



Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Partnership of Wisconsin

Grandparents Raising Grandchildren: Welfare Reform

Increasing numbers of grandparents in this country are either raising or caring for their grandchildren, often as a result of divorce, drug or alcohol abuse, unemployment or abuse and neglect issues related to their adult children. In Wisconsin, grandparents caring for their grandchildren have been affected in several ways by recent welfare reforms.

Changes in the welfare system have changed the way grandparents become eligible for public assistance and the amount of benefits which they can receive. Under the old welfare system, grandparents serving as caretakers could receive benefits for “Non-Legally Responsible Relatives” through Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program. This was an entitlement program, meaning anyone who met the eligibility criteria could receive benefits.

Kinship Care Program

When Wisconsin restructured its welfare program in 1997, a new program was created to provide income support to grandparents and other caretaker relatives. The new program, Kinship Care, is administered by the Department of Health and Family Services.

Kinship Care has stricter eligibility criteria than the old Non-Legally Responsible Relative program. The changes in eligibility affect which children can get into the program and which grandparents or other relatives can receive benefits.

A child can only be placed in Kinship Care if he or she is abused, neglected, or at risk for abuse, neglect or delinquency. This requirement was not in place under the old system. And grandparents or other relatives must submit to a criminal background check in order to be eligible for the program. This is also new requirement under Kinship Care.

An important change is that Kinship Care is not an entitlement program. That means that grandparents who are eligible may be denied benefits if no slots are available. There are differences from county to county in whether a new applicant can actually get benefits. There are a few counties in Wisconsin that now have waiting lists for Kinship Care.

Benefits Under Kinship Care

The benefits grandparents can get are different than under the old system. Caregivers now receive less assistance when there is one child involved, but more assistance when there are multiple children.

Old AFDC System -- \$248 for the first child and \$100 for additional children.

New Kinship Care System -- \$215 per child per month.

Indirect Effects on Grandparents

In addition to the changes in how grandparents receive benefits, welfare reform may have other, more indirect effects on grandparents.

There has been a shift of people off AFDC into the labor force. There has been less demand than expected for subsidized child care, so it seems likely that many of the children are being cared for by grandparents or other extended family members.

Also, as a result of welfare reform, parents who are unable to work may have difficulty providing for their children. This could leave to an increase in the need for grandparents to serve as primary caregivers for their grandchildren.

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Published by *Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Partnership of Wisconsin*, coordinated by Grandparents United for Children's Rights, Inc; Bureau of Aging and Long Term Care Resources, State of Wisconsin; and University of Wisconsin Extension, Cooperative Extension, Family Living Programs. See <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/flp/grgp> for more information.