

## Encouraging Healthy Relationships Between Kids and Grandparents



**Eileen Addis, MSS, LSW**, of Clinical Resource Management and Social Work, sees her work at HUP as part of her connection to the neighborhoods the hospital serves. She has extended this commitment as a six-year board member of Supportive Older Women's Network (SOWN), a Philadelphia nonprofit dedicated to providing strong support networks and services to older women in need.

Although SOWN focuses on older women, for the past 10 years, it has worked with grandparents who are raising their grandchildren. Marypat Tracy, LCSW, SOWN's director of Programs, estimates that there are more than 22,000 grandparent-led families in Philadelphia. These grandparents play a crucial role in preventing these kids from entering foster care.

"This is parenting the second time around for them," said Tracy. "They might be 75 years old. The world is different. Parenting is different."

Children raised by their grandparents are 32 percent more likely to be obese than their peers. "For a lot of these families, there's no safe place outside to jump rope, ride your bike, and do what other kids might be doing," said Tracy. "These kids have already been through something traumatic, so grand mom wants to keep them in the house and keep them safe."

To help improve the families' fitness level — and their nutrition -- SOWN created Philly Families Eat Smart workshops. The classes offer yoga, tai chi, and related activities as well as information about healthy meal preparation, the best place to buy affordable, healthy ingredients, and more ways to live healthy. Addis recently secured a Penn Medicine CAREs grant to provide iPads, on which groups of kids and grandparents can use health apps and activities. These apps can be done not only on the iPads in class, but also at home on an iPad, iPhone, computer, other smartphone or similar device.

"The grandparents also get to spend time with their grandchildren and pass on values that they can use for the rest of their lives and pass on to others," said Addis.

"It can be very difficult for some kids to be raised by their grandparent and not get pressure from their everyday peers," said Tracy. "And sometimes grandmoms are overwhelmed. We're adding that fitness can be fun factor, that kids can have fun with grandma."

For information on participating or joining the program, email Marypat Tracy.

*Photo caption: Penn Medicine CAREs grant winner Eileen Addis (l.) with Marypat Tracy of SOWN.*

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