DC Grandparents for Mental Health

It takes a village.
We are the village.

How does the Grandparents Bench work?

Led by DC Grandparents for Mental Health—a group of older, primarily Black volunteers who originally came together during COVID-19—DC Grandparents Bench is a program of HelpAge USA, a nonprofit which promotes older people’s well-being and self-advocacy, in partnership with the Black Coalition for Health and The Rodham Institute.

DC Grandparents will participate in training by mental health professionals to learn how to listen, express empathy, and refer people to higher levels of care if needed. Building on the success of the Friendship Bench in Zimbabwe and other programs that train non-mental health professionals, benches are placed in safe community spaces and staffed by older volunteers trained to offer emotional support or simply a listening ear.

People of all ages, from younger to older, will be able to turn to the Grandparents Bench to tell their story. Through the DC Grandparents Bench, older people can give others a sense of connection while personally finding purpose and fulfillment.

DC Grandparents for Mental Health is a movement by adults 60+ years of age in Washington, DC, united in promoting mental health through peer-to-peer and intergenerational conversations and interventions. Learn more about DC Grandparents for Mental Health, a program of HelpAge USA, and how you can be part of the solution.

There is a mental health crisis in our communities. Determined to stop the secrecy and stigma around mental health and help others feel less alone, DC Grandparents for Mental Health is about making sure that people of all ages can get the support they need.

Recognizing the lack of resources and other barriers to mental health care, the older people behind DC Grandparents for Mental Health are working to fill some of these gaps with intergenerational activities and a new pilot initiative called the DC Grandparents Bench, which provides a way for people of all ages to confidentially share their story with an older person and know they will receive empathy, understanding, and respect.

“We have something to give to young people. We have skills, experience, and knowledge we can pass on.”
- Charles Turner, DC Grandparent

“If we can help even one person, we would make a difference.”
- Judy Brown, DC Grandparent
Looking to get involved?

Volunteer for the DC Grandparents Bench and help be part of the solution. If you are 60 years of age or older and living in the DMV (DC, Maryland, and Virginia) area, please join us! Here's how it works:

1. Sign up to be a DC Grandparent.
   Sign up by providing your contact information at helpageusa.org/dc-grandparents-mental-health or filling out the form below with a DC Grandparents volunteer.

2. Participate in free training.
   Participate in free training (in-person and online) to learn how to effectively listen and empathize with people who are struggling.

3. Use your skills.
   Be willing to use those skills to support people who are referred to the Grandparents Bench.

4. Be the movement.
   Be part of a grassroots movement of older people who want to help support others.

Yes! I'm interested in finding out more about becoming a DC Grandparents volunteer.

Name: ________________________________________________________________

Address: ______________________________________________________________

Phone: ___________________________ Email: ______________________________

Date of Birth: ___________________________ Gender: _______________________

Ward: ___________________________ Race/Ethnicity: ________________________