

# To grandmother's house we go... And STAY! —Grandparents raising grandchildren—

**A**cross the United States, an increasing number of children under the age of 18 are being raised in households headed by grandparents as parents struggle with substance abuse, teen pregnancy, mental illness, incarceration, economic hardship, divorce, domestic violence, and other serious problems.

According to the 2000 Census, there are 4 million households in the United States in which grandchildren live with their grandparents—accounting for nearly 4 percent of all households with persons aged 30 years and over. In 2002, 5.6 million children were living in households with a grandparent present (8 percent of all children)—**up 44 percent** from the 3.9 million (3 percent) who did so in 1997. More than 2.4 million grandparents are taking on primary responsibility for their grandchildren's basic needs—an increase of 400,000 (19 percent) since 1990.<sup>1</sup> One-third of these grandparents have assumed this responsibility without the parent of the child being present in the home.

In Indiana, the U.S. estimates that there are 66,000 (3 percent) households in which grandparents live with their grandchildren. About 81,000 (5 percent) children live in grandparent-headed households. This figure is just under the national average, and represents a **22 percent increase** since 1990.<sup>2</sup> Fifty percent (48,181) of grandparents who reside in the same household as their grandchildren report that they are responsible for most of the child's basic needs. Thirty-nine percent of these grandparents live in households without the children's parent present.

While the percentage of grandparent-maintained households in Indiana is lower than the national average, Lake County, and several cities within Lake County, have proportions of grandparent-maintained households that are significantly greater than the national average.

There are roughly 12,000 grandparent-maintained households in Lake County. That is more than one and one-half times the state average (4.5 percent versus 2.8 percent), and significantly greater than neighboring Porter (2.3 percent) and LaPorte (3.1 percent) counties. Similar to national trends, nearly one-half (46 percent) of Lake County grandparents living in households with their grandchildren report taking on the primary responsibility for them.

Figure 1 illustrates the percentage of grandparent-maintained households in cities in Lake County with averages higher than those in the county, state, and nation. The percentages of grandparent-maintained households in Gary, Schneider, East Chicago, Lake Station, and Winfield are significantly higher than national, state and county averages. The percentage of grandparent-maintained households in Gary, Schneider, and East Chicago are at least double the national average of 3.6 percent.

Figure 2 illustrates the percentage of grandparents in

grandparent-maintained households (in cities with above average rates of grandparent-maintained households) who take on primary responsibility for their grandchildren's basic needs. Grandparents in grandparent-maintained households in Gary, Lake Station, and East Chicago are significantly more likely than grandparents in the Winfield and Schneider to be responsible for their grandchildren's needs.

Cities in Lake County with the lowest percentage of grandparent-maintained households are: St. John (0.4 percent), Dyer (1.5 percent), Lowell (2.1 percent), Highland (2.2 percent), Crown Point (2.2 percent), Munster (2.2 percent), Hobart (2.4 percent), and Schererville (2.5 percent). Each of these cities had averages significantly below those for the county, state, and nation.

With renewed parenting responsibility, many grandparents experience financial and physical strains. Research indicates that grandparents and grandchildren in grandparent-maintained families are more likely than those in parent-maintained families to be poor, uninsured, and to receive public assistance.<sup>3</sup> Research also suggests that children raised by their grandparents are more likely than children in parent-maintained families to experience significant health problems, including; asthma, weakened immune systems, poor eating and sleeping patterns, and hyperactivity.<sup>4</sup> Studies have also shown high rates of depression, poor self-rated health, and multiple chronic health problems among grandparents raising their grandchildren.<sup>5</sup>

With an increase in the number of grandparent-maintained families, it is necessary that policies and programs designed to help traditional parent-child families in times of need be extended to grandparent-maintained families, particularly those that address poverty and healthcare. Further, additional policies and programs must be developed to address the special needs of grandparents raising their grandchildren, including legal support pertaining to parenting orders and custody, and the need for information on child management and behavioral issues.

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