



Kids as caregivers

AACY is there to help the helpers

BY CRISTY HOM

Kadniel and his grandmother (AACY obtained an oxygen concentrator for her)

Jonathan's grandmother has cared for him as long as he can remember, but now at age 15, he is caring for her. Lisa runs straight home from school to help her grandfather so her mother can go to work. With the increasing number of multigenerational households and grandparents raising grandchildren, more youth are assuming the role of caregiver when the health of their older family members declines.

An estimated 1.4 million children of ages 8-18 in the U.S. are caring for disabled, ill or aging family members. They administer medications, help with feeding, provide personal care in the bathroom and

manage household chores.

These kids experience the same challenges as adult caregivers, yet they are not equipped to manage the resulting sadness and anxiety. It affects their social and academic lives. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation study "[The Silent Epidemic](#)" reported that among students who drop out of school for personal reasons, 22 percent do so to care for a family member.

"My friends can't relate to what I am going through," states an 11th grader who is caring for her grandmother. "I feel so overwhelmed."

Keith assisting his mother (who is a grandmother raising grandkids)



The American Association of Caregiving Youth is the first and only U.S. organization that identifies and supports children who are responsible for the care of their ill, injured, elderly or disabled family members. AACY was founded by Dr. Connie Siskowski, a former youth caregiver and grandparent who went back to school to earn her doctorate.

AACY's local effort, the Caregiving Youth Project, works with middle and high school youth caregivers. Among its services are skill building and therapeutic groups; educational and recreational (respite) activities; family evaluation home visits; health education and stress management classes; and most importantly, the opportunity to connect with caregiving peers who understand.

The youth served by the Caregiving Youth Project consistently state that joining with peers who share this experience has changed their lives. They no longer feel alone and have a safe place to express

their feelings. A 10th grader who cares for her blind grandfather says, "Sometimes I get angry that I have to stay home to be with my grandfather when I'd rather be out with my friends."

Fun activities allow caregiving youth to act their age. At a recent beach party picnic, a 9th grader stated, "I wish every day was like this day." 

Cristy Hom, LCSW, is Director of Continuing Care, Caregiving Youth Project of AACY.

Meet our caregiving kids

About a third of our kids care for a grandparent, another third for a parent, 18 percent for a disabled sibling, and the rest for other relatives and extended family. Forty percent care for more than one person (e.g., Keith cares for his mom and for his dad, who is blind and diabetic).

For more information or to support a youth caregiver, please visit AACY.org or call 1-800-725-2512.



Kassie feeding Joshua

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