



Alisa Parker honors grandparents during recent Grandparent's Day event.

On September 12, the Ecumenical Senior Center honored grandparents during an annual event held at Mt. Zion Baptist Church. It may be one of the only celebrations for Grandparents held in this area during Grandparents Day.

Why Grandparents are so Important

By Alisa Parker

Blessed to know my paternal and maternal grandmothers, I have come to understand the great value of having a grandparent in my life. That value was greatly enriched for me when my paternal grandmother, Verneil Parker, passed away in 1995. With her passing I learned early that grandparents are precious jewels that should never be taken for granted. Grandparents serve an important role in both the family and community at large.



Bernice Myles was honored for chairing the annual Grandparents Day.

When founder, Marian McQuade, championed the cause for Grandparents Day in the late 1970s, she recognized the need to help elderly people in nursing homes balanced with the need to motivate grandchildren to tap into the wisdom and heritage grandparents could provide. It is with this spirit that many have studied the role of the grandparent and have documented the sociological and psychological impact they have in society.

In an article by Sara Green entitled "Grandma's Hands: Parental Perceptions of the Importance of Grandparents as Secondary Caregivers in families of Children With Disabilities," she conducts a survey which describes the impact of grandparents.



Jimmie Roller, 42, was honored as the Youngest Grandparent, during the event. Pinkie Jefferson, age 82, was named "Oldest Grandparent."

First, the survey found that grandparents are a common source of weekly assistance significantly more common than other relatives or friends and neighbors. Secondly, where grandparents participate, the number of other sources of support is also higher. Lastly, the article states that "help from grandparents has a positive, while the number of other sources of help has a negative, relationship to parental ability to maintain a positive emotional outlook and avoid physical exhaustion." (Green) In other words, having help from a grandparent can be more beneficial and provide a much healthier and positive environment, than help from having a nanny or a babysitter.

In a study conducted by the Montana State University, the researchers identify four roles that grandparents play. 1) Family watchdog, 2) nurturer, 3) family historian, and 4) companion. Although this list is not exhaustive, the research done by this university as well as other studies on confirm what most grandparents already know. They are not only important but are significant in the helping maintain the family and cultivate the generations coming up behind them. More than anything, some of these studies I believe, studies serve to confirm and validate the need for grandparents in our society and show that their role extends beyond the family setting.



Pearl Warren, 70, was honored for "Most Grandchildren" 64!

For the past two years I have had the opportunity to practice in the area of elder law as a Staff Attorney at Legal Services of South Central Michigan in Battle Creek. In that role, I have met so many wonderful seniors. In meeting these seniors, different from my non-senior clients, I occasionally find that although they are coming to me to seeking legal advice, I leave the meeting gaining a little knowledge or wisdom about life in general for myself.

What I have also gained in working with so many seniors is that the role of grandparent isn't just limited to those biologically connected. I guess this is what Marian McQuade envisioned when advocating grandparents day.

As I reflect on my own life, while blessed to have a wonderful and supportive biological grandmother in Lois Key, there are some others, that I have no blood relation too, who have taken on the role of being a grandparent in my life. Having the helping hands of these surrogates has been just as instrumental and important in helping me to become the person I am today!

Shaping the lives of young people, being a positive influence and molding the next generations is probably the most significant role that grandparents play. Beyond statistical data, the true evidence of the importance of grandparents lies in the countless stories of hope, encouragement and love that can be told by men, women and children from all walks of life. I believe the late Alex Haley summed it up best when he said, "Grandparents do more for us than anyone else in the world; they sprinkle stardust in our eyes."

Happy Grandparents Day!

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