

Heroin Epidemic Conference

September 20, 2016 9:30-12:00

Kovalchick Center

A. My Story – This is a story that I would not wish on any one even my worst enemy. December 15, 2012 – a day that changed our lives forever. I will never forget the state trooper sitting in our living room and my daughter 27 telling him she was stealing my jewelry because she was addicted to heroin- M 27 year old beautiful daughter with 3 beautiful children living with me- Why did I not know and how could this be happening to us? That day was almost 4 years ago since that time we have another grandchild, my daughter was on Methadone, evicted from her home, in jail and rehab. On April 23, 2015 she walked out of our home- not saying she was leaving and not coming back, never asked us to keep her children or tell her children goodbye. We did not hear from her for several weeks. I look back to almost 18 months ago now and don't know how we got through it. I love being a Grandma- it is such a joy and blessing to me. But because of my daughter's heroin addiction we are no longer able to be just grandparents to Isaiah, Madison, Xavier and Cameron – we are now in a parenting role.

B. What Challenges of being a “grand family” do we face:

Addiction is a family disease- but the family is the “lost Member” of this story. Naranon Family Support readings sums us what we face- Addiction affects the relationship of those close to the addict: parents, siblings, children, long time friends and employers. Those of us who care the most suffer from the addicts behaviors. We try to control and are ashamed of the situations caused by our addict. Soon we begin to think we are to blame and assume the guilt, fears and responsibilities of the addict. Thus Addiction is a chain reaction. It is a disease that affects the addict as well as family members, friends and coworkers. We try to control, cover up and take on the responsibilities of the addict. This sickness spreads to those of us who care

the most. In time we begin to feel used and unhappy. We worry, lose trust and become angry. This we become sick too.

- A. The biggest challenge for me is not being able to be “Just Grandma” any more- you go from being the grandma whose house is fun to being the disciplinarian, so many times my granddaughter has said “it is not like it use to be, this use to be the fun house”- it breaks my heart. I want my house to be the fun place where we get to do fun things but now my house has to be the one where the parnetingtakes place 24/7
- B. There is usually no preparation time to became a grand family so you have to arrange so much – schooling, sleeping arrangements, childcare for a toddler and child care to get the other three on and off the bus and much more.
- C. Family Relationships- marital stress, loss relationships with other children and family members
- D. Financially- legal fees, babysitters, income for family of 6 instead of 2. We are taking care of all the needs for our grandchildren- they could not be on my healthcare plan unless I adopt them so they did qualify for state health insurance which is a blessing. If my daughter had her children she would receive several hundred dollars in food stamps and also WIC. I was going to go part time so I could have more time to spend with my grandchildren- now I have to stay full time to provide for them.
- E. Stress/Health- don’t have the energy and stamina you did as a young parent, you are stressed and tired because you are going, going, going. You are dealing with so many more issues.
- F. Legal issues – the legal process in general -knowing what you need to do to be able to care for your children legally, the right lawyer and the expense of a lawyer, and the whole process is time consuming, - many missed days of work for hearings etc. Help with getting birth certificates

and social security cards that you need for school, travel, etc. I can't even take my grandchildren to Niagara Falls Canada because I don't have their social security and birth certificates. The cost of the lawyer, an unexpected expense that you have to pay for upfront- If my daughter needed legal aid for her children she would have had Legal Aid provided.

G. Childcare – the majority of grandparents are young under the age of 60 and we are raising another family. We are caring for a 3-year old, 7-year old twins and a 9- year old. We have to work. We tried to get help with childcare and was told no- we are working and could not get help with child care. Once again if my daughter had her children she received free day care whether she was working or not for the day because of state childcare guidelines.

H. Time for self- I am constantly going, going, going- School, church and community activities, doctor appt, counseling appt and more. There is no time for your self. I would love to go to the family support meetings but have to work or need to have the children someplace. A much needed date night with your spouse which is so needed is nearly impossible.

C. How do I feel?

- a. Our life is filled with many emotions both positive and negative: we assume our full-time child-rearing responsibilities will end once our children are grown and out of the house, but millions of grandparents across the country find ourselves nurturing another generation.
- b. Positive-the love you feel for your grandchildren is unexplainable , the joy in seeing them learn and grow, and relief at giving them a stable environment, the laughter and activity they bring to our lives,
- c. Negatives.

A. stress and worry- how will we handle all the childrearing responsibilities

1. Daughter's death

2. Financial difficulty, job loss

3. Failing my grandchildren
4. Our grandchildren's mental, emotional and behavioral problems due to the circumstances they have been through in the last several years and their adjustment to living with grandma and grandpap
5. Defeated, disillusioned and depressed- in myself, my daughter , government officials and treatment programs
6. Our death and the kids not being raised

7. Future- what will be our future, our grandchildren and daughter's future be- I don't see any end to this –How can a single mom with four children and addiction and criminal record become independent- find a job that she is able to support her children and live on her own. Can she even get well enough to be able to attempt this.

B. anger and resentment- toward my daughter for causing this situation, not having time, not having support, for legal systems/agencies not assisting involving the family – agencies listen to the addict who are excellent liars and manipulators – instead of asking and involving the family for a full picture

c. guilt and grief- the lost of “being a grandparent”- I feel ambivalence about starting over with children. At a time when I expected my responsibilities to be dwindling they are now more then ever; lost of being grandma; lost of our empty nest; lost of independence and time; feel guilty and responsible for your child mistakes and failures; and loss of independence.[]

My concerns and suggestions

A. No matter why parents can no longer take care of their children —death, divorce, neglect, abuse or poverty — it never, ever is the 'fault 'of the child. I want to make sure my grandchildren feel this and know it.

B. Make available the resources to the grandparents that would be available to the parents- WIC, child care, food stamps, community resources, etc support group, legal help, kinship/foster programs. Policies and programs at the federal, state, and local levels should encourage, rather than discourage, the responsible actions of relatives who step forward to take care of children

C. All children need an appropriate education and necessary health care regardless of who is raising them Education to government agencies that the grandparent is not the “bad” person in all of this – we are doing our best and we want our best for our grandchildren- I was made to feel like I was the one who caused this situation and I was taking advantage of resources- like when I was rejected for childcare and told to go to domestics if I needed food stamps or cash advance- we are already struggling enough we don’t need to made to feel like we are taking from the government. When we care for our grandchildren we do not receive money from the state so we save the state money- if our children were placed in foster care we would be costing the state. Public awareness through community education and media outreach to support these families is needed.

D. A program for grandparents raising their grandchildren to help them with all these issues, also how if it is possible to place the child back with the parent at the right time. My daughter right now is living with us again- but we have custody of her children- when do I let her be the parent again because every day you fear she will relapse.

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