



WELFARE PEER TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE NETWORK
Grandparent Housing Facilities
Boston, Massachusetts
October 7-8, 2003

Background

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, Oklahoma has more than 67,000 grandparents living in households with one or more grandchildren under the age of 18. In addition, 58 percent of these grandparents have the primary responsibility for meeting the basic needs of their grandchildren. Oklahoma has the second highest percentage in the Nation of grandparents raising grandchildren. Safe and affordable housing may be particularly difficult to access for low-income relative caregivers. Challenging circumstances, along with factors such as parental substance abuse, incarceration, teen pregnancy, death, divorce, and poverty, are causing grandparents and other relatives to step forward to keep their families intact.

Based on a review of programs serving grandfamilies in Oklahoma, it is projected that 25 percent of these children have a developmental, physical or mental disability. For example, an examination of the children served through the Oklahoma Department of Human Services (OKDHS) Developmental Disabilities Services Family Support Subsidy Program indicates that about 4 percent of the children being served are in grandparent households. The grandparents served in this program must have legal custody of the children. However, less than half of all children living with grandparents or other relatives in Oklahoma are doing so through a legal or formal arrangement. Greater than 60 percent of all these relationships are informal in nature and the families receive no assistance from the State.

OKDHS Aging Services Division (ASD) staff realizes grandparents and other relatives raising children are faced with a number of complex challenges, including the availability of safe, adequate, and affordable housing. Based on the available research, census data, and the increasing number of pleas from grandparents for help, ASD staff organized a Statewide task force to explore the options now available to these families. In addition, the task force has also set forth one goal and several objectives to be accomplished in a timely manner. They are the following:

- Goal:** *Oklahoma grandfamilies have access to safe, affordable, and adequate housing.*
- Objective:** To replicate the GrandFamilies House in Boston, Massachusetts.
- Objective:** To survey the housing needs of Oklahoma grandfamilies.
- Objective:** To advocate for legislation supporting grandfamilies housing.
- Objective:** To develop a grandfamilies housing resource directory.

As a result, the Oklahoma task force requested that the Welfare Peer Technical Assistance (TA) Network sponsor a one and half- day site visit of two grandparent housing facilities in Boston, Massachusetts. In addition, representatives from the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services expressed an interest in this unique issue that often presents itself among the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) caseload. Therefore, with collaboration from Administration for Children and Families (ACF) Regions I, V and VI, the Welfare Peer TA Network sponsored a visit to the Boston GrandFamilies House and the Franklin Field Grandparent Housing Development. The site visit took place on October 7th and 8th, 2003. A small delegation of participants also participated from the States of Ohio, Oklahoma and the ACF Region I Office.

AGENDA

Day 1

Participants visited the Boston's GrandFamilies House, which serves as the model program/facility Oklahoma plans to replicate and develop on recently acquired property. The GrandFamilies House is managed by Boston Aging Concerns – Youth & Old United, Inc. (BAC-YOU). BAC-YOU's primary goal is to expand affordable housing opportunities, create intergeneration communities, and develop innovative models of housing by building on the strengths of elders, kinship families, and people with disabilities. Developed in partnership with other groups, the GrandFamilies Houses is the Nation's first housing program specially designed for grandparent-headed families, and serves grandparents who are raising their grandchildren without the parent present. The house is comprised of 26 two, three, and four bedroom apartments that have safety features to accommodate the needs of both elderly residents and children. Supportive services are critical to the success of the House, which offers an onsite resident services coordinator, a live-in house manager, education services, and assistance with accessing outside services. In addition, a preschool and afterschool programs are available onsite.

Program staff provided TA participants with an historical overview of the program and the preliminary research involved with the actual program development. According to presenters, in 1982, BAC-YOU found that many elders were raising their grandchildren due to several factors; including kinship placements, death of a parent, substance abuse, and so forth. BAC-YOU further discovered many of the elderly housing facilities could not accommodate grandchildren as residents. As a result, increasing numbers of grandparents were becoming evicted. Inadequate facilities and low-incomes presented a major housing issue for these unique families. Therefore, grandfamily housing was deemed an urgent need by BAC-YOU.

Participants also experienced a tour of the facility and grounds while interacting with residents. Also, presentations were shared on several pertinent topics including:

- Property Management Issues and Concerns;
- Housing Development;
- Resident Services; and
- Program Replication and Evaluations.

Day 2

Participants spent a half-day at the Franklin Field Housing Development. This program is managed by the Boston Housing Authority (BHA). This development is comprised of three unique housing sections, which are designated for the following resident groups: families, elderly and/or disabled, and grandparent-headed families. Franklin Field is one of the largest family housing developments and it started designating units for grandparents in November 2002. There are currently 16 grandparent units and an extensive waiting list of elderly caregivers seeking housing at the Franklin Field development. Section 8 funding is attached to all the grandfamily units; therefore, all potential occupants must possess Section 8 housing certificates in order to become occupants.

Presenters clearly outlined the key programmatic differences from the Franklin Field development and the GrandFamilies House. Such differences include program funding, the resident screening process, occupant eligibility requirements, and available resident services. Likewise, both programs vary in the unique design and features of their apartment units. Through presentations, TA recipients were able to identify the unique aspects of a State managed housing development such as Franklin Field, and the service delivery impact on grandfamily residents. Throughout the time together, both BHA speakers and event participants shared in an interactive dialogue on several topics, including:

- community partners;
- current program needs;
- applicant selection process;
- program history; and
- lessons learned.

A more detailed summary of this site visit will be available on the Welfare Peer TA site. For more information about this event, please contact Chandra Robinson at 301-270-0841, or e-mail crobinson@afyainc.com