

Upcoming Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Conferences

Saturday, June 2nd - Billings

Saturday, June 23rd - Great Falls

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The Montana GRG Project staff is working hard to make the second Annual grandparents raising grandchildren conferences an event you will not want to miss. The conferences are designed to provide information and referral services to grandparents rearing their grandchildren and the service providers that work with them. This is also a great opportunity to meet other grandparents who may be experiencing similar struggles.

Jane Middleton-Moz, author of *Values from the Front Porch: Remembering the Values of our Grandmothers* will be the keynote speaker at both conferences and will also speak on the subject of bullying. In addition, speakers will present information on attachment and financial issues. A panel from the Department of Public Health and Human Services will also be on hand to review available assistance and answer questions.

Informational booths will also be set up by a variety of organizations within Montana such as AARP.

The cost of the conference is only \$15.00 for single grandparents and \$25.00 for grandparent couples. The cost for service providers is \$50.00. This fee includes childcare, lunch and snacks and entrance into all sessions. In addition, a variety of door prizes will be given out during the day.

If you are interested in registering to attend one of the GRG conferences please request a registration form from Debbie Albin at 406-994-6685 or e-mailing shanklin@montana.edu.

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Social Security Benefits for your Grandchild?

If a child is not receiving benefits from a parent when the grandparent retires, becomes disabled, or dies, the grandchild may then be able to qualify for benefits if certain conditions are met. Generally, the biological parents of the child must be deceased or disabled, or the grandchild must be legally adopted by the grandparent. In addition, the grandchild must have begun living with the grandparent before age 18 and received at least one half of his or her support from the grandparent for the year before the month the grandparent became entitled to retirement or disability insurance benefits, or died. Also, the natural parent(s) of the child must not be making regular contributions to his or her support.

If the grandchild was born during the one-year period, the grandparent must have lived with and provided at least one-half of the child's support for substantially all of the period from the date of birth to the month the grandparent became entitled to benefits.

The grandchild may qualify for benefits under these circumstances, even if he or she is a step-grandchild. However, if the grandparents are already receiving benefits, they would need to adopt the child for it to qualify for benefits.

Disabled Children under 18 yrs old

Social Security makes payment under the SSI program to disabled children under 18 whose families have little income and resources. SSI payments are based on need rather than prior work and may be paid to children regardless whether a parent is retired, disabled, or has died. These benefits also continue as long as the child is disabled and has little income or resources. A child under 18 is considered disabled if his or her physical or mental condition is so severe that it results in marked and severe functional limitations. The condition must last or be expected to last at least 12 months or be expected to result in the child's death. And of course, the child must not be working at a job that we consider to be substantial work.

Disabled Children 18yrs or older

Under both Social Security and SSI, children 18 or older are considered disabled if they meet the adult definition of disability, i.e., their condition must be severe enough to prevent them from doing any kind of work for which they are suited.

Social Security has a toll-free number that operates from 7AM to 7PM, Monday to Friday:

1-800-772-1213 If you have a touch-tone phone, recorded information and services are available 24 hours a day, including weekends and holidays. People who are deaf or hard of hearing may call our toll-free "TTY" number, **1-800-325-0778**, between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. on Monday through Friday. Please have your Social Security number handy when you call.

This information reprinted with permission and can be found on the Social Security web-site at

www.ssa.gov

Spanning Generations

Gerri Labunetz, one of the facilitators for the Great Falls Support Group recently shared some of the things they've been doing. Their group, 'Spanning Generations' meets the second Tuesday of each month from 11:30 to 1:00 pm at Longfellow School.

Gerri said at each meeting they celebrate small successes, support one another through their grief and fear of the legal system, and laugh together. "What a difference support makes! We have all gained confidence in our ability to parent our grandchildren, gained knowledge of the legal system, and provided each other with the support to face another round of crisis. Thanks for the opportunity."

In addition to support from within, the group was also assisted by the Sunrisers Women's Group who held a fundraiser on their behalf. Half of the money they raised was distributed in December at a fun holiday get together. Each grandchild received a gift of \$75.00 cash. The remainder of the funds raised will be saved so that grandparents within the group can request money for emergencies or for fun stuff throughout the year. Hand knot hats and

scarves were also distributed to support group members.

As another special bonus for the holiday season of the grandmothers within the group was also able to convince Sears to provide a gift certificate for a free sitting and 8 x 10 picture of the children.

Spanning Generations is lucky to have a number of facilitators who work together to combine resources for the group. In addition to Gerri Labunetz from Healthy Mothers Healthy Babies, Claire Del Guerra, retired MSU Extension Agent and Marilyn Trottier, Home to School Coordinator at Longfellow School assist in facilitation. Jona McNamee with Cascade County Extension is also heavily involved. Colette Gray from Opportunities Inc. also helps out keeping the group posted on legislative issues and low income assistance programs.

If you live in the Great Falls area, and would like to learn more about joining the Spanning Generations GRG Support Group, give Jona McNamee a call at 454-6980.



Montana Children's Health Insurance Plan

The Children's Health Insurance Plan (CHIP) offers low-cost or free health insurance for children up to the age of 19. Children qualify for CHIP if family income meets income guidelines based on family size, the children are not eligible for Medicaid, the children are uninsured, the children are Montana residents and US citizens are qualified aliens, and the children's parents do not work for the State of Montana or the Montana University System.



The application for CHIP is fairly simple and is available by calling 1-877-KidsNow (1-877-543-7669) or by downloading an application form at www.chip.mt.gov, and mailing it to the address on the application. Applications are also available at a variety of social service offices in your community, such as the Office of Public Assistance, County Health Department, WIC office, Head Start, Indian Health Service or Health Care Facilities.

Many children raised by grandparents qualify for Medicaid, a free health insurance plan through DPHHS. Before applying for CHIP check your grandchild's eligibility for Medicaid by calling your local Office of Public Assistance.

The following health care services are covered by CHIP:

- * Office visits and checkups
- * Emergency care
- * Physicals for sports & jobs
- * Shots
- * Hospital care
- * Prescription drugs
- * Clinic services
- * Lab & x-ray services
- * Hearing exams
- * Mental health services
- * Substance abuse services
- * Dental visits
- * Vision exams & eyeglasses

Income Guidelines for CHIP

Family Size (Children & adults)	Family Income
2	\$20,535
3	\$25,755
4	\$30,975
5	\$36,195
6	\$41,415
7	\$46,635
8	\$51,855

Montana Children's Health Insurance Plan is a program of the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services.

Children may be eligible for CHIP even if income is more than the amounts listed. Income guidelines take into account how many family members work and if child care expenses are paid.

Age Limit Lowered for Older Americans Act

The U.S. Congress recently reauthorized the Older Americans Act and lowered the age limit to qualify for related services from age 60 down to age 55. Supportive services for grandparent caregivers are offered through the National Family Caregiver Support Program (NFCSP). This change will make quite a difference, since only 29% of grandparent caregivers were eligible for services with the age limit set at 60. While we would love to see 100% covered, this still represents a victory since 47% of grandparent caregivers will now be eligible. More information about the Older Americans Act and the National Family Caregiver Support Program is available at www.aoa.gov.

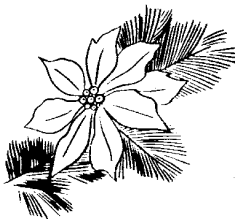
Grandparent Contributions

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.



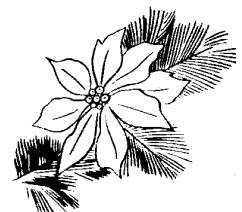
Family Attorney Alert

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.



Legislative Update

Legislation has been introduced at the state level and the national level that would assist kinship caregivers. If you would like to track the bills that are being reviewed this legislative session here in Helena, go to www.maco.cog.mt.us/Legislature. At the bottom of the page you can either look up bills by subject or type in the bill #. SB27 would revise the grandparent grandchild contact law, SB31 is described as “caretaker relative and continuing custody affidavit”, SB48 would allow relative caretakers to consent to medical care, and SB49 would allow a relative caretaker to enroll children in school.

On the national level The Kinship Caregiver Support Act (Bill # S. 661) was reintroduced recently by Senators Hillary Clinton and Olympia Snowe and was referred to the Senate Finance Committee. In a recent statement, Senator Clinton said, “The growth of kinship care is a phenomenon that is quietly changing the face of the American family and creating new challenges for our Nation’s child welfare system... As caregivers who often become parents unexpectedly, these generous family members face unique challenges to successfully raising children. These challenges are physical, emotional, and of course, financial. Grandparents and other relatives raising children often encounter a variety of unnecessary barriers, including difficulties enrolling children in school, authorizing medical treatment, maintaining their public housing leases, obtaining affordable legal services, and accessing a variety of Federal benefits and services. The Kinship Caregiver Support Act attempts to address the full range of difficulties facing kinship caregivers, by allowing relatives to become formal guardians while receiving some financial assistance. This bill will provide relative caregivers with the information and assistance they need to thrive as non-traditional families.”

Inheriting Indian Land Indian Land Tenure in the Wake of the American Indian Probate Reform Act

**April 12-13, 2007
an Indian Issues Week Symposium
Montana State University—Bozeman
Hager Auditorium, Museum of the Rockies
Montana State University—Bozeman**

**Contact: Kristin Ruppel, Asst. Prof., Native American Studies Department, MSU
phone: 406.994.5261 or 406.994.3881 email: ktruppel@montana.edu**

**Registration fee: \$25. Watch for online registration form and symposium details, coming soon to
www.montana.edu/indianland/**

This spring’s symposium will provide a forum for tribal leaders and advocates, legal experts, individual Indian landowners, Indian land lessees—all of whom are plagued in different ways by the problems of fractionated Indian land ownership—and others from the intermountain region to discuss and learn about the state of Indian land tenure: its political, legal and philosophical history as well as its status in the wake of recent legislation.

Grandparent Support Groups Across Montana

Billings

Bernie Mason
P.O. Box 35021
Billings, MT 59107
256-2828

Bozeman

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994-3395
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Browning

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Eagle Shield Center
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338-7257

Butte

Butte 4C's
Terri Bolstad
101 E. Broadway
Butte, MT 59701
723-4019
800-794-4061

Colstrip

Jennifer Anderson
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346-7320

Dillon

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Glendive

Pete Bruno
Parents Resource Center
200 S. Kendrick
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1100 6th Avenue South
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268-6762
Jona McNamee
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454-6980

Helena

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Lewistown, MT 59457
535-3919

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Melody Domphe
The Nurturing Center, Inc.
146 3rd Ave. W.
Kalispell, MT 59901
756-1414

Missoula

Barbara Cowen
Families First
721-7690

Kathy Revello, MSU Extension
Missoula County Agent
256-4208

Poplar and Wolf Point

Ardis Oelkers
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787-5312

Ravalli County

Brenda Fisher
Family Resource Specialist
108 Pinckney
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363-1961 ext:107

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

Call it a clan, call it a network, call it a tribe,
call it a family. Whatever you call it, whoever
you are, you need one.

~Jane Howard

What children need most are the essentials
that grandparents provide in
abundance. They give unconditional love,
kindness, patience, humor, comfort, lessons
in life. And, most importantly, cookies.

~Rudolph Giuliani
