

Topics & speakers:

- September – Getting to know each other & feeling that they are not alone. Gathered info on their interests so I could set up speakers and topics
- October – Speaker – Rene Munger, Art therapist – teaching about how to discuss emotions with grandchild, where is that emotion in your body, etc. Very interesting topic for grandparents
- November – This month we went into more depth about challenges to help select future speakers. We talked about individual challenges and the participants all commented that it really helped them to hear other’s stories to know they are not alone.
- December – Speaker Terri Port Wright, Lawyer from Cloquet – this was the most popular speaker. They loved her and wanted to get her back (hopefully next year)
- January – Speaker Rick Valento, HDC – cancelled at the last minute. We discussed different topics and problems the families were having – some on how to talk with grandkids that were not living with them, discipline issues, etc.
- February – Speaker Karina Krosbakken, from Age Well – She spoke on mindfulness and self-care.
- March – Speaker Emily Vos, Counselor at Bayview in Proctor – Excellent information on navigating the schools and different school issues
- April - Speaker Marsha Gurno, Social Worker at St. Louis County – Substance Abuse, Prevention and Intervention Initiative – Discussing navigating mental health issues
- May – Speaker Rick Valento, HDC – Discussing child trauma, helping kids feel safe, etc.
- June – Speaker – A physician – not confirmed yet
- Some comments about challenges are:
 - How to talk to your grandchild about why they are living with them and not their parents/who does the grandchild listen to/how to manage visitations
 - Legal issues/understanding the process of custody
 - Financial issues
 - Child - Behavioral problems/discipline/trauma/ADHD and meds/mental illnesses
 - Ideas for self-care/music/exercise/yoga/coping skills/etc.,
 - How to navigate the school system
 - Anger management for adults and children/maybe have a psychologist as a speaker
 - Behavioral and mental health/addiction info and what to expect in the future – MD
 - DHS and HDC services – Kinship resources
 - Maybe some grandparents with success stories
- Here are the combined results of my monthly exit sheets from Sept. to March. I have the following list of possible topics that they circle each month:

Attachment -4	Child Safety – 5	Finding Community Resources – 13	Navigating mental health resources – 15
Legal Guidance – 24	Helping children feel secure 16	Generational Difference – 8	Helping with homework – 6
Helping with school issues – 13	Budgeting/ Finances – 1	Discipline and Parenting Styles – 36	Screens and medial usage – 19
Symptoms of trauma - 17			

More detail concerning comments and concerns from Grandparents:

- SHAME – many of the grandparents feel shame that their adult children are not able to take care of their children and they wonder what they did wrong. This is a barrier to many families getting the support and help that they need. I have had so many grandparents tell me that they know lots of families in the same position but they are too ashamed to attend the support group.
- How to talk to their grandchildren about why they are not living with their parents. The grandchildren have many questions as they grow about this (especially when they enter school and kids ask them about it) and the grandparents need to think about how to discuss it with them. If they have visitation rights (especially when the child is young) they might have to continuously discuss this so that the child does not think that anyone is a bad person. Young children do not understand the effects of drugs on people so this can be a touchy subject.
- How do they get their house to fit the new situation? I had one family who just downsized into a one-bedroom apartment. Then they adopted their 3-yr. old grandchild and put that child in the bedroom and they slept in the living room.
- How do the grandparents find the energy to keep up with a small child or two when they are retirement age? I have one family who has adopted 4 of their grandchildren. I had another family member who had a heart attack and couldn't continue to come to our support group.
- What do the grandparents do when they need a break. Many of them tell me they can't just leave the child with a stranger – especially after what the child has gone through. In some cases, the adult children are looking for reasons to call their own parents unfit to take care of their children – probably because of the shame they are feeling about having lost custody of their own children. I have one grandfather on disability and his daughter is always trying to show that he is not fit to take care of her daughter even though she has not been able to stay off drugs.
- Many grandparents have been advised to become foster parents so that there is some financial assistance but then they have to answer to the social services department and always be aware that if their adult children complain about something that the social worker will be questioning them. When the lawyer came, we found that not all social workers have the same training so many of the families were told different and conflicting stories about what they could or couldn't do. That seemed to be a big issue because it often cost them more and more money to get it figured out.
- Self-care continues to be a big issue. Fatigue is one of the top issues. As the children enter school there are so many activities available that they may want to participate in. Most of them cost money and most need to be transported to the activities. Both the money and the energy that is needed is in short supply for these families yet the grandparents want their grandchildren to have those experiences. Also, schools rely more and more on technology to communicate. Some of the families I work with don't have email or computers. This will be an issue for the child when they get into the upper grades. I have several families that struggle with connecting with the teachers to stay on top of behavioral and academic issues.
- How do grandparents deal with their own issues of sadness, grief and anger? Their lives are changed forever by adopting their grandchildren. There will be no retirement. There will be no trips and cruises. There will be very little relaxation time. How will they handle their grandchildren's issues of sadness, grief and anger about their situation? Counseling is expensive.