

Help available for grandparents raising grandchildren

*By Rosanne Boyett
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ACOMA - When parents are unable to raise a child, who steps in to take the responsibility?

In many cases, grandparents or other extended family take on the role of caregiver and are often unprepared to fully handle the extra burden. In 2000, 4.5 million children nationally were living in grandparent-headed households and throughout the country the trend seems to be increasing.

In 2008, the National Indian Council on Aging was awarded two grants by the Administration for Native Americans, which is part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. One of these grants was used to develop an outreach program called Grandparents Raising Grandchildren. The focus of this program is to recognize the unique challenges facing grandparents who are raising their grandchildren and provide support, information and resources that can assist them in navigating these challenges.

“A lot of times the grandparents aren't aware of the financial burden or a lot of the services that are available to them,” says Jolynn Sandoval, a Project Associate for the ANA.

Now, in an effort to spread the word about Grandparents Raising Grandchildren, Sandoval held a “Meet and Greet” on July 28 at the Ka'waika Center for families in the Laguna Pueblo and surrounding communities to come and obtain information that could be beneficial to them.

“What you might be dealing with, someone else might have already dealt with,” Sandoval said, “Sometimes people are embarrassed to ask for help.”

Sandoval's own circumstances growing up made her an excellent source of first hand information. Living on the Isleta Pueblo, her mother and father developed marital problems during her childhood and she ended up moving to live with extended family.

“I was transplanted to the Laguna Pueblo,” she said.

Sandoval hosted an education dinner at Ka'waika Center, located at the old Laguna-Acoma High School, on Aug. 2 at 5:30 p.m. The dinner featured a guest panel of significant community members - Governor John Antonio of the pueblo, Laguna Department of Education Superintendent Dr. Anthony Fairbanks, Grants/Cibola County Schools Superintendent Kilino Marquez and others - all in support of the Grandparents Raising Grandchildren program.

Single Stop USA, a program that was piloted in New York and now has locations in New Mexico, California and New Jersey, is an initiative to eliminate poverty by connecting families in need with various resources. The Laguna Pueblo Department of Education is the only Native American site that chose to bring Single Stop to its community. The program offers a wide variety of services, including financial coaching, legal assistance, and benefits like food stamps, medical care, childcare and housing.

Sandoval said the group is trying to compile a resource book that can be handed out in the community; a book that would include services like Single Stop.

“I want to advocate for both sides of the family,” said Sandoval, “the grandparents and the children.”