Grandparents Raising Grandchildren - 2013

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NOTE: This “story” is being re-submitted as the impact of this effort in our community has been “transformational”. The program is referenced by the state Aging Coalition as a model program. While a portion of the group comes and goes, long term members of the group embrace new grandparents in this role and support each other without judgment. Children in the program are special friends, sharing a bond that is unique and can make them “different” to their peers. A couple VERY “telling” events of this year...

- The day that one of our families finalized the adoption of their granddaughter, they came to the support group to celebrate
- As a new family tearfully shared their story, support group members embraced the family and shared their support and concern, pointing them to resources and “normalizing” their feelings and situation
- “Joey” a fun and outgoing boy who joined the group as a 4 year old and is almost 9 was revealed this fall as a child on the Autism spectrum that doesn’t talk or play with others, except when he comes to the support group
- A young man who was “challenging” as a 6-10 year old, now leads play with younger children and no longer has out-bursts
- One of our grandfathers, widowed this past year, continues to attend the group, calling them “my family”

The contributions of this faculty member seem pretty small, until these things happen/are shared.

Situation Statement: Family members have always provided care to aging family members who need assistance and care because of illness or disabilities. Families also step in to assist parents with parenting roles and sometimes find themselves assuming the parenting role when parents aren’t available. More than one in ten grandparents raises a grandchild for at least 6 months. These grandparents make financial sacrifices, have increased health needs and are very concerned about their grandchildren’s well–being.

This faculty member began working in the family caregiving area in 1999, responding to a growing number of grandparents in this role in Winnebago County and interest by community agencies. Since 2000 the Grandparent Support Network in Winnebago County has provided ongoing support for these families through a variety of activities

Response
1. This faculty member provides leadership to the Support Group - meeting organization, mailings, grant application, grant reporting etc. While partners have evolved over time, multiple agencies continue to support this effort.
2. A Grandparent newsletter is provided to grandparents and kin raising grandchildren.
3. Informational programs and print materials on Grandparents Raising Grandchildren are shared in the county.
Results

1. Informational brochures and packets are distributed to grandparents and kin requesting information on relative caregiving and family caregiving and to all families working with the Winnebago County Kinship program.

2. Monthly Grandparent support groups meetings are held September – June. The group is listed with the local 2-1-1 system, area DHHS, national AARP and national Caregiver Coalition. We have sustained significant attendance at meetings over the ten years, ranging from 30 to over 60 grandparents and grandchildren.

3. Support for the program by agencies, funding entities, the county board and grandparents and grandchildren remains very strong.

4. Grandparents from surrounding counties are referred to the program and travel to Winnebago County to participate in the group.

5. Supportive, nurturing relationships have been established within the grandparent and grandchildren groups, with grandparents connecting outside of the group for social activities and providing “warm-lines” for each other.

Evidence

1) Grandparent “ownership”/leadership for the program continues to increase.
   a) The group no longer has a paid support group facilitator. This role has been assumed by one of the “senior” members of the group and this faculty member.
   b) Members identify and secure speakers for the support group.
   c) Grandparents volunteer for “greeter” roles, welcoming new attendees and providing orientation to the support group.
   d) Long term volunteers now provide leadership for meal preparation, service, clean-up, etc.

2) The project has sustained Title IV.A. funding and additional support/recognition from the Unit on Aging Director.

3) Grandchildren have grown up with the program and some are now serving as child care providers while others mentor children in the group.