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*Practice Brief***Grand Connections: A Workshop Series to Support Grandparents Caring for Grandchildren Under 5**

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Abstract

A workshop series for grandparents caring for grandchildren under five was developed by ZERO TO THREE and piloted online in 2021 as part of a multiyear effort to create resources specifically for grandparents and kinship caregivers. Seven workshops, each 90 minutes long, offer a unique three-generation approach: Grandparents receive the latest information on child-rearing, strategies for collaborating with their grandchild's parents, and opportunities to connect with their grandchildren through read-alouds and art activities. Workshop materials (detailed lesson plans, slide decks, and grandparent handouts) are available online at no charge to organizations wishing to run a program of their own.

Of seven pilot sites, five provided the workshop series to grandparents sharing the care with parents, and two sites provided the series to grandparents raising grandchildren without parents present. Two sites offered the workshops in Spanish; five were in English. Pre- and post-program data showed statistically significant changes in five parenting constructs and near-unanimous positive assessment of qualitative aspects of the program. This article includes details on how the program was developed and how it was received when piloted in 2021, as well as suggestions for implementation.

Keywords: Grandfamilies, grandparents, kinship care, early childhood, curriculum

In the absence of accessible and affordable infant-toddler childcare options for working families, grandparents have increasingly become the cornerstone of early childcare in the U.S. One out of four children under the age of 5 is cared for by a grandparent while a parent works or goes to school (Laughlin, 2013). The number of multigenerational families (three or more generations living in the same household) nearly quadrupled in the past decade, from 7% in 2011 to 26% in 2021 (Generations United, 2021a). Approximately 2.5 million children lived in the care of grandparents in 2022 (The Annie E. Casey Foundation).

In 2016, with the generous support of the David & Lucile Packard Foundation, ZERO TO THREE set out to discover what guidance families sharing child care between generations might need. We explored grandparents' lived experiences through focus groups and a series of documentary videos, followed by a national survey of grandparents providing part-time child care to young grandchildren. This research shaped the development of a curriculum created specifically for grandparents caring for grandchildren—a series of seven workshops tailored to the needs of both custodial grandparents and those providing part-time care for grandchildren under the age of 5.

This practice brief will describe the creation of this innovative series, which began as a single workshop, designed as an event for senior centers serving grandparents. This initial workshop was envisioned as a one-time event in which participants viewed short documentary films featuring families sharing the care between generations, talked about their own experiences, and shared a read-aloud and art activity with their grandchildren. However, we felt this one event barely scratched the surface of the issues grandparents faced in caring for young grandchildren. Additionally, it wasn't clear that senior centers were the best venues to attract a relatively young audience, as the average age of first-time grandparenthood is 50 and this cohort tends not to view themselves as "seniors" (AARP, 2019).

We envisioned a more comprehensive series of workshops that could be used by any organization serving families. Although the initial focus was families sharing child care between generations, we became increasingly aware of the pressing needs of grandfamilies, families in which grandparents are raising grandchildren without a parent present. With the help of consultants from organizations like Generations United and the National Family Support Network, we developed a two-pronged approach to workshop development that would serve both audiences. We believe that it is the first program of its kind developed for grandparents caring for young children.

Our development process is described below.

Table 1
Workshop Development

Year	Activity	Web Link
1	Literature Review and Focus Groups	zerotothree.org/resource/grandparents-who-care-a-literature-review/
2	Grandparent Films (Shared Care)	zerotothree.org/resource/grandparent-films-a-peek-at-grandparent-caregivers-in-families/
3	National Grandparent Survey	zerotothree.org/resource/the-grand-plan-executive-summary/
4	Grand Connections Program Design	zerotothree.org/resource/grand-connections/

5	Pilot Program and Evaluation	zerotothree.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Grand-Connections-Evaluation-Report-2.pdf
6	Grandfamilies and Kinship Care Films	gksnetwork.org/resources/kinship-grandfamilies-thrive-with-peer-support/

Note: Table 1 summarizes the year-to-year development of grandparent resources explained in detail below.

YEAR 1: Literature Review and Focus Groups

According to a U.S. Census report published in 2013, 4.8 million children under 5 years of age were cared for by grandparents while parents work or go to school, a slightly larger number than children enrolled in formal child care programs. In addition, more than 2.4 million children in the U.S. are being raised by grandparents, other relatives, or close family friends with no parents present in the home. (Generations United, 2023). This group, often referred to as grandfamilies or skipped-generation families, will be discussed later in this article.

In 2016, ZERO TO THREE embarked on a project to find out more about the challenges facing grandparents providing part-time care to young children. We began with a literature review (Kinsner et al., 2017) exploring what was already known about the needs of grandparents in this group, as well as a series of focus groups (two in English, one in Spanish) designed to take a deeper dive into grandparents' lived experiences.

Here's what we asked:

What Families Are Most Likely to Rely on Grandparents for Part-Time Childcare?

Relative care in the child's home is a more common primary arrangement for very young children in families with one of the following characteristics: living in poverty, in single-parent households, with family members of Asian descent or Spanish as the primary home language, when mothers have a high school degree or less, or when mothers are looking for work or not in the labor force (Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, 2009). Relative care is also often a fallback in families in which parents work unusual (e.g., overnight) or unpredictable hours. A 2012 survey by Generations United and MetLife echoes these findings, with grandparents offering the following reasons for providing care for grandchildren on a regular basis:

- because I want to enjoy doing it (58%);
- so their parents can work (53%);
- to save money on day care (37%);
- to help out my child who is a single parent (37%).

What Are the Benefits of Childcare Provided by Grandparents?

Grandparents in our focus groups rejected the idea that the care they provided was simply "babysitting," regarding it as something more transformational, meaningful, and integral to their role in the family. Respondents were either asked for help by their grandchild's parents or had seen a need and offered to fill it.

Though cost and convenience are often the primary pragmatic drivers of arrangements in which grandparents provide childcare, there are less tangible benefits mentioned by both family members and experts in the field. One group of researchers found that health declines as a

consequence of grandchild care appear to be the exception rather than the rule, also pointing to scattered evidence that grandmothers who provide part-time care for grandchildren in fact experience health benefits such as more exercise, fewer functional limitations, and a decline in depressive symptoms (Hughes et al., 2007).

Some studies have found that grandparents providing “substantial” amounts of care may be more likely to report stress or marital discord. A grandmother from our focus groups described caring for her grandchildren six days a week:

[Monday through Friday] I work in the mornings . . . I go to Los Angeles [two hours with traffic], I stay with the boy, my daughter goes to school, and at night I drive back home. [On Saturdays, I watch my son’s daughter.] From where I live to where my son lives, it’s around an hour and 15 minutes of nonstop driving. We live far away. I have them from coast to coast . . . I escape on Sundays. I make up whatever excuse to not go, because otherwise I’d take care of them on Sundays as well.

For other grandparents, the experience is less taxing, more joyful. Said one grandmother: “Right now they’re my compass; they’re my life. They have infused my life with life.” One grandfather described a cross-country move so he and his wife could assist in the care of their grandson:

I do it out of love for my daughter, as well as for my grandson. The grandson is the dividend. I’m doing it for my daughter because my daughter had a setback in her life, and as a single parent, she turned to us and said, ‘Would you like to join us, out here, in California?’ I said, ‘That sounds pretty good to me.’

Amy Goyer, writer, and for many years the AARP’s specialist on grandparenting, mentioned the benefits caregiving grandparents provide to other family members:

The more loving adults in a family focusing on a child, the better children do...Grandparents as caregivers provide a sense of security; the parent is generally more relaxed, and kids pick that up. Grandparents provide continuity, and their care changes the grandparent-grandchild relationship throughout their lifetime (personal communication, February 6, 2017).

Greg Link, a program specialist at the U.S. Administration on Aging, identified similar benefits:

For kids, especially when they’re young, a sense of stability [is offered by grandparents]—the more solid the footing, the better. The working parent has the security of knowing a family member is providing care. Stress levels are reduced. (personal communication, January 17, 2017).

A growing research base also spotlights how grandparent participation in children’s lives can be a critical protective factor—for example, as one study found, more grandparent involvement protected grandchildren from the positive association between observed harsh parenting and grandchild externalizing behaviors (Barnett, et al. 2010).

What Struggles Do Families Sharing Childcare Between Generations Encounter?

Conflict occurred most frequently between grandparents and their grandchildren's parents on topics like discipline and their grandchild's eating habits. Some grandparents wanted a return to ways they raised their own children—more outdoor play, for example, and less screen time. Sometimes they preferred to be more indulgent than a parent's rules allowed. One grandmother shared her response to her grandchild's parents' concerns about eating candy: "I always have candy hidden around. I tell [the parents], 'They didn't eat candy, it's true,' but they did eat candy [laughs]." Most often, the grandparents were trying to find a middle ground that honored their own experience as well as recognized their grandchildren's parents as the final authority.

At other times, grandparents expressed a desire to shield their adult children from the consequences of parenting "mistakes." One grandmother said:

[It was] hard to watch [my daughter's] disciplining skills, versus mine. I don't know. I just tell her she should pick her battles, with the three-year-old, because he is very strong-willed. He has a temper. He's going to be her challenge. I tell her, "Just pick your battles with him because you can't get frustrated over every little thing."

Another grandmother described the difficulty of standing by when she wanted to intervene:

[My grandson] has a temper, and he would scream. When [his parents] would tell him 'no,' he would scream and, literally, cry until he was [out of breath]. I said, 'Let me just get him, so he can stop.' [His mom] says, 'No. He has to learn that that's inappropriate behavior.' That tore my heart apart, but I allowed her to do what she did because he's going home with her. That was very challenging.

Grandparents were clear about the need for boundaries. One grandmother described her relationship with her 21-year-old daughter this way:

I'm her mother, and I still mother her. I try to teach her, being a new mother 'Certain things, you have to teach my grandson so that he is polite.' Sometimes, that has been an issue, so she has to make sure that I know, 'I need your help but remember, I'm the mom'.

Another advised:

Just know your role. Those are not your children, even though they came from your child. That's their responsibility, and there's a time for you—your time is over, so you're like a—maybe a guardian or a guide for them. It's not your duty to raise them. That's what [their parents] are for.

Experts acknowledge the need for families to be explicit in negotiating the roles and responsibilities of sharing childcare. According to Greg Link, "If the question of 'who will do what?' is answered, it will help mitigate conflict." Matt Kaplan, professor of intergenerational programs and aging at The Pennsylvania State University, also recognized the push and pull on grandparents who act as caregivers: "Families appreciate having a grandparent around—a lifesaver! And yet, for grandparents who are still working, this may be a huge sacrifice" (personal communication, January 13, 2017).

An often-unanticipated drawback of providing care for grandchildren is greater isolation from one's social network. Melinda Perez-Porter, director of the Relatives as Parents Program for the Brookdale Foundation Group, observed that caregiving can cause grandparents to feel isolated from friends who don't share this experience (personal communication, January 13, 2017).

What Kind of Help Do Grandparents Want or Need?

The grandparents in our focus groups expressed confidence in their parenting experience as a guide to caring for their grandchildren. But some aspects of the discussion (for example, the belief expressed by some grandparents that spanking was an acceptable limit-setting strategy) made us wonder if group members were up to date on the latest child-rearing research. Some studies raise similar concerns. According to a survey of more than 600 grandparents conducted by Dr. Andrew Adesman of the Cohen Children's Medical Center in New York, grandparents aren't always familiar with the latest childcare techniques; nearly a quarter of grandparents surveyed were unaware that infants should be put to sleep on their backs (Jimison, 2017). Two studies suggested that grandparents were less likely than parents to follow the latest recommendations regarding the use of car seats (O'Neil et al. 2012, as cited in Pulgaron et al., 2016, p. 266; Norton, 2011).

YEAR 2: Grandparent Films (Shared Care)

In Year 2, we set out to create a series of short films that would explore the experience of caring for young grandchildren. As we began our search for families interested in participating, it quickly became apparent that few grandparents providing routine noncustodial care were connected to programs designed for them. The families we interviewed were amazing in their diversity: a school superintendent whose child had two sets of grandparents ready to step in and help while she worked; a grandmother who'd retired early to care for her grandson, an arrangement her daughter-in-law was comfortable with because her own grandmother had cared for her. These grandparents were proud of their role as caregivers—grandparents who were there because no one else could be.

We selected three families that, taken together, would present a picture of how families in different circumstances make this arrangement work—grandparents who wore their hearts on their sleeves concerning their grandkids and were also able to talk about how they managed the occasional disagreements between generations. In one film, a grandmother moves to a new neighborhood to provide her daughter and grandson with a secure base for a fresh start. In another, a couple juggles two careers and a two-year-old, with assistance from his mom and her dad. In a third, a grandfather moves in with his son, daughter-in-law, and two grandsons under difficult circumstances, and there are unexpected benefits for all.

The circumstances are different from family to family. But the challenges the families face, the gratitude they feel, and the support they find helpful are remarkably similar. These stories brought our research to life, amplifying family voices so they could be heard by a wider audience. In the end, they also served to spark conversations in the very first of our seven-workshop series.

YEAR 3: National Grandparent Survey

In year three, we widened our focus to examine whether the trends we'd observed in focus groups and individual interviews reflected the experience of grandparents nationally. We

conducted a survey of 1000 grandparents who provided regular child care for grandchildren aged five and under from across the United States, over-sampling Hispanic and African American grandparents (ZERO TO THREE, 2019).

What we learned is that while grandparents love their role and the connection they share with grandchildren, caring for young children is not always easy. Of the grandparents surveyed, 20% reported feeling stressed and 40% reported feeling tired, while 98% said they love being a grandparent, and 94% said they love caring for their grandchildren. These numbers mirror similar research efforts. In a national survey for the AARP (2012), “the most common initial response to the question about how [grandparents] felt about being a grandparent was ‘joy.’” Our focus group data also led us to anticipate the high number of respondents who felt confident in caring for their grandchildren based on their own experience as parents: 71%. We also confirmed that grandparents felt they had acquired a sense of perspective from their experiences as parents. Surveyed grandparents observed they had more patience (70%) and a clearer sense of what’s important (67%) than they did when raising their own children.

The more surprising finding was that nearly half (48%) of the grandparents surveyed felt some level of disagreement/tension between generations. When asked about specific topics that caused the most conflict, grandparents reported challenges like handling tantrums (31%), navigating mealtime (27%), and managing screen time (27%). A University of Michigan survey of *parents* of children ages birth to 18 reported a similar level of disagreement between generations (43%) on similar topics (discipline, 57%; meals/snacks, 44%; and TV/screen time, 36%) (C.S. Mott Children’s Hospital, 2020). Additionally, the ZERO TO THREE survey found that grandparents in multigenerational households reported *more* tension/disagreements than those who didn’t share a home with their grandchildren and their parents (57% vs. 45%).

YEAR 4: Grand Connections Program Design

Program Goals

Our research left us with a clearer sense of the unmet needs of grandparents caring for grandchildren under 5. The *Grand Connections* program was designed to meet those needs by centering grandparent wisdom and experiences, creating opportunities for peer support, and presenting child development research in respectful and engaging ways. The following goals informed the development of the program as a whole:

- increase grandparent knowledge of research-based child-rearing practices like sleep, feeding/picky eating, screen media use, limit-setting, and early learning;
- provide grandparents with easy-to-use, effective tools for “sharing the care” or navigating caregiving expectations with their adult children and their partners;
- offer grandparents the opportunity to build a strong social support network with peers who also provide care to grandchildren.

An Opportunity to Reach New Audiences

Implementing *Grand Connections* offers an opportunity to serve families who may otherwise be difficult to reach, yet still need and deserve support and information. Grandparents who provide part-time childcare are not typically connected to any formal means of support; these child-care arrangements are largely informal and invisible. In addition, most skipped-generation households function outside the foster care system. According to Generations United (2023), for every child being raised by kin in foster care, there are 18 children being raised by kin outside of foster care.

An Opportunity to Develop a Three-Generation Model

A national parent survey by ZERO TO THREE (2018) also revealed the most likely, and most trusted, source of information for parents of young children is immediate family members. A series of workshops for grandparents has exciting potential to reach parents who frequently turn to their own parents with child-rearing questions and concerns. Furthermore, the *Grand Connections* curriculum was designed to include a “learning through play” experience to be shared by grandparents and grandchildren in each workshop. This element provides an opportunity for two-generation connection and may spark grandparents’ own ideas of new ways to play with their grandchildren.

Finally, we set our sights on creating a bilingual program, with grandparent-facing materials (handouts, picture books, links to external websites, and PowerPoints) available in both English and Spanish. Grandparent films in Units 1A and 1B are available in English with Spanish subtitles.

An Opportunity to Reach All Kinds of Families

Finally, our goal was to develop a program adaptable enough to address the different family contexts for grandparent care—those in which parents are not present as well as those in which grandparents provide part-time care. This led us to bifurcate content in the first two lessons, so that the needs of custodial grandparents could be specifically addressed. For example, in the first workshop of Grand Connections, we suggest screening our documentary films to jumpstart a discussion of grandparents’ experiences providing care. Since custodial grandparents require a different approach to spark discussion around the transition to full-time child-rearing, we created videos reflecting that experience. For custodial grandparents, we also designed an activity to develop a customized list of resources for help with the various issues they may face: legal, housing, education, counseling, medical, self-care.

Following our 2021 pilot program, it became clear that we needed to bifurcate the content of the second workshop as well. In Workshop 2, grandparents providing part-time care complete a resource that helps them plan the details of the caregiving arrangement they share with their adult children; grandfamilies focus on the role that grandparents can play in mitigating the impacts of early childhood trauma. Both audiences strategize about ways to address difficult topics with their grandchildren’s parents. See Table 2 for more information about *Grand Connections* content.

Table 2
Workshop Structure

Shared Care with Parents	Custodial Care
Unit 1A: Intro (films and old school/new school)	Unit 1B: Intro (films and resources)
Unit 2A: Sharing the Care (planning doc)	Unit 2B: Sharing the Care (You are your grandchild's "person")
Unit 3: Sleep	
Unit 4: Screens	
Unit 5: Mealtimes	
Unit 6: Challenging Behavior	
Unit 7: Making the Most of Everyday Routines	

Note: The disparate needs of skipped-generation families and families sharing the care between generations led to the development of separate lessons for Workshops 1 and 2. Workshops 4, 5, and 6 address topics most often mentioned as “areas of disagreement” by parents and grandparents sharing care.

Though we recommend running separate workshops for shared care and custodial grandparents, the content in Units 3 through 7 focuses on early childhood development and is the same for both audiences. Unit 3 explores sleep, a perennial cause of concern among young parents and an area in which safety recommendations have changed significantly from advice offered 30 years ago. The areas on which generations most frequently disagree (screens, mealtimes, and managing challenging behavior) are the focus of lessons 4, 5, and 6. The final unit includes ideas for building learning into everyday activities, a topic which 35% of the grandparents in our 2019 survey wanted to know more about.

Each workshop is 90 minutes long, with 60 minutes of content specifically designed for grandparent discussion and learning and 30 minutes allocated to a grandparent-grandchild read-aloud followed by an art or cooking activity. Options are provided for in-person or online groups.

Workshops are designed to tap into grandparents’ knowledge and experience, with facilitators providing prompts for conversation and adding to or providing updated information as needed. Where possible, activities are hands-on (for example, grandparents watch a video clip from the PBS preschool program *Daniel Tiger’s Neighborhood* and offer suggestions of what they might talk about while viewing) or game-like (grandparents consider a commonly asked question about mealtimes and choose the “wrong” advice from four possibilities).

Our Facilitator’s Guide and introductory webinar contain additional information for those embarking on the program for the first time (ZERO TO THREE, 2021). Early drafts of lesson plans were reviewed by senior staff at Generations United, the National Family Support Network, and the National Coalition on Aging, with additional guidance on grandfamilies

provided by experts at the UMaine Center on Aging and the New York City KinCare Task Force. Workshops were also revised based on feedback from our pilot sites.

YEAR 5: Pilot Program and Evaluation

The Grand Connections program was piloted at seven sites in the spring of 2021: Las Vegas, NV; North Bend, WA; Opelika, AL; Phoenix, AZ; Athens County, OH; Logan, UT; and Goleta, CA. Grandparents caring for grandchildren under 5 were recruited to participate. Due to the pandemic, the program was delivered virtually at all sites, with between five and 12 grandparents participating online at each. Two sites delivered the program to custodial grandparents, with the remainder delivering the program to grandparents sharing the care with parents. Two sites conducted the workshops entirely in Spanish.

Three brief online trainings were offered to orient facilitators toward the design and goals of the program and describe the highlights of each workshop. Sites launched the program at different times depending on the success of local recruitment efforts, and early starters were able to share information with the those that followed—for example, describing how technology was introduced or how program materials were delivered.

Data was collected via online surveys at the beginning and end of the workshops. Surveys were offered in both English and Spanish to maximize completion based on participants' preferred language. The first survey, distributed to respondents at the start of the workshops, collected information about participants in the workshop as well as their thoughts on child-rearing practices (parenting constructs concerning feeding, sleeping, social-emotional development, etc.) The second survey, completed by respondents at the end of the workshops, asked respondents for their thoughts on the same child-rearing practices and asked for evaluative feedback on the workshops. At one site, surveys were conducted by phone to support a population that struggled with technology.

Our pre/post data on objective measures (parenting constructs) illustrate statistically significant knowledge acquisition in several areas. Specifically, survey respondents were more likely to *agree/strongly agree* with the following true statements after participating in workshops:

- Babies are listening and learning language even when they're too young to speak.
- Children begin to learn skills needed for math and reading starting at birth.
- Video chat is a good way for children of all ages to connect with friends and family.

Respondents were more likely to *disagree/strongly disagree* with the following false statements:

- Children who are picky eaters are not likely to get the food they need to grow and thrive.
- A two-year-old should be able to remember and follow rules.

It's especially exciting to see significant improvements in grandparents' understanding of child development such as the emergence of language and mathematics skills from an early age and the very gradual acquisition of social-emotional skills like self-control. In other areas, such as safe sleep and discipline, data suggests grandparents seem to understand many of the basics and are ready to ask and answer more sophisticated questions.

One of our goals in developing the program was to acknowledge the vast parenting experience that grandparents bring to the tasks of childcare. We were gratified by the

overwhelmingly positive evaluative feedback—participants strongly indicated that the workshop content and approach honored and respected their experience. Grandparent feedback also communicated that the vast majority of grandparents felt connected to and supported by peers during the experience. Open-ended feedback confirmed this theme with comments such as “It was so helpful to know that other grandparents are facing the same challenges as I am experiencing—that I am not alone.” and “There was no judgment, only acceptance and suggestions and other viewpoints of how to deal and cope.” This feedback suggests a real need for validation and community among grandparents caring for young grandchildren.

Facilitators provided written feedback on each workshop, using a five-point Likert scale to respond to items about content relevance, the amount of content covered in each session, grandparent engagement and connection, and clarity of instructions and background material. Open-ended questions provided facilitators with an opportunity to suggest changes and comment in greater detail. Facilitator comments helped drive a complete reworking of the first and second workshops for custodial grandparents. Facilitator comments on the third workshop (Sleep) suggested a lack of participant engagement; this finding led to substantial revision that expanded the focus on safe sleep (birth to one year) to include toddler and preschool sleep concerns like naps, nightmares, and transitioning to a bed.

Facilitators also shared their thoughts via structured interviews at the conclusion of the program. Some items worth noting included:

- Recruitment: Some pilot sites found it difficult to identify and recruit grandparents providing regular childcare as there are no systems or agencies serving this population. Sites recommend planning ample time for strategic recruiting.
- Online adaptations: Sites found innovative ways to adapt to an online format and create a sense of virtual community. The success of these online adaptations emerged in responses from grandparent participants. All but one of surveyed grandparents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: “This online workshop helped me feel connected to other grandparents”.
- Sense of community: Grandparents in both skipped-generation families and families sharing the care appreciated the opportunity to connect with and learn from each other.

YEAR 6: Grandfamilies and Kinship Care Films

In 2021, Generations United was awarded a 5-year federal contract to create the first-ever national technical assistance center for organizations serving grandfamilies, the Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network (gksnetwork.org). As one of five partners in this endeavor, ZERO TO THREE created three new short films, each profiling a grandparent or kinship provider describing the joys and challenges of their family’s journey. These films are included in Workshop 1B, the introductory session for grandfamilies.

Discussion

Limitations

Though the results of our pre/post surveys are encouraging, we want to be cautious in interpreting this data. The number of participants who completed both surveys is small ($n = 36$), and it’s possible that responses were more likely among those who were more technologically adept or most enthusiastic about the program.

It should be noted that African Americans are slightly underrepresented in this survey; two sites that had planned to participate in the pilot and that served primarily African American communities—one in Chicago, one in South Carolina—were ultimately unable to facilitate the program due to recruitment issues and a staff change. Because two sites offered Spanish-only programs, Latinas are overrepresented as compared with the general population. More information is needed about how grandparents in other communities, such as Native Americans and Asian and Pacific Islanders, might respond to the guidance offered in the Grand Connections program.

Target Audience

The workshops are intended for all audiences, but we hope to reach underserved families. About two-thirds of survey respondents felt the content was about right, with the remainder divided as to whether it was a bit too simple (15%), a bit too advanced (10%), or far too advanced (8%). Participants in the pilot program represented a range of races/ethnicities, ages, education completed, and geographic locations. Because recruitment was challenging in some locations, organizations would do well to consider what the barriers to participation might be and how to overcome them. Barriers might include a lack of time, particularly among grandparents who are still working; cultural attitudes toward seeking support; and the misperception that workshops are designed to address family problems that need to be “fixed.” In social service settings, grandparents may be wary of disclosing family issues out of concern children could be removed from their care.

Replicability

Grand Connections was intended as an off-the-shelf program, usable in any setting by any organization that serves families where grandparents are caring for grandchildren under 5. Subject-matter background (for example, current guidance on feeding and screen time) is provided within each lesson, with additional links to helpful articles. Facilitators found the detailed lesson plans easy to follow.

One pilot site is now running the program quarterly, and we’ve developed a list of budgetary line items for consideration to assist organizations interested in launching programs of their own:

- administrative time for photocopying and distributing materials;
- staff prep time (We recommend two co-facilitators. Backgrounds in group facilitation and early childhood development are helpful. Pilot site facilitators reported 1-2 hours of preparation time for each lesson the first time through, plus 1 hour and a half of contact time per facilitator per lesson.);
- picture books (one per workshop, titles recommended but not supplied. For in-person workshops, books might be obtained at the local public library. For online workshops, we suggest purchasing a copy of each book for each family.);
- art supplies (These common supplies—crayons, paper, etc.—are listed in each lesson. Some pilot sites mailed or dropped off supplies to each family participating in the online workshops.);
- incentives (Sites determined which incentives would resonate with their participants and at what intervals these would be distributed.).

Sites planning on running in-person workshops will want to budget for customary expenses, for example, childcare during the first hour of the workshop, snacks or a meal, and gas allowance or subway fare.

All lesson plans, slide decks, and handouts are available for free download at www.zerotothree.org/grandconnections.

Conclusions

We believe the Grand Connections program fills a previously unmet need in supporting grandparents caring for grandchildren under the age of 5, particularly in its focus on how grandparents can support early child development. Ample opportunity is provided for grandparents to share their own experiences, with robust background information offered so that facilitators can guide the conversation as a partner, rather than a lecturer.

Grandparents are the unsung heroes of early childcare in the U.S., stepping in to help when formal childcare is unavailable or unaffordable, or because of the sense of safety and shared culture relative care provides. In ZERO TO THREE's national survey of grandparents caring for grandchildren under 5 (2019), nearly all grandparents reported that caring for their grandchild was a source of joy, but many found it tiring (2 of 5) or stressful (1 of 5). As one grandmother put it in a recent email:

I am currently caring for our two grandsons, ages 2 and 10 months, Monday through Friday while our daughter and son-in-law work. I am feeling overwhelmed and would appreciate any information I can get as I navigate this time of our lives (personal communication (October 1, 2022)).

For grandparents raising grandchildren without the presence of their parent, the task is more daunting. Most grandparents and other kinship caregivers raise their children outside the formal foster care system and are forced to navigate a complex patchwork of legal, educational, medical, and financial concerns. We owe grandfamilies a program where they can find the support they need.

The Grand Connections workshops offer one such place. This program is available to any organization able to supply facilitators and a place to meet - community centers and places of worship, schools, and public libraries, in person and/or online, anywhere people are trying to make a difference for families.

Perhaps the most powerful endorsements of the workshops were from our pilot programs' summative descriptions of grandparents' engagement. At the conclusion of the program, grandparent participants in Goleta, CA, wanted to continue to meet monthly to stay in touch. In Phoenix, grandparents "didn't want to go" at the end of the final meeting. In Las Vegas, custodial grandparents were "talking and talking and talking," with nobody sitting on the sidelines. In North Bend, WA, "every single person [custodial grandparents] launched into a 5-minute thing [when asked to offer their opinion on a given topic]. It was powerful for them to share what worked and why. They learned a lot from each other." In Opelika, AL, facilitators felt grandparents "benefitted from the social aspects, other grandparents who understood their situations. They could fill up an entire class with their talk." We are honored to serve the needs of this essential group of early childhood care providers, and welcome additional feedback from others who elect to embrace this task.

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