



*Providing programs and services to meet the urgent and on-going needs of grandparents and other relatives raising children at-risk*

Grandparents As Parents is a 501c3 corporation and has been serving families since 1987. The corporate office is located in Canoga Park and currently there are 18 weekly groups being provided in 17 locations in all Spas throughout Los Angeles County. Weekly support/education groups are just a part of the work being provided by GAP.

GAP has three primary areas of focus:

- 1) Direct Services – GAP provides cost-free services to kinship families including Mental Health Services, Safety-Net Services, Education and Child-Focused Advocacy, and Navigation. These services are offered directly to families free of charge.
- 2) Information – GAP acts as an educational and informational resource for government institutions and officials on the needs of kinship families. In this capacity, GAP is able to help ensure that the needs of kinship families are taken into account when public policy is set and during times of system change.
- 3) Referrals and Linkages: GAP works with partner agencies to link families in informal, voluntary, and formal kinship families with available information and resources including public benefits, CalFresh, low-cost medical care, referrals to subsidized housing, food pantries, and clothing sources. GAP also advocates on behalf of these families with DCFS and other county agencies, schools, doctors, and courts.

*Direct Services:* While determined to provide the best possible life for the children, kinship caregivers are often unprepared emotionally and financially for the responsibilities that their new role imposes upon them. Support services and programs are essential in helping these grandparents forge healthy family structures capable of meeting the needs of these at-risk children and youth. Since its inception, GAP has offered a framework of core programs that address the primary needs facing kinship families in the areas of Mental Health, Safety-Net Services, Education and Child-Focused Advocacy, and Navigation. These programs give kinship families access to emergency funds, food and clothing, emotional support, counseling, Support Groups, mentoring, and tools to work with schools and government agencies.

#### **Mental Health**

***Individual and Family Crisis Intervention and Counseling:*** GAP provides caregivers and children in crisis with intervention and counseling designed to help the family overcome specific problems, situations, or issues. These are short-term programs with finite treatment schedules. Recipients may qualify for one to six crisis counseling sessions and can receive further sessions with Board approval.

***GAP Support Groups:*** These weekly meetings are run by professional facilitators and/or licensed counselors to provide peer support and education for caregivers who, through either informal arrangement or formal placement through DCFS, are the primary caregivers for one or more children.

***Family Recreational Activities:*** GAP provides caregivers and the children in their care with opportunities to overcome feelings of isolation through organized social outings and other recreational activities offered at no cost to participating families. These events include theatrical productions, the circus, picnics, and sporting events and many other opportunities for families to spend time together and with others. These events provide much needed peer interaction for caregivers while demonstrating to children that they are not alone in belonging to

nontraditional households. These activities may also aid in the potential reunification of the entire family by creating a natural but monitored ‘visitation’ setting.

**Respite Care:** While not typically regarded as a “mental health” service, GAP provides options for relief from caregiving to alleviate the psychological burden and emotional stressors that so often are experienced by grandparent and relative caregivers. Respite care allows caregivers some time off to obtain care for their own health needs without compromising the level of care provided to the children. As an example, each year GAP endeavors to find campership opportunities for the youth as well, which provides respite for the caregiver in addition to providing social outlets for the children.

### **Safety-Net Services**

**Emergency "Safety-Net" Referrals:** GAP provides referrals for a range of services that benefit grandparents. Referrals link our clients with emergency resources for food, clothing, transportation vouchers, low or no-cost medical care, and dental care.

**Emergency grants:** GAP provides stipends to grandparents in cases of extreme need. Examples of aid in this area include assistance with utility bills, car repairs, ER visits, medications, and other emergency needs. One recent case involved a grandmother who, after agreeing to look after two grandchildren, came home with six children between the ages of two months and nine years of age. Although gainfully employed, the expense associated with purchasing six beds,<sup>1</sup> clothing, and other necessities represented a distinct hardship for a grandparent. GAP stepped in and provided funds to purchase beds, bedding and other items for the children.

**Warm line:** GAP's widely published phone number provides caregivers in crisis with immediate access to a skilled professional and/or volunteer who can impart helpful information and a list of local referral resources. GAP is listed in several info-hotline referral sources and has received thousands of calls for help since its inception.

### **Education and Child-Focused Advocacy**

**Classes, Trainings, and Workshops:** GAP provides classes, trainings, and workshops at no charge to attendees. A Curriculum created in partnership with CLC, Child Welfare Initiative and Alliance for Children's Rights has been incorporated into all weekly meetings. In additional specific training workshops are scheduled as requested.

Class information includes: parenting classes often required by the courts; workshops on topics such as raising at-risk children; educational conferences; and referrals for counseling. Topics addressed in the classes include grandparenting adolescents; ADHD—diagnosis, treatment options, and how to get help; government benefits; dependency courts—how to maneuver through the system; health issues—stress reduction, diabetes, obesity, and hypertension; conflict resolution; caring for children with mental illness or special needs; addictions; anger management; and other important issues.

**Child-Focused Advocacy:** GAP provides licensed social workers to advocate on behalf of grandparents and relative caregivers with the Department of Public Social Services (DPSS), DCFS, schools, doctors, and courts on an as-needed basis.

**“Filling the GAP” Newsletter:** GAP's quarterly newsletter is distributed to over 9,000 individuals and families throughout Los Angeles County. The newsletter highlights recent research findings on the needs of children raised by grandparents and other relatives, legislative issues, information on the organization's events, as well as articles written by grandparents. The newsletter also offers tips on low-cost activities and encouragement in the form of kinship family success stories. In June 2007, the newsletter became available online.

**Government and Public Awareness:** GAP provides statistics and awareness-raising information to policymakers and the media. Our efforts in this area help caregivers to become aware of pending legislation that may pertain to them and provides stakeholders with information on grandparent-led kinship families, which are often a tragically

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<sup>1</sup> Child Welfare regulations stipulate that each child must have a bed or the children could be placed elsewhere.  
5/31/2012

overlooked segment of our population. Finally, GAP leaders have provided expert testimony at legislative hearings on issues pertaining to kinship care.

### Navigation

**Caregiver Center:** The Caregiver Center was established in 2010 as a partnership between GAP and four of the major players in the child welfare field—the Edmund D. Edelman Children’s Court, Child Welfare Initiative, Alliance for Children’s Rights, and The Children’s Law Center. By combining their various areas of expertise, these organizations have created an invaluable resource to provide navigation and support services to needy kinship families in Los Angeles. The Caregiver Center makes assistance, support, and referrals available to all kinship families involved with the court system through the intervention of the Department of Child and Family Services (DCFS). The Caregiver Center functions as a “one stop” shop, providing direct assistance and information, and linking newly formed and existing kinship families with existing community resources. GAP operates the Caregiver Center on-site at the Edward D. Edelman Children’s Court during business hours, five days per week. The Court Navigator acts as a liaison between kinship families and all facets of the child welfare system and the Permanency Coordinator provides case planning assistance. A group of trained peer kinship ‘navigator’ volunteers guide families in understanding foster care, education, court, Medi-Cal and other systems. In addition, the Center provides new caregivers with referrals, information, guidance, and links to GAP’s other core services including Support Groups, recreational programs, and emergency financial assistance.

Tens of thousands of children cycle through the Edelman Children’s Court each year. While the Edelman Children’s Court is a “child-sensitive” facility with smaller courtrooms, designated indoor and outdoor play areas, arts and crafts, and other activities, for many kinship families the court proceedings are intimidating, raise numerous questions and cause confusion and stress for all family members involved. GAP’s staff provides a basic, accessible overview of the dependency system to kinship and other caregivers through the Caregiver Center’s pro-active outreach plan. Various issues are covered in the overview, including: dependency, juvenile, and probate court processes; health and mental healthcare availability; educational programs and assistance in registering children in school; benefit program availability and application procedures (for families within the child welfare system and outside it); family reunification services; permanency planning; kin-gap; probate guardianship; adoption; and referrals to outside support organizations.

In addition to providing information, GAP’s staff members act as liaisons between kinship families and all facets of the Child Welfare System. The Permanency Coordinator provides case planning to help families successfully think beyond their immediate legal predicament to how they can establish a healthy and functional family in the long term. Staffed with two full-time professionals, the Caregiver Center provides advocacy and gives kinship families a voice in proceedings that—especially at first—can be confusing and frightening experiences.

The Caregiver Center offers kinship families a trusted environment in which to receive and share information. Newly formed kinship families will receive the support they need to make informed decisions on whether to remain in the foster care system as foster kinship providers, to leave the foster care system and assume probate guardianship, or to act as “informal” kinship parents. GAP will use its community outreach to link families to its support programs and other services. One-year objectives include the following:

- Provide navigation assistance to a minimum of 400 kinship families each year through the Caregiver Center.
- Provide a minimum of 600 community referrals to kinship families through the new Caregiver Center.
- Train 30-40 peer educators each year to support kinship families in Los Angeles County.