



FRIENDS OF THE COMMISSION AWARD

THE COMMISSION ON GRANDPARENTS RAISING GRANDCHILDREN IS VERY GRATEFUL FOR ALL OF THE COMMUNITY PARTNERS AND SERVICE PROVIDERS THAT ARE DEDICATED TO WORKING WITH AND SUPPORTING THE THOUSANDS OF GRANDPARENTS RAISING GRANDCHILDREN AND RELATIVE CAREGIVERS THROUGHOUT MASSACHUSETTS. HAVING OUTSTANDING COMMUNITY PARTNERS AND COLLABORATORS HELPS ALL OF US MOVE THE MISSION FORWARD TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO SUPPORTS, INFORMATION, AND RESOURCES FOR THESE AMAZING CAREGIVERS WHO ARE RAISING SOME OF THE MOST VULNERABLE CHILDREN IN OUR COMMONWEALTH. NONE OF US COULD DO THIS WORK ALONE.

2026 FRIENDS OF THE COMMISSION AWARD IS PRESENTED TO:

MASS GRG INC.

EXECUTIVE BOARD:

ILENE MITCHELL, DEANNA FORIST, JERRY LANSON, ANTHONY MARTIN

Massachusetts Grandparents Raising Grandchildren, Inc. is a not-for-profit volunteer fundraising and outreach organization that works to enhance the programs and opportunities provided by the Commission on the Status of Grandparents Raising Grandchildren. Consisting of a dedicated group of volunteers, the board is committed to finding resources to support grandparents and kin raising children throughout Massachusetts. They are proud to help the Commission support the over 30,000 grandfamilies in Massachusetts, and specifically, the 10,000 grandparents and kinship caregivers raising children without biological parents present. The Mass GRG Inc. was created in 2020. In a short time, the board has been awarded multiple grants from generous donors, such as The Marigold Foundation, and has been awarded a Mosaic grant, amongst other very generous donors and grantors. The board created the “Bridge the Gap” scholarship to assist kinship caregivers not involved with the child welfare system gain access to resources such as camperships, music lessons, tutoring services, and more. Lead by Ilene Mitchell, this group takes care to review applications and honor requests as best as they can. They have ambitious goals for the future to continue to support these amazing caregivers and are committed to continuing to seek additional grants, donations, and sponsors. A special thank you to Ilene Mitchell, Deanna Forsit, Jerry Lanson, and Anthony Martin for your hard work and dedication to caregivers and the children they are raising here in Massachusetts.

CONGRATULATIONS AND THANK YOU, MASSGRG INC.!





HARRIET JACKSON-LYONS AWARD

THIS AWARD WAS THE VERY FIRST GIVEN AT THE “ANNUAL CONFERENCE FOR GRANDPARENTS RAISING GRANDCHILDREN” IN 2012 IN HONOR OF MS. JACKSON-LYONS, A TRUE PIONEER FOR GRANDPARENTS RAISING GRANDCHILDREN IN HER COMMUNITY. MS. JACKSON-LYONS CREATED A SUPPORT AND ADVOCACY GROUP, RAISING OUR CHILDREN’S CHILDREN (ROCC), TO BRING AWARENESS TO THE ISSUES IMPACTING KINSHIP CAREGIVERS IN THE CITY OF BOSTON. MS. JACKSON-LYONS SUPPORTED AND ENCOURAGED HUNDREDS OF RELATIVE CAREGIVERS UP UNTIL SHE PASSED AWAY IN 2019. SHE WAS A MENTOR TO MANY AND AN INSPIRATION TO ALL.

2026 HARRIET JACKSON-LYONS AWARD IS PRESENTED TO:

GAIL WILLIAMS

GRANDPARENT AND COMMUNITY ADVOCATE

Gail Williams is currently a resident of Roxbury, Ma with years of experience working with children and families. She has worked as a school guidance counselor and has been an advocate for kinship caregivers for many years. She was a member of MSPCC Kinnections program and is currently involved with the Boston Senior Home Care support group which meets at the Julia Martin House in Jamaica Plain. Her involvement in grandparents raising their grandchildren came about through personal experience. In 1993 she was granted temporary custody of her then eight months old grandson who is now 33 years old. He is the child of her eldest daughter. She found ROCC (Raising Our Children’s Children) through a newspaper story. ROCC was a support group founded by Harriet Jackson-Lyons. Through ROCC she found information and resources. More importantly, she says she found a community of other grand relative caregivers facing the same challenges. Gail went on to gain custody of two more grandsons, her youngest still in her care and going to school in Boston Public Schools. Gail accomplished all of this while receiving her BS in Human Services, Counseling Psychology from Lesley University and later her M. ED from Cambridge College.

Gail became a Commissioner on the Commission on Grandparents Raising Grandchildren in 2020. She has been the co-chair of the Outreach and Information Sub-Committee and is now currently the Chair of the Community and Support Group Sub-Committee. Gail brings a critical lived-experience perspective to all conversations, programming, and planning in support of kinship caregivers. She is one of the first to volunteer for focus groups, outreach opportunities, or panels and represents the Commission in other initiatives and programs such as the Kinship Navigator Program and the Boston Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Regional Roundtable. Gail is an incredibly passionate, caring, knowledgeable, and supportive advocate and friend to all who know her.

CONGRATULATIONS AND THANK YOU, GAIL!



JOHN LEPPER ADVOCACY AWARD

THE JOHN LEPPER ADVOCACY AWARD IS NAMED AFTER THE FOUNDER, LEADER, AND THE HEART AND SOUL OF THE COMMISSION ON GRANDPARENTS RAISING GRANDCHILDREN: JOHN LEPPER. JOHN, AND HIS WIFE JOAN, RAISED TWO GRANDDAUGHTERS WHO ARE NOW SUCCESSFUL YOUNG WOMEN AND MOTHERS THEMSELVES. WHILE RAISING THEIR GRANDCHILDREN, JOHN AND HIS WIFE STRUGGLED TO ACCESS SUPPORTS AND RESOURCES FOR THEIR FAMILY AND HE REALIZED THAT NOT MANY EXISTED AT THE TIME. JOHN DECIDED TO TRY TO CHANGE THIS. AFTER YEARS OF JOHN'S HARD WORK, ADVOCACY, DEDICATION AND PASSION FOR HELPING OTHER GRANDPARENTS AND RELATIVE CAREGIVERS, THE COMMISSION ON GRANDPARENTS RAISING GRANDCHILDREN WAS ESTABLISHED BY THE LEGISLATURE IN 2008. THE COMMISSION HAS THRIVED AND EXPANDED IT'S MISSION UNDER JOHN'S LEADERSHIP AND HE CONTINUES TO BE INVOLVED TO THIS DAY. JOHN'S ADVOCACY AND PERSISTENCE ARE INSPIRING AND IT'S FOR THESE REASONS AND MORE THAT THE COMMISSION CREATED THE JOHN LEPPER ADVOCACY AWARD IN HIS HONOR IN 2016.

2026 JOHN LEPPER ADVOCACY AWARD IS PRESENTED TO:

THE UNITED ARC/TURNER'S FALLS GRG SUPPORT GROUP

SANDRA AND ROBERT VECCHIO, CAROL MAGNUSON, CHERYL WOOD, DONNA AND KEVIN SEYMORE, ELAINE ARSENAULT, JUDY DEROSIER, JUDY WOLTER, KAREN GARDNER, KILLEEN PERRAS, PHYLLIS SINCLAIR, SUSAN JONES, SUSAN AND PATRICK SHEA WITH THE SUPPORT OF THE UNITED ARC/TURNER'S FALLS

Since its inception, The United Arc has recognized and responded to the unique needs of grandparents raising their grandchildren. Across all programs, they have supported grandparents as they have moved into caregiving roles, often in times of crisis. In the early 2000s, The United Arc formally established its Grandparents and Kinship Caregiver Program in response to the growing number of families affected by substance use, incarceration, mental health challenges, and economic instability.

With early and sustaining support from the BETE Foundation, LifePath, The United Way, and the Community Foundation of Western Massachusetts, the program grew into a coordinated, community-based initiative. These partnerships allowed The United Arc to expand services, build lasting relationships with caregivers, and develop programming that reflects the evolving needs of these families. Over the past two decades, the program has become a reliable source of support, information, and advocacy throughout Franklin County and the Commonwealth. They continue to focus on strengthening both family and community connections so that grandparent caregivers and their grandchildren can both thrive.

In 2025-2026 the group was determined to have their voices heard as they advocated for issues important to all kinship caregivers in Massachusetts. Many testified in support of a bill to waive in-state college tuition and fees for children raised by kinship caregivers outside of the child welfare system. Others organized an information session with elected officials to hear their worries and concerns. And a few offered to be featured in a Boston Globe article to highlight the day to day life for grandparents raising grandchildren. They are a thoughtful, dedicated, and passionate group of amazing grandparents/relative caregivers.

**CONGRATULATIONS AND THANK YOU, THE UNITED ARC/TURNER'S
FALLS GRG SUPPORT GROUP!**



2026

AWARDS

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RECOGNITIONS

**THANK YOU TO ALL WHO CONTRIBUTE TO SUPPORTING
GRANDPARENTS AND RELATIVE CAREGIVERS**

