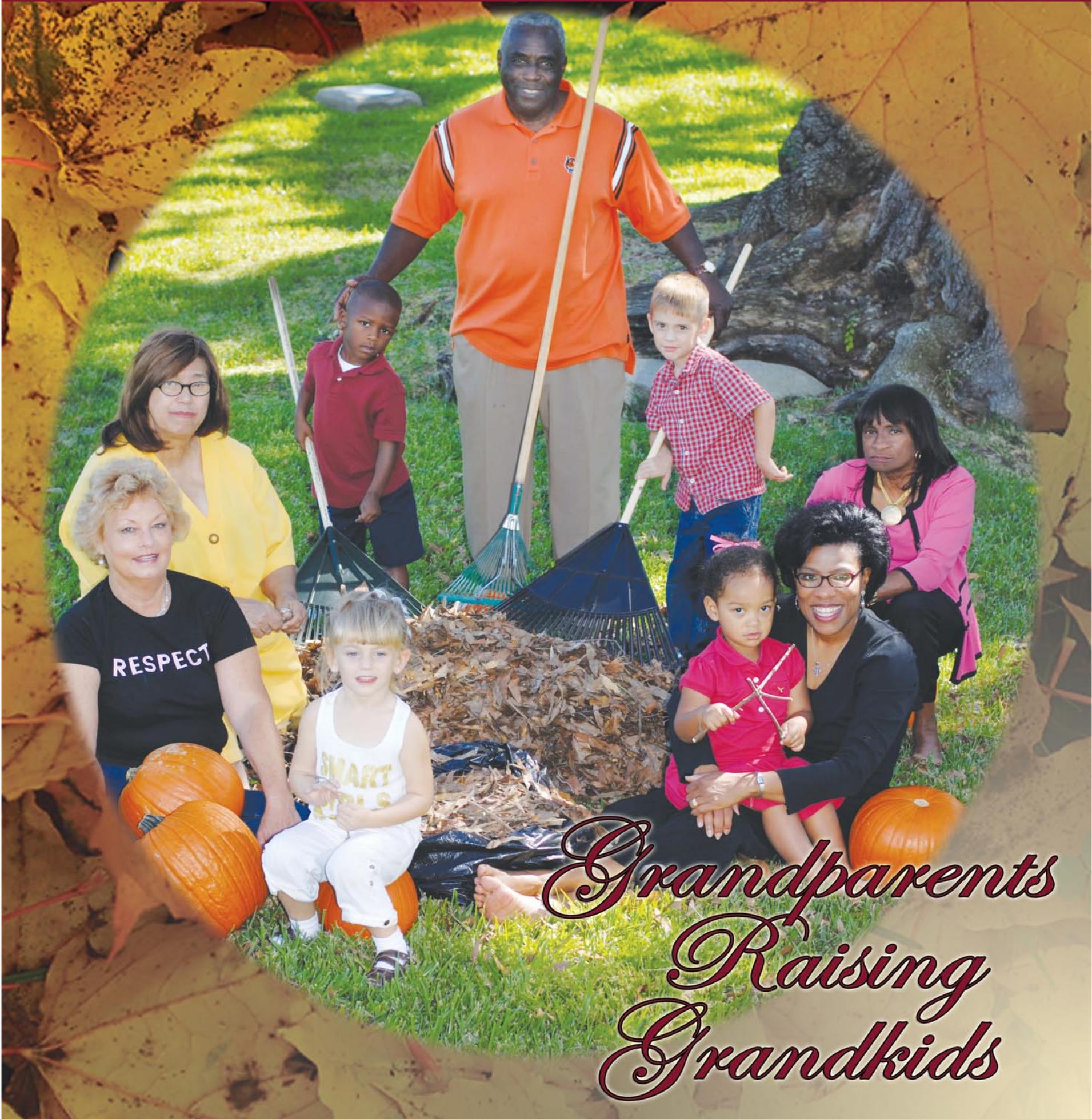


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*Grandparents
Raising
Grandkids*



Grandparents Raising Grandkids

By Melissa Mills



Senator Sharon Weston Broome with Sydney Broome

State Senator Sharon Weston Broome became interested in The Grandparents Raising Grandkids program several years ago when she was invited by a Grandparents Support Group, associated with The Council on Aging, to attend a meeting. She found that meeting very insightful, gaining knowledge on the large population of grandparents actually raising grandchildren and the obstacles they faced. Senator Broome has constantly been an advocate of family preservation, and in most cases keeping families together is the preference. After hearing the numerous challenges that the Grandparents faced, she made it a goal to advance their agenda. Her first initiative was to get a subsidy for additional funding for grandparents. However, this was not as easy as it would seem. The response she was met with at the committee process was mixed. So she completed a study to help put a face on the bill. Once the legislators were able to see that at least one grandparent was raising a grandchild in their district, and some were able to personally identify with someone in such a situation, the bill was approved. The Grandparents Subsidy Bill was passed, then they went on to pass The Kinship Care Subsidy Bill, which enlarged the program from just grandparents to other relatives.

This subsidy helps the grandparents financially, who have voluntarily taken on the responsibility of raising a second, and sometimes third generation of children. It keeps the children out of foster care and away from all its hazards, while saving the state the money it would spend on fostering that child. It helps to keep the family together in a situation that could otherwise tear it apart. Rita Hathorn says she sleeps well at night knowing that her great grandbabies are just down the hall. Without this policy she and many other grandparents would have had to give up their grandchildren to the Foster Care System. They all want to keep the children in the family, The Grandparents Raising Grandkids, and The Kinship Care Subsidy Program enables them to do that. These programs are aiming at helping everyone, the Child, the Grandparent, and the State.



**At least
2.5 Million children
in the United States
live in grandparent-
headed homes**

Currently there are at least 2.5 Million children in the United States that live in grandparent headed homes and 1.5 million live with other family members. The 2000 United States Census says that 5.8



million grandparents live with their grandchildren. Louisiana is fourth in the nation for Grandparents raising Grandchildren with approximately 10 percent of all children in the state residing with a grandparent. According to senior journal.com there are 64,866 children in the State of Louisiana living with relatives without either parent present.

There are many reasons for these numbers. Whether it be drug abuse, financial issues, domestic violence, or mental instability, the outcome is still the same; the children need stability and grandparents step up to the plate. The circumstances vary, it may be a son who leaves his children with his mother as in the case of Irdean LeDuff, or a daughter or granddaughter as with Rita Hathorn. Mrs. Hathorn is now raising two of her great grand children.

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"It can never happen to me" is no way to look at the future.

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“I was alone, having chest pains... Pushing this button saved my life.”

A push of the button on her pendant allowed Ms. Barker to summon medical help when she felt too weak to get to the phone. Within seconds, a dispatcher responded, and Emergency Medical Services were on their way.



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to my questions. It seemed second nature. After having raised her daughter, granddaughter and now great grandchildren, you could tell that rearing children was nothing new. Nothing new though does not minimize the toll a 4 and a 5 year old must take on a 64 year old woman, emotionally, physically and financially.

Mrs. Irdean LeDuff is 68 years old. She has had her two grandsons, ages 9 and 7, “since they were babies.” Retired from the school system, which is her only income, she has permanent custody of both boys. Her oldest grandson is Autistic, and does not speak. The youngest was 6 weeks old, the oldest was 18 months old, when she retired. She laughs when she says she retired “into

house each night.

Isabella Bell, a small, fragile looking woman, has had her grandson, Jeremiah, since he was born. He is 3 years old now, and she is 60. Her daughter is not married, but seldom comes by to see Jeremiah. Mrs. Bell has temporary custody of her grandson.

Watson Williams, Jr. and his wife Enola Williams, are raising their grandson, also a Watson Williams, age 5. They have had him since he was born. Mr. Williams, who is retired from the Army said, “It is a joy to have him in the house.” It keeps the elder Watson Williams going. According to Mr. Williams, “things were getting a bit boring” in retirement before young Watson came to live with them. Mr. Williams was beaming with a smile so big, such a genuine laugh, and a positive energy so strong that I almost wanted him to raise my future children. Mr. Williams also volunteers at his grandson’s school, Forrest Hill Heights.

These are just a few of the families Grandparents Raising Grandkids has helped with funding and support groups – a mere glimpse into what they are up against and what they will face in the future. With the help of Senator Broome and programs like The Kinship Care Subsidy Program, they can receive the funding and support they need to keep their families together and their grandchildren safe at home.



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Rita Hathorn is 64 years old. She is raising her great grandson and great granddaughter, ages 5 and 4. She has had Trea’, her great grandson since birth and Kade, her great granddaughter since she was 4 months old. Her only income is a disability check. She depends on the help of The Kinship Care Program, and other welfare subsidies to raise these children. She has had full custody of them since last July, but there is not room here to tell what she went through to get it. I would not have guessed that she was 64 years old by looking at her as she held two young children by the hand at first. After the kids got comfortable and began to get rambunctious I still did not see her age. Both children were so well behaved with beautiful bright blue eyes and blond hair. A great grandmother’s ‘no’s’ and ‘stop that’s’ did not erase the smile from their faces, and barely interrupted her answers

a harder job.” She says her son comes by to “see” the boys every evening at dinner time. He does not help support the boys financially, but manages to come by to eat dinner at her



Pictured: In the dark pantsuit is Sharon Weston Broome with Sydney Broome. Going clockwise from Senator Broome is Isabella Bell, Kade Gallo, Rita Hathorne, Trea’ Gallo, Watson Williams Jr., Irdean LeDuff, Watson Williams IV