

# “Black Kinship Families and the High Cost of Loving”: Key Takeaways

---

This document presents key takeaways from separate conversations between Karyne Jones and three African American grandparents who are rearing their grandchildren and/or other kin children. **Karyne Jones** is President and CEO of the National Caucus & Center on Black Aging, Inc. (NCBA), the country’s preeminent national organization on issues impacting minority citizens aged 55 and over. **Rhodena Arnold** is a grandmother in Chicago, Illinois; **Rod Johnson** is a grandfather in Orlando, Florida; and **Shirley Littlejohn** is a great-grandmother in Capitol Heights, Maryland.

[Click here](#) to watch the full conversations between Ms. Jones and the three grandparents.

## **Employed grandparents are disadvantaged by the social service infrastructure.**

Rhodena Arnold:

- ▶ “[I]t’s not easy for me because I’m a working grandmother and I don’t have the days to constantly take off work. I don’t have the funds for the therapy that they need.”
- ▶ “So, everything has to be done off my income. It’s an enjoyment but sometimes it can be very overwhelming because I don’t get the support that I need as far as transportation--they won’t give me transportation for them. I have to pay for that. I have to pay for Ubers every day. And I feel as a grandparent who has reached out to government assistance...I think that the government should help us a little bit--not a whole lot--but some type of way financially to help take care of these kids.”

## **Costs and inconveniences aside, maintaining custody within the family is paramount.**

Ms. Arnold:

- ▶ “That’s what they told me: ‘Well, maybe you should become a foster parent or maybe you should put them in DCFS [Department of Children and Family Services].’ I didn’t like that solution at all. That’s not a solution.”

- ▶ “And if they were in foster care or DCFS, then you all would want to help me? It shouldn't be that way. Why not help me with the children?”
- ▶ “I even asked for...a grant to help pay for them to be able to go the YMCA to do basketball, swimming, get tutoring, whatever. Denied. I will have to pay for that too.”

## **Social service professionals must recognize the unique social challenges for which African American families have to prepare their children.**

Rod Johnson:

- ▶ “It's hard for them to understand if they're not African American, been through some of these things and the challenges that we face raising these kids. It's different; it's a whole different ballgame.”
- ▶ “It's okay to get involved and try to help us, but they got to let us do our job too, especially being a Black father of four sons.... They want to get involved, but they don't understand the full picture.”
- ▶ “So, I raised my boys to be chameleons, adapt to your environment and you'll survive. You'll survive. But they got to let us continue to teach them that well and not intervene in being so broad as if we tell them one thing this way, they'll turn out this way.”

## **Many representatives of public assistance programs seem disdainful of African American clients.**

Shirley Littlejohn:

- ▶ “[S]ometimes those agencies are really rough on Black, especially Black women. They tend to look down. Well, that's my feelings that they tend to look down on me and talk so mean to you. But I found that you could say whatever you want to say. If I need some help, that's what you are there for is to help me.”

Karyne Jones:

- ▶ “One way you help people is, number one, welcome them and say, ‘We understand and that's why we're here to assist you. Now how can we assist you?’”
- ▶ “What they're there to do is to let you know about special programs, provide support networks, direct you in the way where you might get extra tutoring or if the child [has] some special, maybe, mental issue....”

Mr. Johnson:

- ▶ “You would think...that would be part of their whole package. That would be priority one: ‘Hey, we got assistance from different programs to help you.’ You and whoever’s helped taking care of these kids or whatnot.”

---

The Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network: A National Technical Assistance Center (Network) helps government agencies and nonprofits in states, tribes, and territories work across jurisdictional and systemic boundaries to improve supports and services for families in which grandparents, other relatives, or close family friends are raising children whose parents are unable to do so. For more information, please visit [www.GKSNetwork.org](http://www.GKSNetwork.org).

*The Network is supported by the Administration for Community Living (ACL), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of a financial assistance award totaling \$9,950,000 with 95 percentage funded by ACL/HHS and \$523,684 and 5 percentage funded by non-government sources. The contents are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by ACL/HHS, or the U.S. Government.*

©Generations United, 2023

The Network is a project of  
Generations United.

**generations  
United**

Because we're stronger together®