



SPONSORED CONTENT



Editor, Janis Merrell
GoodLife@LifePathMA.org
(413) 773-5555 x2255

THE GOOD LIFE

Find past editions on www.LifePathMA.org

www.facebook.com/LifePathMA



Older Relatives Raising Children

Many Local Options for Support Available



By Janis Merrell, Editor of The Good Life

According to Jan Doody, Parent Educator & Grandparent Resource Coordinator at The United Arc, it is estimated that there are over 150 families in Franklin County in which an older relative is raising a child. Grandparents are often called upon to bring a grandchild into their home when the child's parents are not able to care for the child due to illness, a substance use disorder, incarceration, or death. Grandparents may need to get involved with the Department of Children and Families and with the courts in order to get custody of their grandchild.

Grandparents and other relatives raising a young family member face many challenges. Most grandparents in this situation find themselves suddenly having to become parents all over again while dealing with feelings of sadness and remorse about their adult children. Grandparents need to navigate getting children to school, helping with homework, assigning chores, handling discipline, and dealing with all the challenges of everyday life. They sometimes miss the experience of being traditional grandparents who see their grandchildren occasionally, or for special events.



James, 9, with his Grandma, Phyllis Sinclair

Also, grandparents may regret not having the type of retirement they had anticipated. They worry about aging and about who will care for the grandchildren when they are too old or ill to do so. There are also financial concerns.

Another major challenge for grandparents

is being a generation behind in terms of technology. All parents wrestle with issues of monitoring their children's use of cell phones and social media. These issues are even harder for grandparents who have less experience with the latest devices and applications.

Despite all of these challenges, grandparents report that they get much satisfaction from having such a profound presence in their grandchildren's lives. They enjoy sharing their home and everyday activities with their grandkids and do not regret taking this big step toward ensuring their grandchildren's safety and welfare.

Thankfully, there are many resources available to grandparents raising their grandchildren. The Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Grandparents Raising Grandchildren, at www.massgrg.com, provides tons of useful information for grandparents, ranging from legal concerns to finding a support group to legislative matters. The commission also hosts support groups and provides funding for special events.

Phyllis works hard to provide James with a stable home and a normal childhood, and the United Arc's Grandparent Support Group helps her do this.

Another helpful organization is Kinship Navigator, which assists grandparents and other kinship caregivers in finding services and resources. They can be reached at mass.gov/kinship-navigator or at 844-924-4546. Grandparents can also contact the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance, at mass.gov/orgs/departments-of-transitional-assistance for financial assistance.

In Franklin County, the Grandparent and Kinship Program is offered at the United Arc in Turners Falls. Thanks to a grant from LifePath, the United Arc has offered a support group for grandparents that meets twice a month at the main office at 294 Avenue A in Turners Falls. According to Jan, "Meetings offer a chance for grandparents to share their stories with one another, provide mutual support, and learn about issues affecting them and their families. It's important to know that you are not alone as you undertake the challenge of raising a grandchild. We also have family gatherings where the grandchildren can get to know one another. We host a family picnic at Look Park in Northampton every summer. Any grandparent in Franklin County is

welcome to join us." Please contact Jan for more information at 413-834-8312 or janetdoody@theunitedarc.org.

Phyllis Sinclair is a dedicated member of the United Arc's Grandparent Support Group. She is supportive of the other grandparents in the group and always has a positive attitude, which is very appreciated by other members, according to Jan. Her grandson James is named for Phyllis' late husband. Phyllis was a retired widow living in Bernardston when her life turned upside down nine years ago. Her daughter had given birth to a baby boy and DCF was getting involved due to her daughter's mental health issues and drug use. Phyllis offered to take care of James and she was eventually given custody. She put her plans for retirement on hold and became James' full-time caregiver. She is now his legal guardian.

She and James, who is 9, do everything together—go to the playground, pick up meals at the senior center, go to the beach for vacation, and enjoy family dinners with his mother, aunts, uncles, and cousins. James is doing well in school, loves sports, and enjoys going to camp in the summer. He also loves attending the United Arc's summer picnic at Look Park. Phyllis works hard to provide James with a stable home and a normal childhood, and the United Arc's Grandparent Support Group helps her do this.

In the North Quabbin, Valuing Our Children (VOC) offers a Grandparents' Group, facilitated by Gina Crossman, that meets weekly on Tuesdays from 10:30 AM-noon at VOC's Patch Office at 109 Lumber Street in Athol. According to Gina, attendees described the group as "so important," with one saying, "Grandparents' Group is my time, my only time."

Members explain they learn from one another, and ask each other questions about resources or experiences without feeling judged. In fact, VOC's Grandparents' Group developed out of a need identified in another VOC group. The Grandparents' Group also started a text message chain and keep in contact with one another outside of the group.

For more information about the VOC Grandparent Support Group, please call Gina at 978-249-8467 or email gcrossmanvoc@gmail.com.

Ready to make a difference?

We need **Volunteer Ombudsmen** to advocate for residents in nursing homes and long-term care facilities.

- *Free training
- *Set your own schedule
- *Only a few hours a week



Visit www.lifepathma.org/volunteer or call 413.773.5555 and ask for Volunteer Resources.



Reach thousands of existing and potential clients with an advertisement in *The Good Life*.



For more information, contact:

Elizabeth Coté or Suzanne Hunter
203-912-4680 413-772-0261 x 228
ecote@recorder.com shunter@recorder.com

NE-388448