

# Grandparents Caring for Grandchildren

## DEFINITION

*Grandparents caring for grandchildren* is the percentage of family households in which a grandparent is financially responsible for food, shelter, clothing, child care, etc. for any or all grandchildren under age 18 living in the household.

## SIGNIFICANCE

The number of grandparents raising grandchildren is on the rise. In the United States, eight million children live in households headed primarily by grandparents or other relatives, and 2.7 million of these children are in families where grandparents or other relatives serve as the primary caregiver through kinship foster care. Black and Native American children are more likely to be cared for by grandparents than other groups.<sup>1</sup>

A grandparent caregiver reduces the trauma of separation when a child cannot remain with their parents and provides better outcomes for children than those who are placed with non-relatives. Children may be in a grandparent's care because of child abuse or neglect, unemployment, or incarceration. Increasingly, parental substance use is the reason a grandparent becomes the primary caregiver.<sup>2,3</sup>

Twice as many grandmothers are involved in raising grandchildren than grandfathers. Forty percent of grandmother-only caregivers live below

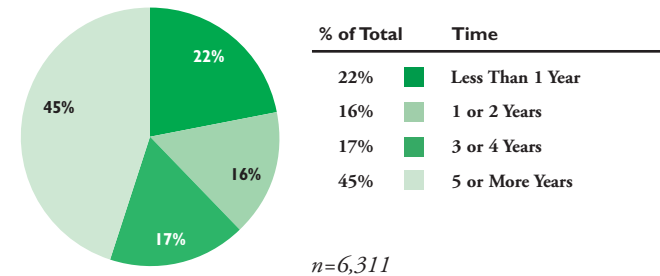
the poverty line, and 76% receive public assistance. Nearly one in five of all grandparent caregivers lives in poverty.<sup>4,5</sup>

Many grandparents have informal custody arrangements and are not involved with child welfare agencies, often receiving fewer services than traditional foster parents.<sup>6</sup> Compared to the general population, children in informal kinship care are more likely to live in poverty, less likely to be covered by health insurance, and are more likely to have physical and mental disabilities.<sup>7</sup>

Grandparents and other relative caregivers often lack information about the support services (such as training, respite, and peer support), resources, programs, and policies available to them. Nearly all children in kinship care are eligible for cash assistance through Temporary Assistance for Needy Families regardless of their household's income level, yet children in informal custody arrangements are much less likely to receive these payments.<sup>8,9</sup>

Grandparent caregivers are at risk for poor physical and mental health. They may have difficulty enrolling children in school and/or seeking health insurance or medical care for the children in their care. Many caregivers do not pursue the legal process required for permanent status to avoid strain on family relationships and due to cost.<sup>10,11</sup> Grandparents make up the largest percentage of relative caregivers, but other family members may face similar obstacles.<sup>12</sup>

  
**Rhode Island Grandparents Financially Responsible for Their Grandchildren, by Length of Time Responsible, 2015-2019**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2015-2019. Table B10050..

- ◆ **Between 2015 and 2019, there were a total of 14,517 children in Rhode Island living in households headed by grandparents.<sup>13</sup> During this time period, there were 6,311 grandparents who were financially responsible for their grandchildren, 62% of whom had been financially responsible for three or more years.<sup>14</sup>**
- ◆ **In the 2010 Census, 6% (13,968) of all children in Rhode Island lived with a grandparent caregiver and 2% (4,398) lived with other relatives.<sup>15</sup>**
- ◆ **Children in kinship foster care have better physical and mental health outcomes, more stability, and are more likely to have a permanent home.<sup>16</sup> Rhode Island regulations state that the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) must give priority to relatives when placing a child in out-of-home care.<sup>17</sup> On December 31, 2020, there were 830 children under age 19 in DCYF care who were in out-of-home placements with a grandparent or other relative. Children in kinship foster care made up 45% of all children in out-of-home placements in Rhode Island.<sup>18</sup>**
- ◆ **During the COVID-19 pandemic, grandfamilies are juggling distance learning, economic challenges, and difficulties accessing services for their grandchildren. They are also at increased risk of developing severe complications if they contract COVID-19 because they are more likely to be over age 60, have underlying health issues, and be People of Color. Support groups, kinship navigator programs, and case management can help grandparents access services for themselves and their grandchildren.<sup>19</sup>**

# Grandparents Caring for Grandchildren

Table 3.

## Children's Living Arrangements, Rhode Island, 2010

CITY/TOWN	CHILDREN LIVING IN HOUSEHOLDS	CHILDREN WHO ARE A HOUSEHOLDER OR SPOUSE		CHILDREN LIVING WITH NON-RELATIVES		CHILDREN LIVING WITH OTHER RELATIVES		CHILDREN LIVING IN MARRIED IN COUPLE FAMILIES		CHILDREN LIVING IN SINGLE PARENT FAMILIES		CHILDREN LIVING WITH GRANDPARENTS	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Barrington	4,597	2	<1%	31	1%	15	0%	3,871	84%	593	13%	85	2%
Bristol	3,621	1	<1%	37	1%	51	1%	2,564	71%	743	21%	225	6%
Burrillville	3,548	0	0%	110	3%	26	1%	2,353	66%	827	23%	232	7%
Central Falls	5,634	3	<1%	90	2%	209	4%	2,159	38%	2,744	49%	429	8%
Charlestown	1,506	0	0%	15	1%	20	1%	1,059	70%	306	20%	106	7%
Coventry	7,762	2	<1%	148	2%	72	1%	5,343	69%	1,648	21%	549	7%
Cranston	16,262	5	<1%	226	1%	324	2%	10,462	64%	4,218	26%	1,027	6%
Cumberland	7,535	0	0%	97	1%	53	1%	5,651	75%	1,400	19%	334	4%
East Greenwich	3,436	0	0%	21	1%	13	0%	2,889	84%	442	13%	71	2%
East Providence	9,100	2	<1%	127	1%	154	2%	5,329	59%	2,813	31%	675	7%
Exeter	1,300	0	0%	23	2%	16	1%	996	77%	183	14%	82	6%
Foster	986	0	0%	24	2%	10	1%	741	75%	142	14%	69	7%
Glocester	2,098	0	0%	39	2%	26	1%	1,581	75%	315	15%	137	7%
Hopkinton	1,845	0	0%	46	2%	24	1%	1,327	72%	335	18%	113	6%
Jamestown	1,043	0	0%	3	0%	5	0%	799	77%	187	18%	49	5%
Johnston	5,473	2	<1%	90	2%	114	2%	3,591	66%	1,296	24%	380	7%
Lincoln	4,743	3	<1%	61	1%	52	1%	3,270	69%	1,146	24%	211	4%
Little Compton	654	0	0%	5	1%	1	0%	528	81%	78	12%	42	6%
Middletown	3,634	3	<1%	45	1%	38	1%	2,606	72%	776	21%	166	5%
Narragansett	2,240	2	<1%	35	2%	25	1%	1,533	68%	540	24%	105	5%
New Shoreham	163	0	0%	1	1%	1	1%	111	68%	46	28%	4	2%
Newport	4,060	2	<1%	66	2%	56	1%	2,034	50%	1,698	42%	204	5%
North Kingstown	6,322	1	<1%	57	1%	49	1%	4,639	73%	1,329	21%	247	4%
North Providence	5,481	0	0%	81	1%	131	2%	3,266	60%	1,625	30%	378	7%
North Smithfield	2,456	0	0%	40	2%	13	1%	1,831	75%	476	19%	96	4%
Pawtucket	16,550	17	<1%	239	1%	460	3%	7,488	45%	7,118	43%	1,228	7%
Portsmouth	3,940	2	<1%	47	1%	24	1%	2,977	76%	718	18%	172	4%
Providence	41,497	41	<1%	632	2%	1,663	4%	16,931	41%	19,136	46%	3,094	7%
Richmond	1,836	0	0%	32	2%	16	1%	1,437	78%	247	13%	104	6%
Scituate	2,272	0	0%	24	1%	22	1%	1,731	76%	356	16%	139	6%
Smithfield	3,615	2	<1%	46	1%	29	1%	2,802	78%	572	16%	164	5%
South Kingstown	5,364	0	0%	81	2%	31	1%	3,951	74%	1,053	20%	248	5%
Tiverton	2,998	1	<1%	41	1%	20	1%	2,109	70%	665	22%	162	5%
Warren	1,935	4	<1%	42	2%	19	1%	1,124	58%	610	32%	136	7%
Warwick	15,795	3	<1%	308	2%	223	1%	10,476	66%	3,676	23%	1,109	7%
West Greenwich	1,468	2	<1%	22	1%	13	1%	1,131	77%	221	15%	79	5%
West Warwick	5,746	1	<1%	151	3%	121	2%	3,118	54%	1,990	35%	365	6%
Westerly	4,787	4	<1%	82	2%	83	2%	3,012	63%	1,337	28%	269	6%
Woonsocket	9,842	10	<1%	203	2%	176	2%	4,237	43%	4,533	46%	683	7%
Four Core Cities	73,523	71	<1%	1,164	2%	2,508	3%	30,815	42%	33,531	46%	5,434	7%
Remainder of State	149,621	44	<1%	2,304	2%	1,890	1%	102,242	68%	34,607	23%	8,534	6%
Rhode Island	223,144	115	<1%	3,468	2%	4,398	2%	133,057	60%	68,138	31%	13,968	6%

### Source of Data for Table/Methodology

U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2010.

The denominator is the number of children under age 18 living in family households according to Census 2010. A family household is defined by the U.S. Census Bureau as consisting of a householder and one or more people living together in the same household who are related to the householder by birth, marriage, or adoption – it may include others not related to the householder.

Core cities are Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket.

### References

- <sup>1.4.19</sup> Facing a pandemic: Grandfamilies living together during COVID-19 and thriving beyond. (2020). Washington, DC: Generations United. Retrieved February 4, 2021, from [www.grandfamilies.org](http://www.grandfamilies.org)
- <sup>2.5.12</sup> Lent, J. P., & Otto, A. (2018). Grandparents, grandchildren, and caregiving: The impacts of America's substance use crisis. *Generations* 42(3), 15-22. Retrieved February 4, 2021, from [www.jstor.org](http://www.jstor.org)
- <sup>3.6.16</sup> In loving arms: The protective role of grandparents and other relatives in raising children exposed to trauma. (2017). Washington, DC: Generations United. Retrieved February 4, 2021, from [www.gu.org](http://www.gu.org)
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- <sup>9</sup> Walsh, W. A., & Mattingly, M. J. (2014). *Related foster parents less likely to receive support services compared with nonrelative foster parents*. Durham, NH: Carsey School of Public Policy, University of New Hampshire. Retrieved February 4, 2021, from <https://scholars.unh.edu/>
- <sup>11</sup> A place to call home: Building affordable housing for grandfamilies. (2019). Washington, DC: Generations United.

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