



UNIVERSITY of MARYLAND
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

NEWS

For Immediate Release

Contact: Patricia Fanning

Phone: 410-706-7946

E-mail: pfanning@umaryland.edu

UM School of Social Work's COPE Program Seeks Grandmothers for Project on Raising Grandchildren

To learn the best ways to help grandparents cope with the challenge of raising their grandchildren, the University of Maryland School of Social Work (SSW) is recruiting participants for a project funded by a \$2.5 million grant to the School and collaborators in Ohio, Texas, and California.

The grant from the National Institutes of Health will fund a four-year study called Project COPE (Caring for Others as a Positive Experience).

About 2.5 million grandparents in the United States are responsible for providing shelter, food, and clothing and meeting the other needs of grandchildren under age 18 who live with them, according to U.S. Census data.

It's a tough task, according to **Frederick Strieder, PhD**, Clinical Associate Professor at the SSW and director of Grandparent Family Connections, a nonprofit that helps Baltimore grandparents carrying out parental roles under difficult and often unexpected circumstances. He knows the grandparents' experiences vary tremendously; there are even some great-grandparents, in their seventies and eighties, who are raising infants.

At the SSW, Strieder is the principal investigator for COPE Maryland, which is enrolling grandmothers caring for grandchildren between the ages of 4 and 12. "It's not like raising your own from the beginning," he says. "Based on the children's experiences, you have to undo and redo some important basics in relating."

Often the children have been neglected or undergone trauma, or perhaps come into an elder's care because of a parent's death, illness from AIDS, or incarceration. "All these reasons are why grandparents step up," he says, despite financial and personal demands of raising children who've been through some tough times.

“Across demographic groups, the challenge they face is the same,” he says. Nationally, a third of these grandparents are above age 60, 13 percent are younger than 45, and the rest fall in the ages in between. The financial and other pressures are greatest for those living in poverty.

The national study, which will enroll more than 500 grandmothers, is led by project principal investigators Gregory Smith, PhD, professor at Kent State University, and Bert Hayslip, PhD, professor at the University of North Texas.

In Maryland, 126 grandmothers are being recruited in Baltimore City, Baltimore County and, Prince George's County and surrounding areas, according to Patty Greenberg, MA, COPE Research Project Manager at the SSW. They will meet in small groups once a week for 10 weeks at convenient neighborhood settings, with child care and a meal provided at no charge to participants. A peer grandparent and a group leader with special training will facilitate the sessions.

Grandmothers will be assigned to one of three types of support and learning interventions. To measure how helpful they are, each grandmother and a grandchild will be interviewed before the interventions begin, after they end, and every six months for two years. Compensation is provided for the interviews.

Grandmothers raising grandchildren between the ages of 4 and 12 can take part in the project if the child's parents do not live in the home. In addition to offering support to participants, Dr. Strieder believes this effort will increase our understanding to implement effective programs for this growing and often overlooked population. For more information go to www.ssw.umaryland.edu/cope or call toll-free 855-462-8766.

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