



**April 2010**  
**Volume 48 Number 2**  
**Article Number 2IAW7**

[Return to Current Issue](#)

# **Community Mobilization Model Applied to Support Grandparents Raising Grandchildren**

**Jacque Miller**

Extension Agent - Family and Consumer Sciences  
Larimer County  
[jacque.miller@colostate.edu](mailto:jacque.miller@colostate.edu)

**Ann Bruce**

Extension Specialist  
Department of Human Development and Family Studies  
[annbruce@cahs.colostate.edu](mailto:annbruce@cahs.colostate.edu)

**Kimberly Bundy-Fazioli**

Assistant Professor  
School of Social Work  
[kbunfaz@cahs.colostate.edu](mailto:kbunfaz@cahs.colostate.edu)

**Christine A Fruhauf**

Associate Professor  
Department of Human Development and Family Studies  
[cfruhauf@cahs.colostate.edu](mailto:cfruhauf@cahs.colostate.edu)

Colorado State University  
Fort Collins, Colorado

---

**Abstract:** This article discusses the application of a community mobilization model through a case study of one community's response to address the needs of grandparents raising grandchildren. The community mobilization model presented is one that is replicable in addressing diverse community identified issues. Discussed is the building of the partnerships, the development and implementation of action plans, and evaluating for effectiveness. Information gained through the evaluation process of this case study demonstrates the success of the model in affecting individuals and community through positive outcomes.

---

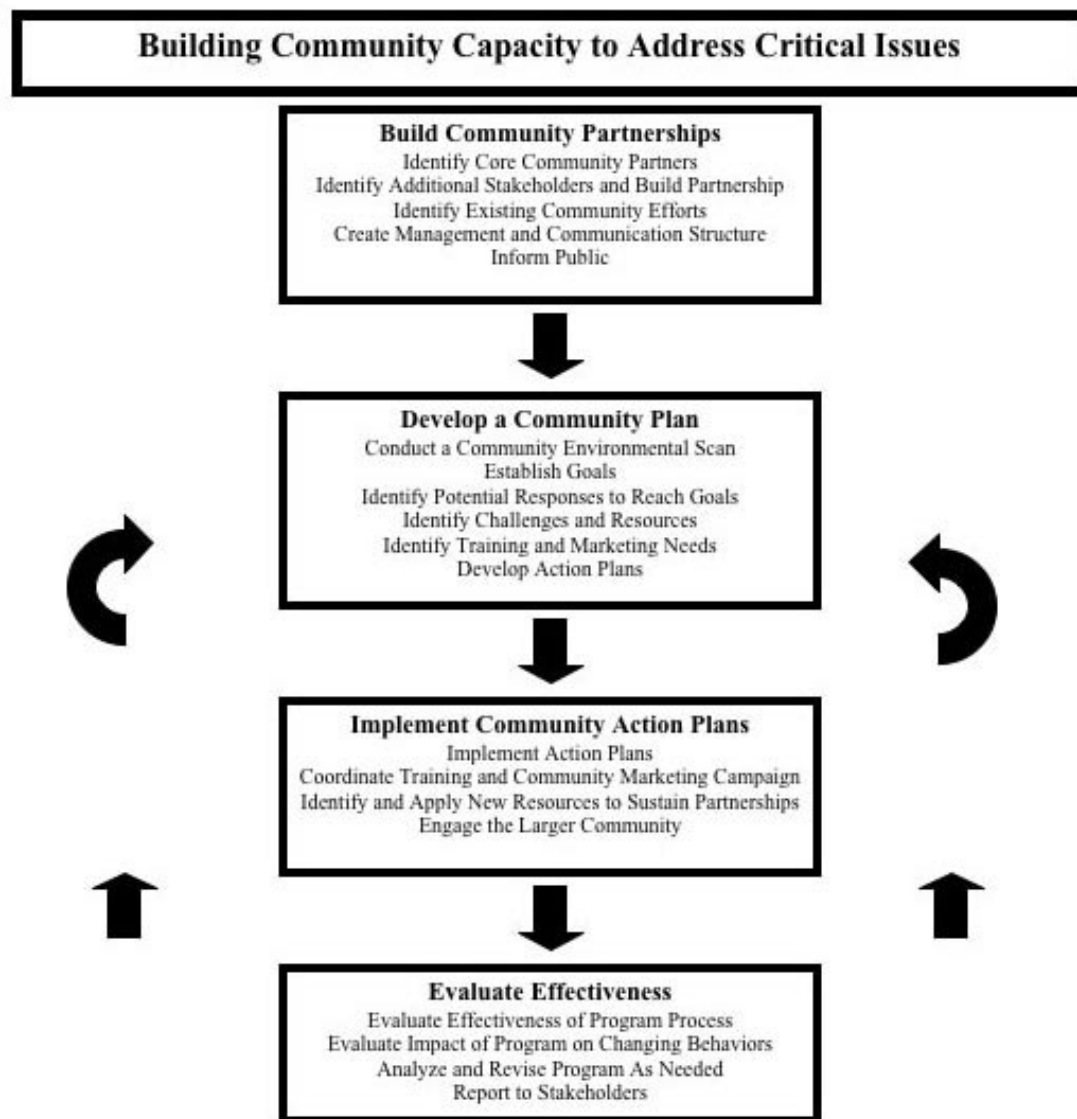
## **Introduction**

This article reviews one community's process of mobilizing to support grandparents raising grandchildren. The community mobilization model presented is one that is replicable in addressing new and intriguing community identified issues. As a case study it reveals the essential components of community mobilization to provide insights for any Extension professional to work effectively with collaborations resulting in successful outcomes. Results show a key role for Extension is one that engages community partnerships in seeking solutions that address problems (Strieter & Blalock, 2006).

A small group of grandparents raising grandchildren was referred to Colorado State University Larimer County Extension seeking solutions to the complex issues they were facing, in particular, financial, legal, health, and well-being needs. Their vision was to provide support and information to other grandparents in similar situations.

Working with the Extension agency as a convener, the first meeting of community professionals and grandparents was held. Using a community mobilization model (Figure 1) developed by the first author, Extension provided the necessary leadership to address the needs of grandfamilies. The term "grandfamilies" refers to families where the grandparents or other relatives are raising a child and may or may not have a legal relationship to the child who is related by blood, marriage, or adoption (Smith, 2001; Generations United, 2006). This community collaboration involved four critical steps, including: (1) building partnerships, (2) developing a community plan, (3) implementing community action plans, and (4) evaluating their effectiveness.

**Figure 1.**  
Community Mobilization Model



Jacque Miller, M.S., Colorado State University Extension, 2008

## Build Partnerships

Identifying core community partners is the first step in implementing the community mobilization model, because the key to building successful collaborations is the relationship between and among people for the empowerment of all individuals (Rebore, 2000; Walker, 2003). These partners included grandparents, relative caregivers, human service professionals, university and Extension faculty, mental health professionals, and community educators. These individuals met to discuss the challenges faced by grandfamilies and to identify existing community efforts. As a result of this meeting, additional stakeholders in the community were identified and invited to a strategic planning session.

## Develop a Community Plan

This planning session provided an opportunity to conduct a community environmental scan to assess how community members and agency professionals perceived this issue (Borden & Perkins, 1999). A community consensus model (Watts & Walker, 1996) was used to facilitate the group's process to develop a mission statement, identify goals, and establish action steps. A management and communications structure was created, now known as the Larimer County Alliance for Grandfamilies (LCAG).

Under the umbrella of the LCAG, four work teams emerged: Community Outreach, Kinship Inclusion, Peer Support, and University Engagement. Individuals self selected work teams based on their expertise and interest. Each team became populated by members with diverse experiences and capacities. Work team members came together to further refine goals by looking at potential responses, taking into consideration challenges, and assessing available resources. Together in the larger group of the LCAG, the partners identified training and marketing needs to support all of the work teams.

## **Implement Community Action Plans**

This framework continued to guide the LCAG in reaching its mission. Each of the work teams is responsible for the implementation of their action plans. The overall LCAG coordinates training and marketing campaigns, identifies and secures new resources to sustain the partnership, and monitors accomplishments. The larger community is engaged through member affiliates. These individuals are identified and recruited to accomplish a specific task. An example would be an attorney to assist with legal services clinics.

## **Evaluate Effectiveness**

An evaluation was conducted measuring impact on individuals and community 13 months after the initiation of the LCAG. Of the 36 community members who attended the second annual planning meeting, 28 completed a survey. Completed surveys included individuals who were grandparents, professionals in aging services, child welfare representatives, preschool-12 educators, and university faculty and students.

Participants were asked to answer the following open-ended question: "What do you think is the greatest impact that the LCAG has had to date?" A variety of positive impacts were expressed, including coordination of financial resources, increased community awareness of grandfamily issues, building partnerships, and grandparent empowerment. For example, one participant stated that the greatest impact was "coordinating agency contacts and resources to hire the navigator grandfamily specialist."

Participants were also asked a series of questions regarding the "extent that the Alliance has had an impact on them" as individuals. A majority of respondents stated that the LCAG has had a moderately high to high impact on their knowledge of grandfamily needs and resources, skills to influence public policies, ability to solve and respond to grandfamily problems, and knowledge of services/best practices for grandfamilies. Responses to these questions confirm that the LCAG has benefited individuals who serve grandfamilies, the community, and the grandparents and kinship providers in the county.

The survey also evaluated program processes and the effectiveness of the work teams. A majority of respondents reported that all work teams were high functioning and should be retained. Respondents were asked to share what they perceived as significant concerns to be addressed by the work teams in the future. Because of this feedback, the program direction was revised, and work teams are developing new action plans to focus on the identified issues.

The LCAG has reported these outcomes to stakeholders through one-on-one visits and updates that showcase the program for state legislators and other decision makers.

## Discussion and Conclusion

Many times Extension professionals are left on their own to experience "first hand" or attend training to develop their expertise in Community Development. This model provides a useful outline for self study. As a team of land-grant university faculty, our reflection regarding the model is that the outcomes, in the first year alone, surpassed expectations. The community mobilization model provided the framework that captured the passion of the grandparent advocates, the leadership of Extension, and the investment of community agencies and faculty researchers to ignite action in addressing an emerging and compelling issue. It is a model that can easily be applied in resolving other unique community issues.

## References

- Borden, L., & Perkins, D. (1999). Assessing your collaboration: A self evaluation tool. *Journal of Extension* [On-line], 37(2) Article 2TOT1. Available at: <http://www.joe.org/joe/1999april/tt1.php>
- Generations United (2006). *Grandfamilies: Challenges of caring for the second family*. Washington, DC: Author.
- Rebori, M. K. (2000). Two techniques to foster collaboration within a group. *Journal of Extension* [On-line], 38(4) Article 4TOT4. Available at: <http://www.joe.org/joe/2000august/tt4.php>
- Smith, C. J. (2001). Grandparents raising grandchildren: Challenges faced by these growing numbers of families and effective policy solutions. *Journal on Aging and Social Policy*, 12 (1): 7-17.
- Strieter, L., & Blalock, L. (2006). Journey to successful collaborations. *Journal of Extension* [On-line], 44(1) Article 1TOT4. Available at: <http://www.joe.org/joe/2006february/tt4.php>
- Walker, S. (2003). Building a state child care initiative: Applying principles of teamwork and collaboration. *Journal of Extension* [Online], 41(3) Article 3FEA2. Available at: <http://www.joe.org/joe/2003april/a5.php>
- Watts, J., & Walker, S. (1996). *Leadership facilitation tools*. Phoenix, AZ: Technology of Participation, Institute of Cultural Affairs.

---

Copyright © by *Extension Journal, Inc.* ISSN 1077-5315. Articles appearing in the Journal become the property of the Journal. Single copies of articles may be reproduced in electronic or print form for use in educational or training activities. Inclusion of articles in other publications, electronic sources, or systematic large-scale distribution may be done only with prior electronic or written permission of the *Journal Editorial Office*, [joe-ed@joe.org](mailto:joe-ed@joe.org).

If you have difficulties viewing or printing this page, please contact [JOE Technical Support](#).