

“Black Kinship Families – Unsung and Underserved”: Transcript

Narrator:

Black Kinship Families: Unsung and Underserved, a conversation between Karyne Jones, President and CEO of the National Caucus and Center on Black Aging Incorporated, NCBA—a proud partner of the Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network – and the Reverend Dr. Frederick D. Haynes III, Senior Pastor of the Friendship West Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas, and President of the Rainbow PUSH Coalition.

Karyne Jones:

Welcome to the conversation, Reverend Dr. Haynes. We're so happy to have you with us today. You pastor a huge congregation, and I know that some of your members fall into the families or kinship family category. They are rearing their children's children or the children of other relatives or friends. What impressions do you have of these people who may be doing this work for a second and even a third time around, often in what we've all looked forward to, our golden years?

Rev. Dr. Frederick D. Haynes, III:

A few years ago, when Hillary Clinton took the African proverb, "It takes a village to raise a child," it was politicized. But for Black people, it's our reality. That is, it's going to be rare for you to have what, a husband, wife, and 2.5 kids and a dog. It's a whole village involved in the bringing up of the children. And so, what is often mis-defined as a broken family structure in our context, there are reinforcements that are engaged in making sure that the kids are not only brought up, but the kids get to school, the kids have resources. When you talk about the traditional Americanized, even politicized view of the family, you are missing out on not only what is a strength of the Black community in terms of the village approach to bringing up our children, but you also end up with a lot of our kids being judged, misrepresented, and families that are totally misrepresented because we don't always fit into the Americanized version of what a family looks like.

What's funny is their families don't either, but it's just that we admit it and we're honest about it. So yes, I have both in our community where our church is, and our church, just to give you an example, is right across the street from a high school that is predominantly minority, predominantly Black through the years. I cannot tell you how

many times I've gone over there for various programs and the grandmothers are there. Mama may not be there, but grandma is. Even when my daughter was in high school, I won't forget the many times I'd go to both the parent teacher conference meetings and PTA meetings, and I'm looking around at these people who are much older than me, and I'm not even tripping because it's like, oh yeah, they're a part of the village helping to ensure that the children are taken care of.

I want to begin with that because I think that's the appropriate understanding and framework through which to view our families. As a consequence, in terms of needs, I mean, just imagine you've already been through the process of raising a child or children, and now you're raising the child, children of your child. I got to be honest with you, some of that is the product of a traumatic event that took place. And so that grandmother or great-grandmother is stepping in and filling a gap that was imputed on that family by trauma. For me, it goes back to the need for access to mental health services for the child, even for the grandmother. But if you don't have access to mental health services, I think you're missing out on the fact that sometimes there's a grandparent involved because something traumatic has happened.

I mean, this is what... It's just after six. I guess around one o'clock today, I got a call from one of our members, and her son, 37 years old, passed, and the son was raising two daughters. And so, the grandmother was saying, "Pastor, pray for me because I've got to raise my other grand babies." So, she not only has to get through the trauma of burying a child, and everyone says that should never happen, so she's got to do that, and she has to go through the process again of raising a child. Sometimes it's trauma that has brought this about. I think that kind of sensitivity says, okay, we got to break down these barriers where our community does not have access to mental health services.

That is, I guess, the first place I'll begin. The second place I'll begin, and really what I'm doing, it's just really amazing. You shared with me what you want to talk about. And then it's like everybody came to me with, okay, I'm an example and I did not ask for these examples. It just lets you know how real this is because it was something that is so commonplace that I can't say I've grown numb to it, but at the same time it's just commonplace because a village is indeed raising our children. It's not ever just mama daddy, it's always a village. The first piece, I'll say again, has to do with the whole trauma piece.

The second piece is the fact that... I mean, let's be real. This country targeted, through its criminal justice system, Black men; snatched them from their families. And now the stats are showing it's Black women who are being victimized by this criminal justice system. So, if you don't have to deal with the trauma, you have grandparents who are stepping up now because of a system. This past Sunday after church, this grandmother came up to me and she had her teenage grandchildren that she's raising now. It's

because both her son and her daughter-in-law are in prison. I was asking, "Okay, so what's the timeframe? What are they in for?" And it's petty drug possession.

Because this is Texas, and in Texas, you can still get arrested for marijuana possession. And so, they didn't just get arrested, they are in prison serving time. When you look at systems, some systems have created the necessity for the village stepping up. I'll just also add that not only is there a need for mental health services, but for resources for this grandmother who all of a sudden is... And this is what she said to me Sunday, it just melted my heart. She said, "Pastor, I'm putting money on the books for my son and my daughter-in-law. I've gone back to get a second job. And so, I'm working two jobs while I'm trying to raise my grandchildren."

So, you can judge them all you want to, but you got to keep in mind a system is as guilty as ever in making this come to pass. I can go on and on and on. I got too many examples, but I do know there's a need for mental health services and there's a need for getting appropriate resources to these grandparents who are having to do it all over again.

Karyne Jones:

And they need resources that do not require them to be intruded upon or interfered with and judged unnecessarily.

Rev. Dr. Haynes:

If you don't have cultural competence when it comes to addressing, ministering, serving this clientele, then you can easily come across as being judge-y. And worse than that, shaming something that really should not be shamed.

Karyne Jones:

Those are some of the things that make African Americans tend to shy away from getting some of these services, which is a shame because that works against our own interests. But that's because the biggest fear is losing the children.

Rev. Dr. Haynes:

I think that is such an important point. Our experiences with the system, it is rare to hear an experience that was healthy, helpful, and healing. It's very rare. If all I've heard and all I've experienced is bad, then of course I'm going to do all I can to protect what's mine. This is mine, so I'm going to do it even if I don't have the resources, I'm going to make do, which is what we've learned to do as a people, and that is to make do. So another piece, and thank you for saying this, another piece is not only is the "system" going to have to market some positive successes that they can point to and that can get

on the grapevine in the community, but ensure that in the process that there is a kind of, again, cultural competence.

I'm going to go back to that again because if Ms. Karen shows up in her judgmental ways making her judgmental assumptions, then the sad reality is that that is going to cause... Oh man, I just thought of something. It happened last year. One of our members got into a serious situation fighting the system, the foster care system, because... I'm trying to make sure I get the details. The dad had been in Iraq, and when he came back, he was just mentally in a bad space. He was married to the stepmother of his child, and the stepmother had her own issues with the child and her own issues with the fact that he had gone to Iraq and had come back struggling.

As a consequence, the grandmother, the mother of the son who had been in Iraq, she tries to get involved. What happens is that they called CPS [Child Protective Services] on her and it just went from bad to worse. Unfortunately, they were able to get the child away from the grandmother, and when the child went back to the stepmother's place, the stepmother was very abusive. And now the child is in foster care system and the grandmother has no idea where that child is. We've been fighting trying to help, but it's like, that is not good. I don't know if that child will ever be what the child should be.

This kid was in our mentoring program. I mean, we were doing a decent job of providing a village context, but I mean the system as far as I'm concerned, has messed up a situation that could have been better, especially if the grandmother was allowed to do what she was doing effectively.

Karyne Jones:

Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network is working hard to provide resources that will help those who help these families better understand the options that are available to them. We're hoping churches can create new ministries just for those caregivers and their families, just as they have senior ministries and bible study ministries and other ministries within their churches that help their congregations and the communities that are surrounding. It would be great to see our churches create these new ministries just for these caregivers and their families.

Rev. Dr. Haynes:

I really appreciate that you were doing this because that's great.

Karyne Jones:

Your insight and observations, as always, are very helpful in making us understand what so many of these caregivers are going through. Congratulations on taking the helm of Rainbow PUSH. Reverend Jesse Jackson certainly passed the baton on to a

very strong runner and advocate. We wish you all the best in the good work that you do. Thanks so much for your time.

Rev. Dr. Haynes:

Right. Same to you. Thank you.

Narrator:

Additional resources are available at the Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network website, that's GKSNetwork.org; and at the website of Generations United, gu.org. The network is supported by the Administration for Community Living, ACL, US Department of Health and Human Services, HHS. As part of the Financial Assistance Award, totaling \$9,950,000 with 95 percentage funded by ACL, HHS and \$523,684 and five 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 US government.

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.

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