

GRG NEWSLETTER



Values from the Front Porch: Remembering the Values of our Grandmothers

By: Aimee J. Kissel

I recently gave all of the grandparents raising grandchildren support group leaders across the state of Montana a call to see how things have been proceeding along in their groups. Carrie Jackson at the Eagle Shield Center shared with me that the group she facilitates is using a wonderful book to lead their discussions. They are reading the book, *Values from the Front Porch: Remembering the Values of our Grandmothers*, by Jane Middleton-Moz. (For those of you who know Al Ward with AARP, Jane is Al's sister.) This uplifting book discusses twenty-three fundamental values and how those values can be brought to life in our everyday experiences. In *Values from the Front Porch* Jane brings to life the wisdom that is passed down through the generations through our grandmothers. She focuses each chapter on recollections people have of the life lessons and traditions they gained from their grandmothers. At the conclusion of each chapter, Jane has added an exercise to bring these values into practice in our day-to-day lives.

Carrie Jackson revealed that her GRG support group discusses a different value mentioned in the book at each meeting. In addition, each member keeps a journal of their reflections on how the particular value discussed has affected their lives.

Values from the Front Porch: Remembering the Values of our Grandmothers, by Jane Middleton-Moz is available at Barnes and Nobles and Amazon.com for about \$11.00. The ISBN # is 0757302971.

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Reducing Holiday Stress

By Aimee Kissel

Many of us feel overwhelmed by the holiday season. The holidays are a time to spend extra time with loved ones, and let others know how much they are loved. Unfortunately, the joy of the season is often hampered by the barrage of obligations many of us feel. We feel pressured to buy gifts we may not be able to afford, make massive amounts of food, attend events and parties, and travel to visit relatives. Even happy events can be stressful. Here are some tips to keep your holiday season manageable, and bring the joy back into the holidays.

Remember that there is no shame in saying no!

If you are not up to driving for four hours on Christmas Eve to visit a relative, let them know. Stress can cause health problems, and no one wants you to suffer just for a brief visit. Don't take on more than you can handle. Obligations can add up quickly. You don't have to volunteer for every charitable event your church sponsors, or take your grandchild to every holiday event in town. Instead, you could spend some quiet time at home discussing your family's holiday traditions, or sharing a special holiday memory with your grandchild from your childhood.

Avoid holiday debt!

It is so easy to spend way too much over the holiday season! Credit card companies and outlet stores count on the majority of us to feel pressured to spend, spend, spend on gifts, decorations and food. One of the best presents I received when I was growing up didn't cost much at all. It was a tin of homemade cookies from my grandparents. As I reflect back to my childhood, I can't remember very many of the expensive gifts I received but I can still taste those cookies! Even when I wasn't visiting my grandparents for the holidays I still thought of them fondly as I ate a homemade cookie. This year my daughter and I bought a craft kit for \$20.00 and made decorations with her school picture in the center to give as gifts. They are light, and will be easy to mail and best of all, my shopping is done and we had fun making them together. A huge weight has already been lifted from my shoulders. Many places also offer assistance with gifts for children. Toys for tots, the Salvation Army, and quite a few churches throughout the state have programs to provide new toys to children for free. Don't feel shy about signing up, they are there to help!

Relationships are sometimes hardest during the holidays.

Keep in mind that holidays are stressful for many of us, and extra tension in our relationships this time of year is not unusual. Some children who are separated from their parents also feel especially sad or anxious during the holidays. They may have conflicting emotions and be unable to express or resolve their feelings. If your grandchild seems distressed, you might want to attempt to talk with them about how their feeling, or seek professional counseling to help them work through their emotions. They may also be confused about whether to expect a visit from mom or dad. Whenever possible, let them know what is planned for the holidays so they know what to expect. Ask them how they feel about the holiday plans, you might be surprised by the answer.

Help for the Holidays

By Aimee Kissel

Lots of great organizations provide assistance during the holidays. They are here to help, and make the season a little less stressful. They can't help, unless you request it, so please, let them fulfill their quest. Sign up!

Churches throughout the state of Montana are offering assistance in a variety of creative ways. For example, one church in Bozeman has a 'shopping' program for children to pick out gifts for their family from items that have been donated. Many advertise these types of services in a local paper, but don't be afraid to call and ask.

Food Boxes: A variety of organizations give out food boxes with all the fixings for a holiday feast. Most require that you sign up ahead of time so they know how many they need. Many do not have income requirements, and ask a minimum of personal questions. Holiday food boxes are usually given by food banks, the Salvation Army and local churches.

Toys for Tots:

Many communities have access to toys for tots which gives new toys to thousands of children each year. The US Marine Corp. Reserve Center coordinates this project and relies on community members to help donate the toys. Call the contact nearest your area if you would like to sign up your grandchildren for holiday toys. Most of the cities listed also serve their surrounding area. For example, Bozeman handles a variety of other towns such as Belgrade, Livingston, Wilsall, Manhattan, and the Yellowstone area just to name a few. When you call, leave a message with your last name and a phone #, and the children's age and gender. They do not ask personal questions, and once they have contacted you they don't keep records of the names.

Bozeman / Bob Metcalf 587-7517 Butte / Mr. Richards 782-1761

Deer Lodge / Ray Worthey 846-2814

Great Falls / Marvin Brewster 452-8550 Helena / James Heffernan 458-6256

Kalispell / Columbia Falls / John Olsen 257-4043 Missoula / Carl Hutchison 549-0466

Polson / Ed Holland 250-2772 Billings / Richard Reed 655-6256

Salvation Army:

Many of the Salvation Army offices across the state offer a variety of holiday services. One of these is the Angel trees they coordinate with the help of volunteers. You can sign up your grandchildren to receive specific gifts just for them. When you apply, they ask you for the child's clothing sizes and the items they have requested for the holidays. This information is placed anonymously on an 'angel card' hanging on a tree within the community. Community members then choose a card, purchase the items on the card and then bring the items back. The Salvation Army then handles distribution. Many Salvation Army offices also give out food boxes and other holiday items such as gift wrap. Sometimes they can also offer emergency clothing or household item vouchers to use at their stores.

New Parent Support Group for the Greater Bozeman Area

The organization Parents Let's Unite for Kids (PLUK) recently notified our office of a new support group in downtown Bozeman for **parents of children with disabilities or special health care needs**. The first meeting will take place

Saturday, December 9th from 11 to 12:00 p.m. The meeting will be located at the **St. James Episcopal Church, Parish Hall (basement) in downtown Bozeman** on the corner of S. Tracy and West Olive. For more information please contact Rebecca Adams at 1-877-847-8890 or radams@pluk.org.



Stringing popcorn and jelly beans

I remember as a child having a great time with my family stringing popcorn for the Christmas tree. You can take this tradition one step further and string lots of different things. Jelly beans, beads, corks, and colored popcorn are just a few items that look beautiful not just on a tree, but as a general winter decoration strung on a bookshelf or in the window. All you need is some creative items to string, a needle and either waxed dental floss or fishing line. Kids can use thimbles to protect their thumb as they push the needle through.

Egg Carton Snow people or Santa

What you will need: egg cartons (either plastic or paper), craft glue, craft paint, a piece of ribbon, string or fishing line and other misc. decorating

items you find around the house.

Cut out separately four of the half round egg holders. Glue two of them, top to bottom to make the bottom of the snowman or the chest area of Santa. Do the same for the top, but first string a doubled ribbon or fishing line through a small hole in the top egg holder and then tie it together. This will allow you to hang your creation. Then glue the top to the bottom. Paint your creation and then add felt or scrap material to create a hat or a scarf. Little white craft pom-poms can be glued on for the top of the hat. Beads, beans or other small items can be glued on for buttons or faces. Construction paper can also be used for the face. Use your imagination and have some fun coming up with your own ideas for egg carton people, animals or just fun decorations.



Scholarships for the kids

Many programs for kids that cost money offer scholarship programs. For example, most schools throughout the state have some money set aside to cover the expense of enrollment in sports programs or after school events who otherwise could not afford the fees. Other offices such as Thrive, Inc. have a limited budget to assist with the cost of things like ballet or Tae Kwan Do classes. Sometimes scholarships can be found directly through the company offering the sport or classes. Free or low cost equipment for sports can often be found as well. For example, one school recycles kid's ice-skates. To find out about availability in your area, call your local school district and local non-profit agencies, or ask when inquiring about a specific program. It never hurts to ask!

HELP! Please send us your ideas!

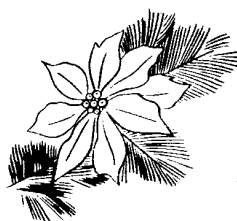
We are planning for next year's Grandparents Raising Grandchildren conferences. We would love to hear what topics you are interested in. If you have any topic ideas, or know of a guest speaker you would like to hear, please give us a call, drop a note in the mail, or send us an e-mail. We would also like to know what topics you would like to see in the newsletter. We always love to hear from grandparents raising grandchildren!



Brenda Roche talks to grandparents about the side effects of methamphetamine use at the 2006 Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Conference in Great Falls.

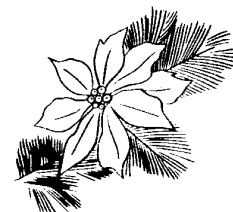
Family Attorney Alert

The GRG Project would like to make a list of attorneys that practice in the state of Montana that are familiar with cases pertaining to grandparents raising grandchildren and similar custody cases. If you know of a good family law attorney that you can suggest, please call us at (406) 994-3395 or send us an e-mail with their name and contact information at grg@montana.edu.



Mental Health Resource

The MSU Grandparents Raising Grandchildren project has received some funding from the Brookdale Foundation to assist grandfamilies in addressing mental health needs. In Bozeman, Helena, and West Yellowstone we have been able to offer 8-week therapeutic support groups with trained mental health facilitators. For support groups in our other areas of the state, we are offering limited funds for you to bring a local mental health professional to your group. These funds will be based on a first come, first serve basis. For example, your group may want to have a therapist come to your support group once or twice to discuss a particular issue. If the therapist charges a fee, you can apply for funding to cover that cost. Or your group may want to have a therapist come for several weeks to work with specific grandparents and you may apply for funding to cover that cost. For more information, please contact our office at 994-3395.



Low Income Energy Assistance Program (LIEAP)

If you are struggling to pay for your electric and gas usage this season, you may be eligible for assistance in paying your bill, or receiving free weatherization services. You can apply for weatherization assistance year round and fuel bill assistance from October 1 through April 30th. The LIEP program is offered through the Department of Public Health and Human Services. Call 1-800-332-2272 to determine where you can apply. The application can also be downloaded off the internet and mailed in at www.dphhs.mt.gov/programsservices/energyassistance/index.shtml. Tribal energy assistance offices also offer help, but have their own application. If your household receives Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) you may automatically qualify. Otherwise eligibility is based upon 150% of the federal poverty level. For a household of 2, 150% is \$19,800, a household of 3 is \$24,900, and a household of 4 is \$30,000. You can look up larger households by clicking a link on the web-site listed above. Besides the application you will need to supply a recent copy of your energy bill and copies of income records such as pay stubs, child support and retirement payments. The above web-site also has links to energy tips to help you save energy throughout your home.

Honor Society Sponsors GRG's for their yearly project

The Montana State University chapter of the national Family and Consumer Science Honor Society, Phi-Upsilon Omicron has generously donated their time and talents to help support a few of the grandparents rearing their grandchildren in Bozeman. Each year the students in Phi-Upsilon choose a project that will help the community. This year, these fine young ladies decided to direct their energy to helping out a few grandparents. They 'adopted' several families and raised funds to offer several grocery store gift cards, and purchase household items and games to give to the families. In addition, they have offered to baby-sit to provide these families with some much needed respite services.

Thank you Phi-Upsilon Omicron for your support!

If you would like to highlight something special your grandparents raising grandchildren support group is doing please send an article or information to grg@montana.edu for possible submission in the newsletter. We would also love pictures and poetry. Please remember if you send in pictures you need permission from all the people in the pictures. You can request a picture release form from the GRG project by e-mailing us at grg@montana.edu or calling 406-994-3395.



Grandparent Support Groups Across Montana

Billings

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Bozeman

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Rocky Boy Reservation/ Box Elder

Peggy Riotar-Aquino
395-4875

Rocky Boy Reservation/ Agency

Evelyn Gopher
395-4875

Townsend

Nancy Marks 226-3710
Jerri Paulk 266-4249

*When one door of happiness closes, another
opens, but often we look so long at the closed
door that we do not see the one that has
opened for us.*

~ Helen Keller

*There is only one way to happiness, and that is
to cease worrying things which are beyond the
power of our will.*

~ Epictetus
