

Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Task Force Annual Report to the Board of Supervisors (03-04)

1. Introduction

The Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Task Force was organized by the Office on Aging in 1998 in response to a directive from the Board of Supervisors to coordinate a process that would better address the unmet needs and concerns of a growing population of grandparents raising grandchildren in Riverside County.

2. Summary Historical Background of the Task Force

The Task Force has been in action for the past five plus years, and has made steady progress in getting focus and achieving outcomes.

In October of 1998, the Task Force was convened for its first meeting.

In 1999, the Task Force recommended that a WarmLine be developed within DPSS to provide information, assistance, and advocacy to grandparents raising grandchildren.

In 2000, a program specialist was hired within the Office on Aging to staff the Grandparents Task Force, and the Warm Line became operational within DPSS.

In 2000 the Task Force convened its First Annual Forum for grandparents raising grandchildren to identify needs and provide information on available resources.

In 2001 the Task Force was restructured by the Board of Supervisors to include a representative grandparent appointee from each district.

In 2001 the grandparents Task Force completed a county wide needs assessment by convening a series of grandparent focus groups to identify priority concerns and issues.

In 2002 the Task Force was further restructured by the Board to include a grandparent representative from each grandparent support group throughout the county in order to increase their input into deliberations and decisions.

In 2002 the Task Force formed a special Ad Hoc Grievance Committee at the direction of the Board of Supervisors to address grandparent grievances with the service system.

3. Summary Highlights and Accomplishments of 2003-2004

The Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Task Force has had a very successful and productive year, and is proud of its progress and accomplishments. A minimal investment of resources in realizing major results because of effective coordination across departments and with community agencies and resources.

A. Policy Development: The Task Force solicits presentations to identify system policy issues that lie beneath the individual problems being experienced by grandparents using the system, and takes steps to address them.

The Task Force developed and approved **policy position statements** on two priority issues of concern; adoption and respite services. (Copies attached)

Impact: In response to these position statements, DPSS took action to address the recommendations made. They revised and clarified policies and procedures related to these issues, and made outreach efforts for improved communication.

The Task Force also completed **a Report on Grievances of Grandparents Raising Grandchildren** and submitted it for Board approval on 2003.

Impact: The Department of Social Services invited grandparent representatives to participate in the process to develop and revise informational brochures about the process to raise and resolve concerns. They also reviewed and standardized implementation of adoption policies and procedures.

B. Program Development: The Task Force identifies programs that are needed and takes steps to support their development.

Grandparent WarmLine program staff relocated from DPSS to the Hemet Senior Service Center to achieve better coordination and improve customer service.

Impact: the number of calls has increased from 100 to 150 per month, and the satisfaction of callers has improved significantly.

The Grandparent Volunteer Advocate program has trained 12 volunteer advocates who have provided service to 500 grandparent and relative caregivers in the last year.

Impact: grandparents have been assisted in moving through system barriers, and obtained the benefits, assistance and rights to which they were entitled.

The eleven **Grandparent Support Groups** throughout the county serve hundreds of grandparents. Representatives from each group participate in Task Force deliberations, and also refer individuals in need of information and/or advocacy to the Hemet office for assistance.

Impact: Coordination with local support groups assists in identifying priority grandparent needs and recurring problems on a regular basis.

The Multi-Disciplinary Team, consists of representatives from DPSS, Mental Health, Health Dept, Office on Aging and other entities. It brings together key county professional staff to address complex cases, remove barriers to service, and resolve issues that affect the rights and preferences of the grandparents. A total of 25 cases were addressed in the last year, and there are currently 16 active cases.

Impact: This team approach provides an effective process to resolve issues on behalf of grandparents who are experiencing difficulties across multiple departments, agencies, and geographic jurisdictions.

Probate Court has made legal services available at low or no cost to grandparents in special need. Although this is not available to all grandparents it has assisted those in great financial need.

Impact: In 2003 service was provided to 147 relative caregivers with 225 children. Grandparents are gaining voice and better understanding of their rights and options in the Court.

C. Education/Communication: The Task Force has a strong commitment to reaching grandparents throughout the county to inform them of the assistance available.

An Info Video was produced this year to provide information on the Riverside County Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Task Force, and available programs and services.

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Impact: Through use of the Office on Aging InfoVans and other venues, the video will reach grandparents in remote areas throughout the county.

The Grandparents Newsletter is published quarterly to highlight programs and share individual insights. Approximately 12,000 copies are distributed annually.

Impact: Grandparents are being informed about available resources and support groups.

The Fifth Annual Grandparents Forum will convene an estimated 150 grandparents and highlight information and strategies for self care, parenting, and working with complex systems.

Impact: The 600 plus grandparents attending these forums in the past four years have benefited from information, resources, and networking opportunities.

Outreach to grandparents provides information on available resources through presentations, conferences, meetings, public service announcements, billboards, posters, handouts, telephone, and web page, and is an ongoing activity.

Impact: Grandparents not currently in the county system are learning of assistance available and are being referred to available resources in their communities. A total of 20,375 persons were impacted through outreach in the last year.

4. Unresolved Issues/Needs

Customer Satisfaction System: The Grievance Ad Hoc Committee recommended the development of a county wide system to measure grandparent satisfaction with services being received. Planning is still in process. Implementation concerns have been expressed because of increased costs to the departments involved.

Ombudsman Program: A feasibility report was completed recommending the positive impact that a Grandparent Ombudsman program could have. This idea has been put on hold because of estimated program development costs of approximately \$250,000.

Ongoing Advocacy on placement and adoption issues: Although the Task Force has developed a consensus position statement on placement and adoption, case by case difficulties and issues continue to arise, requiring advocacy and intervention.

Development of Seamless System of Services: They Systems Change committee continues to explore strategies to connect services and programs for grandparents raising grandchildren into an integrated service delivery system.

5. Future Outlook/Priorities

Although much has been accomplished, there remains a great challenge ahead. Grandparents continue to experience difficulties with the system on a daily basis. And the number of grandparents raising their grandchildren continues to increase.

The Task Force has been awarded a \$47,000 planning grant from the CA. Endowment to develop and refine plans to develop a pilot **One Stop Center for Grandparents Raising Grandchildren**. Prevent Child Abuse is serving as the fiscal agent for the grant. This concept has long been a priority for the Task Force and is now close to being funded by the Endowment.

Task Force **participation and commitment** from departments varies as staff/budget cuts are experienced. Since it is essential that departments take participation seriously to assure the Task Force is as effective as it can be, ongoing attention needs to be given to encourage this.

The Task Force continues to be **a model for other parts of the state and nation**. Members are committed to working together to address issues as they arise on a case by case basis, and also to promote overall system improvements that promote a continuum of services for grandparents across programs, agencies, and departments.

Submitted by:

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Attachments: Policy statement, Respite Service
Policy statement, Adoption
Policy statement, Customer Satisfaction
WarmLine 2004 YTD Statistics
DPSS draft brochures on Complaint/Grievance Process