

La Fe Policy Research
and Education Center



**ABUELOS Y NIETOS JUNTOS
PROJECT**
(Grandparents and Grandchildren Together)

**PROJECT SUMMARY REPORT
2012-2013**

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I. INTRODUCTION

La Fe Policy Research and Education Center (La Fe PREC) is a non-profit organization with the **purpose** of engaging communities in research, education, demonstration programs, training, and policy development to address community social and health needs. The organization was established in San Antonio on January 2006 with the mission to increase the involvement and influence of Mexican Americans in health and social policy issues important to their *bienestar* (well-being) and health.

A strategic focus of La Fe PREC is the *bienestar* of seniors. Grandparents Raising Grandchildren (GRG), a growing segment of the population, presents unique challenges. According to 2009 census data, in San Antonio, an estimated 29,196 grandparent head of households (GHH) are responsible for co-resident grandchildren, and nearly one third (31%) of these grandparents are raising grandchildren without parents. Latinos represent 37% of the GRG population in Texas, while in San Antonio, they are more than half (53%) of GRG. San Antonio GRG's median income of \$25,580, remarkably less compared to the State and National GRG median income of \$33,374 and \$34,782 respectively. Among GRG in San Antonio, 68% are under the age of 60 compared to the State 73%, 29% are disabled and 48% of grandchildren living in Grandparent Head of Households are under the age of six. GRG in San Antonio are characteristically younger, poorer and more disabled than the State and National GRG. Additional data is available in the GRG fact sheets found on La Fe PREC's website, www.lafepolicycenter.org.

The number of grandparents with primary care-giving responsibilities for their grandchildren is steadily increasing. Teen parents relinquishing responsibility, family violence, parent incarceration, divorce, drug use and/or death of parent are factors contributing to this increase. Generally, Latino seniors are more economically disadvantaged, have poorer health status, and less access to social and health services compared to other non-Hispanic senior groups. A growing number of GRG are seniors, 55 years of age or older with limited resources. Their family's *bienestar* is of growing concern.

In September of 2007, La Fe PREC established a pilot demonstration project, *Abuelos y Nietos Juntos* (Grandparents and Grandchildren Together), referred to as *Abuelos Project* in this report. The long-term goal was to demonstrate improvements in the health and *bienestar* of Latino grandparents and their grandchildren. The goals included educating GRG to maintain their family's health, promoting civic engagement and improving access to social and health services. In 2013, the project completed its sixth year. Over the past six years, a diverse network of community partnerships has been established to support and educate *Abuelos Project* participants. For the first time this year, two GRG were selected to participate in an AARP Foundation-sponsored animadora (community health worker/advocate) training project (CENA Project) that included leadership development, community resources education and community engagement skills building. As a result of this training one GRG found full-time employment at the University Health System, as a Promotora de Salud.

II. SOCIAL SUPPORT GROUP SERVICES – PLATICA

This year, the *Abuelos Project* offered its monthly educational/support services from September 2012 through May 2013. It is one of the only support groups in Bexar County offered in Spanish for GRG and was underwritten through private donations. La Fe utilized free meeting space, provide by Neighborhood Place (NP), through a partnership with Family Service Association. After January 2013, the classroom designated for the *Abuelos Project* was unavailable because the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) Program utilized it for tax preparation. Instead the conference room at NP was utilized for four months. Through a new partnership established with the YWCA's Family, Friends and Neighbor (FFN) Program, Martha Lopez, FFN Coordinator, facilitated four *platica* sessions.

A *platica* is an intimate, friendly and mutually supportive conversation, in a trust-based milieu. The social support *platicas* were focused on social, emotional, health, financial, legal and educational issues that affected their family's *bienestar*. The *platicas* continued to be conducted in Spanish, as requested by GRG in 2009. The project encouraged GRG to become self-empowered advocates to seek community resources, confront access barriers and identify policy changes needed to help enhance their family's quality of life. These *platicas* promoted emotional bonding through socialization, information sharing and mutual support. As GRG openly shared their life stories, they received encouragement, insight and support. GRG reported that the *platicas* improved their mental/emotional health status by reducing stress and teaching them new coping strategies. Since 2007, GRG have engaged in more civic engagement involvement in local and State advocacy efforts. To enhance GRG resilience, community resource information packets were distributed during the monthly *platica*. The packets contained 15-25 handouts on social service agencies, community events and bilingual educational materials on children's mental health issues. Although a total of 36 GRG participated this year, the monthly maximum capacity of 20 GRG per support group session was not exceeded.

A. Program Outreach and Recruitment

As in past years, the most effective recruitment strategy for enrolling new GRG has been informal 1-1 outreach by support group members. In 2012-13, 8 new GRG enrolled. Current support group members recruited 75% (6 GRG) of the new participants. A new GRG from Helotes, Texas, recruited through mass media channels, joined with the intent of replicating the *Abuelos Project* in her community. One GRG was referred through the office of State Representative Joaquin Castro. Over the past six years, La Fe PREC has compiled a mailing list of over 125 GRG through GRG-related community events, telephone calls and direct 1-1 recruitment efforts. Community partners collaborated with the *Abuelos Project* staff by distributing recruitment fliers. Stories highlighting the project were published in print media. La Fe PREC's website has data and reference materials about the *Abuelos Project*. This year, an additional 25 GRG, who called La Fe PREC office, were provided information/referral services by phone, though they were not enrolled in services.

B. Program Attendance

TABLE 1 Attendance - Social Support Group Services 2012-13		
Month	Monthly Attendance	New GRG Enrollees
September 2012	15	1
October	17	2
November	10	1
December –CHRISTUS Party	24	0
January 2013	9	0
February	17	3
March	11	0
April	8	1
May	15	0
Average Monthly Attendance	14	n/a
Total # of GRG Participating in 2012-13	36	8

Table 1 tracks GRG attendance, tallied from the monthly sign-in sheets. A total of 36 GRG participated in the two-hour Spanish support group *platicas* during this academic school year. In 2012, CHRISTUS Santa Rosa Health System sponsored a Christmas Party honoring the *Abuelos Project* participants. This special event had the highest attendance, 24. April had the lowest attendance, 8, possibly because of the topic, advanced funeral planning. The lower attendance in January was due to rescheduling the meeting because the grandchildren were still on Christmas break the first week of January 2013. The average monthly attendance was 14. This year’s end-of-the-year celebration was held at Lisa’s Restaurant.

Each month, 40 postcards were mailed to GRG on the *Abuelos Project* roster. This cost-effective approach was used not only as a meeting reminder, but also to maintain contact with GRG who are unable to attend due to illness, care-giving responsibilities or work. As per her request, one working GRG was mailed the community resource packets each month. If a support group GRG was unable to attend a *platica*, the community resource packet was mailed to them, upon request. Through a community partnership with ACOG-Bexar Area Agency on Aging, some GRG received taxi transportation assistance to attend the support group. But other obstacles prevented consistent attendance, such as grandparent or grandchildren’s medical appointments and family crisis. Participation in the *Abuelos Project* is flexible and open-ended, encouraging GRG to attend whenever possible and to stay connected with project staff.

A core group of 10 GRG (28% of this year’s participants) has participated since the initiation of the *Abuelos Project*. Of 36 GRG who attended the support group *platicas*, 18 (50%) attended 1-2 sessions. Ten (28%) attended between 3-5 sessions. Eight (22%) attended 6 – 9 sessions. The only GRG with perfect attendance this year has been enrolled since 2010. The attendance data underscores the value GRG placed on participating in the support group *platicas*, though they encounter numerous challenges in attending. This year the GRG had to cope with the death of a grandfather, loss of visitation rights, illnesses and an eviction. Their commitment to safeguard confidentiality and build mutual trust has contributed to retention and group loyalty. Of those participating this year, 78% (28 GRG) had attended in prior years. GRG self-empowerment and mutual support promotes leadership, loyalty and a sense of reciprocity. The GRG group members came to support and encourage each other. As per their request, in May they received a roster of GRG names and phone numbers so that they could contact each other during the summer months.

C. Profile of the Grandparents

TABLE 2 2012-13 Profile GRG Enrolled in the Abuelos Project			
	Female	Male	TOTAL
Total # of GRG enrolled	34	3	37
Total # of new GRG	7	0	7
Total # of GRG couples	-	-	5
Total # of GRG families enrolled			32
Total GRG attending support group (1 GRG works so resource info is mailed to her each month)	33 (91%)	3 (8%)	36
Age range	46-79	49-84	-
Mean age	62	65	-
Percent of voluntary GRG	98%		
Family Income (n=25)*			
<\$24,999			17 (68%)
\$25,000 - \$34,999			6 (24%)
>\$35,000			2 (08%)
* 7 GRG did not provide income data			
			25 (100%)

The GRG profile in Table 2 was abstracted from the *Abuelos Project* enrollment forms completed by the grandparents when they joined the support group. This data was collected from 37 grandparents, including 5 couples and one working GRG who could not attend and was mailed the monthly resource packet. Of the 37 grandparents enrolled in the *Abuelos Project*, 34 (92%) were women and 3 (8%) were men. All were Mexican American and either bilingual or monolingual in Spanish. Nearly all the GRG (98%) were voluntary caregivers, with no Child Protection Services (CPS) involvement. Seven reported involvement with CPS, prior to joining the *Abuelos Project*.

The *Abuelos Project* GRG's are responsible for raising a total of 65 grandchildren, ranging in age from 3 to 21 years, in households comprised of one to six grandchildren. The age of GRG ranged from 46-79 years for females (mean age 62); 49-84 for males (mean age 65). The oldest GRG was a 79-year-old grandmother, raising a seven-year-old granddaughter. The youngest GRG was a 46-year-old grandmother, raising 3 granddaughters, age 4 to 8. There were four GRG aged 65+ who were raising young grandchildren, ages 2-7. More than one-fourth GRG aged 65+ (29%) were raising teenagers. One GRG who adopted her granddaughter, now 16, has assumed voluntary responsibility to help raise her granddaughter's two-year old baby. A 69-year-old GRG was voluntarily raising four grandchildren, 6-14 years of age. Two grandchildren, living in Mexico, were brought to the US by the GRG when their mother vanished in Mexico.

Most GRG relied on Social Security as their only source of income. Other sources of government income reported included food stamps and Supplemental Security Income (SSI). No more than five GRG work outside the home. More than two-thirds of the GRG (68%) reported an income under \$24,999. Six had incomes between \$25,000-\$34,999 and only two GRG reported income over \$35,000, 25% and 8% respectively.

D. Profile of the Grandchildren

TABLE 3 Ages of Grandchildren of GRG in Abuelos Project 2012-13		
Age	Females	Males
1 yrs. – 5yrs	5	4
6 yrs.-10 yrs.	12	8
11 yrs.-15 yrs.	16	6
16 yrs.-18 yrs.	2	6
19 yrs.-20 yrs.	1	5
Total	36	29
Total number of grandchildren being raised by grandparents		65

Table 3 lists the age distribution of the 65 children being raised by their grandparents. A majority (55%) of these grandchildren were pre-teens and teenagers, 17 male and 19 female. The ages of the younger children (45%) ranged from 1-10 years. Ten children had no siblings, 6 had 1-2 siblings and 10 had 3-4. Two GRG were raising 5 or more grandchildren. This year there were more female (55%) than male (45%) grandchildren. The average age of GRG caring for teenagers was 64. The majority of GRG (71%) raising teenagers were under 65 years of age. All the grandchildren had health insurance, primarily Medicaid; one had CHIP. Social Security was the primary source of income available to the GRG to support their grandchildren.

E. Social Support *platica* Sessions

TABLE 4 <i>Abuelos Project</i> Support Group “Platicas” 2012-13 Academic School Year		
Meeting	Theme	Facilitator/Guest Speakers/Presenters
September 2012	Obamacare - Overview and its Implementation	Facilitator: Juan Flores – La Fe PREC
October	Breast Cancer Awareness	Facilitator: Lupe Morin
November	Effective Communication in Families	Facilitator: Martha Lopez – FFN Coordinator YWCA
December	Abuelos Christmas Celebration	Facilitator: Yolanda Santos- La Fe PREC Sponsor: CHRISTUS Santa Rosa Health System
January 2013	Improving Family Interaction	Facilitator: Marta Lopez – FFN Coordinator YWCA
February	Nutrition Education	Facilitator: Marta Lopez – FFN Coordinator YWCA
March	Support Group <i>Platica</i> on Family Issues	Facilitator: Yolanda Santos – La Fe PREC Marta Lopez – FFN YWCA
April	Funeral Planning Options	Speaker: Yvette Martinez – Family Service Counselor Del Angel Funeral Homes
May	End of Year Celebration Luncheon @ Lisa’s Restaurant	Facilitator: Yolanda Santos – La Fe PREC

Table 4 is an overview of the *platica* topics discussed during the 2012-13 academic school year. The topics were selected based on GRG recommendations. The Spanish-speaking presenters were community collaborators whose services best addressed the unmet needs of GRG. Their *platicas* were provided at no cost. They distributed bilingual handouts and occasionally gave GRG token gifts of appreciation. As in the prior years, community resource packets, with 15-25 handouts of community resources information, family recreational events and bilingual educational articles, were distributed monthly to GRG. As needed, La Fe PREC staff provided 1-1 information and referral services for GRG and assisted them in completing application forms to access resources.

In May 2013, the grandparents provided feedback and recommendations for the 2013-14 academic year support group *platicas*. They prefer meeting in the classroom at NP, rather than the conference room. They wanted to continue meeting in the morning on the first Thursday of each month during the school year. They learned about the availability of community resources and met community service providers. Since the start of the *Abuelos Project*, GRG have commented that they enjoyed participating in the support group because “it got us out of the house once a month”. The GRG benefited from the support group’s *platicas* because of the bonding, support, wisdom and prayers they shared with each other. The GRG wanted to continue the *platicas* in Spanish and promised to recruit new support group members.

The types of topics preferred by GRG included childhood/brain development; parenting skills, stress management and coping skills; the biological, psychological, behavioral and medication aspects of ADHD; and learning to set boundaries and improve communication with teenagers. They requested legal assistance for issues related to will preparation, medical directives, adoption and grandparent visitation rights. They also wanted to learn more about coping with stress and relaxation techniques. This year the GRG decided they wanted to start a voluntary monthly arts and crafts activity on the third Thursday morning of each month. It started out well but the GRG who volunteered to coordinate this activity encountered family health issues for several months so this activity was discontinued. Although the GRG enjoyed participating in arts and crafts activities, there were no funds or staff to maintain it as an on-going *Abuelos Project*-sponsored activity.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

A. Challenges Faced By Grandparents

Many GRG in the *Abuelos Project* were unaware of the existence of some programs that benefit their family. A few encountered eligibility problems because they were not the grandchildren's legal guardians. Other factors such as limited resources, inability to navigate public safety net programs, lack of transportation and language/cultural barriers further jeopardized the family's *bienestar*. Although there were fewer traumatic life events this year than in prior years, they were significant life-changing events. One GRG died of lung cancer, shortly after diagnosis, and having no prearranged funeral plan, his wife had to cope not only with his death but also the financial crisis of a funeral. One GRG, raising 6 teenage grandsons, whose home was vandalized last year had to vacate her home this year because the owner sold it. Some older GRG reported foregoing the purchase of their own medications or making needed home repairs because they used their SS and SSI benefits to support their grandchildren. Some GRG were also part of the "sandwich generation", with responsibilities for both raising their grandchildren and caring for their aging parents.

Since the majority of *Abuelos Project* GRG's were homemakers, they have the opportunity to attend monthly support group *platicas*. But, large segments of the younger GRG, who work full time, were unable to benefit from this project. In the coming year, La Fe PREC will seek out other community partners to offer some bilingual educational forums in the evening or on Saturday to reach out to working GRG. More media coverage will be undertaken to promote greater awareness of the escalating increase in grandparents assuming responsibility to raise their grandchildren and keep them out of the State's Foster Care System. Although there was no CPS involvement with grandchildren this year, GRG shared their past experiences of having CPS use them as a safety plan placement. Their complaint was regarding the lack of support offered by CPS staff once the grandparents assume responsibility for their grandchild.

B. Challenges Faced By Grandchildren

Some grandchildren exhibited behavioral problems and emotional stress at home and/or in school because of family instability. Although GRG wanted their grandchildren to succeed in school, they often do not know how to access tutoring or mentoring services. Money for school uniforms and school supplies often was unavailable. GRG have limited information about or access to Back to School Drives that could have benefited their grandchildren. Few had computers at home. Many grandchildren, diagnosed with ADHD and other psychological disorders, were difficult for GRG to manage. Fortunately, all of the grandchildren had health insurance coverage. Truancy, school dropout and bullying were constant concerns amongst GRG. Some grandchildren in GRG households lived in over-crowded living conditions, lacked privacy and personal space to do homework. Some homes were in need of major repairs but were not eligible for City/County programs that help with home upgrades and repairs. A dilemma faced by GRG during summer months, is their lack of resources to pay for summer enrichment programs. The slots available for the free recreation programs were quickly filled. They worried their older grandchildren would get into trouble during the summer because of the high prevalence of gangs in their neighborhoods.

C. Lessons Learned

The staff of La Fe PREC has gained extensive knowledge, experience and data regarding GRG and their unmet needs, as well as the individual/institutional barriers GRG have confronted accessing community resources. Lack of transportation, language barriers and legal issues and the complexities of the application processes often proved insurmountable barriers for GRG. For Spanish-speaking grandparents these issues were even more challenging. One of the most significant gaps to efficiently address the unmet needs of GRG is the lack of a 1-stop GRG-focused resource center where community partners could collaboratively bring services to them. Another significant gap is the lack of accessible mental health services for the grandchildren. Two key issues limiting service accessibility for GRG is (1) their status as informal caregiver, without the legal documentation required by some service providers and (2) the inability to access some available GRG supportive services because of age barriers. The eligibility criteria for some public programs for GRG is 55 years of age and older.

Six years of GRG participation in the *Abuelos* support group *platicas* has demonstrated its benefits to family *bienestar*. As GRG shared their life experiences and learned from each other and community partners, their self-confidence and resilience has increased. Through advocacy and collaboration, limited access has been gained to social service, health, legal and food/nutrition programs. GRG have demonstrated a willingness to engage in self-empowerment training and advocacy to improve their family's *bienestar*. Stronger advocacy efforts are needed to focus the community's attention on the gaps in services that affect GRG in San Antonio so they can be comprehensively addressed. GRG have stated their willingness to share their stories with local and state leaders in order to create a momentum for change that will enhance the quality of life of their grandchildren.