

Public Administrator Career Biography:

Anna Ceravolo

Program Director

Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Program

Athens Community Council on Aging (ACCA)

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Introduction:

Since graduating from the University of Georgia with a PhD in Psychology two years ago , Anna Ceravolo has been working with the Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Program within the Athens Community Council on Aging(ACCA). Anna worked as a program specialist in the first year and then became a program director in the second year.

Why Public Service?

Anna's choice to work for ACCA is based on her interests and research direction. She has always been the type of a person that wants to help people, even when she was younger. She hoped to be professional in one field and use her professional knowledge to help a specific group. When Anna was working on her PhD in Psychology at the UGA, she ended up doing lots of research with older adults and trying to figure out how to promote healthy brain aging. Because of these experiences, she decided to enroll in the Institute of Gerontology(a part of the College of Public Health). While she was taking classes toward a certificate in Gerontology, she figured out that she wanted to work with older people and help them succeed in aging well. The government and non-profit organizations take the responsibility to solve the problems in these part.

ACCA is an ideal workplace that matches Anna's motivation for public service. The Grandparents Raising Grandchildren phenomenon is also a serious social problem now. Thus , we need professionals like Anna to focus on this field. Over the past 20 years, the number of grandparents serving as primary caregivers for their grandchildren has increased nationally. According to the 2005 American Communities Survey, there are an estimated 5.7 million

grandparents living with grandchildren in their households. The southern region of the nation has the highest percentage (47.2%) of grandparent caregivers. On Monday, July 9, 2018, President Trump signed into law The Supporting Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Act proposed in May 2017. The Supporting Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Act has received support from 40 older adult and child advocacy groups including the ACCA in Athens, GA. The Grandparents Raising Grandchildren program at ACCA could help the state government to carry out the related policies and could offer some powerful support. As a director of this program, Anna is trying her best to make the aging community better with her team.

How Did She Get to their Current Position/Place in Public Service?

She learned that the ACCA had an internship during summer for psychology students, so she became a summer intern. During the internship, she felt like the ACCA had a reputation for being very innovative when it came to serving older adults. In addition to this, Anna is always looking for an organization with a friendly work environment and lots of opportunities to communicate and collaborate with other agencies. What's more, ACCA is the place where one can feel how much the staff cares about the aging community and see how well they provide services for older adults. Therefore, she really wants to be a part of a agency that truly live out their mission. She also did many times private talks with the research participants who were the current staff in ACCA and they explained how they fall in love with this agency. When she finished her graduate studies, Anna wanted to be in a position where she could find ways to marry her research interests. For all the reasons above, ACCA is her dreaming workplace and she would like to be a part of the Grandparents Raising

Grandchildren program.

What is her agency all about?

Mission: The mission of the Athens Community Council on Aging is to promote a lifetime of wellness through engagement, advocacy, education and support.

Values:

- Imagination&Innovation: We embrace change and always find new and creative ways to increase our value to the community we serve.
- Kindness&Respect: We always act with genuine care and concern for each other, the people we serve and the organization.
- Generosity&Gratitude: We believe in the power of generosity to change lives and are grateful for the time and resources given of others.
- Learning&Sharing: We are committed to life-long growth and discovery and are passionate about sharing our stories and experiences with others.

Vision: The Athens Community Council on Aging(ACCA) is a nonprofit, community-based agency with a strong and stable staff of professionals and volunteers working together in partnership with government agencies, faith-based community groups, and other service providers to effectively meet the needs of all in our aging and disability community by providing a wide range of service to adults, including information, social services, education, advocacy and activities focusing on wellness.

Goals:

- To provide meals, health and wellness offerings and caregiver support to older adults.
- To offer opportunities for participation in community life through a variety of educational and recreational activities.

How does her program fit in within the organization to advance these goals?

The Grandparents Raising Grandchildren (GRG) resources include:

- Emergency assistance with utilities and groceries: This resource corresponds with the ACCA first goal. Providing adequate food for family members is a source of worry for low-income grandparents when grandchildren come to live with them. Some grandchildren living with grandparent caregivers experienced some level of food insecurity. Hence, the GRG has a Summer Food Program to solve this problem. They have a grant with a Turner Family Foundation provide bags of groceries to family while they are helping supplement meals that the kids aren't getting while they are in schools or homes.
- Case managers that provide mental health assistance: This resource corresponds with the ACCA first goal. Many grandparents have mixed emotions about raising their grandchildren. While they enjoy having them in their homes, some grandparents also are angry with their adult children who caused them to be in the parenting role again. The lack of economic resources, poor physical health, and, the lack of social supports predicted higher levels of psychological distress. The level of stress may be exacerbated when grandchildren have medical or developmental problems that require extensive supports, but grandparents are uncertain how to access needed services. Therefore, the

necessity for mental health support services for grandparent caregivers. Anna's team provides mental health support for our families and keeps in contact to look at any medical related issues they may have and connect them to those resources.

- Support groups for caregivers: This resource corresponds with the ACCA first goal. Anna and her team build monthly support groups. They serve about 40 families. They help these families connect to the community resources. The monthly support groups talk about money management , how to stretch dollar and what resources families can access.
- Family activities: This resource corresponds with the ACCA second goal. Grandparents often meet pressure on raising the children because grandparents take on the parenting role for their grandchildren. This means giving up their leisure time and have to do the day-to-day maintenance of a home, schedules, meals, homework, and play dates. The GRG group gathers the child of the aging community and provide some outdoor activities which may help grandchildren feel better and develop a healthy lifestyle. What's more, it can be an important stress reliever for grandparents.
- Parenting education and workshops: This resource corresponds with the ACCA second goal. Too often, grandparents are left to defend their grandchildren's rights with little knowledge about or experience with education policies or school systems. Being unfamiliar with educational policies or services can put any parent at a disadvantage and the lack of knowledge in this area can present a major challenge for grandparents who may be intimidated by public systems. Thus, knowing how to access early education or special education programs is critical for any caregiver of a child, and in particular, a

child with disabilities. Anna and her team hold some workshops to introduce any related issues they may have and connect them to educational policies. They try to tailor the program to their families as much as possible.

Key insights and lessons learned along the way

First, Anna said that you'd better choose your job based on your interests and your research fields. "Your interests could inspire your motivation for public service and you could make a difference when you use your professional knowledge". Public service motivation relates to the notion that individuals are attracted to work in public service because it affords them the opportunity of doing good for others and for society. Over the past two decades, interest in the concept has grown across academic disciplines with a growing body of research evidence pointing to its relevance in career choice and its impact on performance. For example, Anna is a PhD student in psychology when she was studying at UGA. After making sure that her interests were in the Gerontology, Anna decided to work at the ACCA. Because of her motivation for helping the aging community, she created a supportive work environment with her team. They enhance the quality of communication with other agencies and clients, manage conflict, and shape the relationship between an employee's public service motivation and their performance. Because Anna is an expert in dealing with older adults' problems, she does well on setting the missions and goals of GRG and designing clear job responsibilities for the support groups and her management team(including one program specialist and two interns).

Second, Anna learned deeply about the problem related to the Grandparents Raising

Grandchildren phenomenon when she was doing her job in the GRG program at the ACCA. In the past few decades, a substantial increase in the number of grandparents raising grandchildren has been observed within the United States. Grandparents who raise their grandchildren are particularly vulnerable, as are the grandchildren in their care. However, U.S. policy currently presents many barriers, gaps, and unintended consequences for grandparent caregivers. Therefore, she was determined to keep working for older adults and wanted to figure out how structural features of American social welfare policy have impeded an adequate response to the unique needs faced by custodial grandparents and the grandchildren they are raising for the next few decades.

Skills and Attributes Needed for Public Service Professionals in the 21st Century

Actually, when I asked Anna this question, there were lots of key words came to my mind, like financial management and communication skills, leadership, etc. However, she told me a attribute that impressed me a lot. Self-care. In the past, hard-working leaders have been portrayed in the media as sleep-deprived, stubborn individuals with no time to do anything other than work-related tasks. Nonetheless, in recent years more emphasis has been put on the importance of mental health and self-care, especially in the workplace. Self-care is any activity that we deliberately do in order to take care of our emotional, mental, and physical health. In my opinion, her answer is perfectly match her psychology background and she really wants all public service professionals to learn to take care of themselves well.

Why is self-care so important for public service professionals? The promotion of self-care to ameliorate work related stress has become a significant aspect of contemporary

public service workplaces. As many studies indicate, professionals currently working in the health care, justice, and social service sectors report higher than average levels of stress. Anna introduced me a new concept “Uncomfortable Knowledge”. Uncomfortable knowledge refers to information that can be disruptive and requires action within the organization to alleviate a problem. “Uncomfortable knowledge” includes workplace bullying and harassment, toxic work cultures, receiving too much negative emotions from your customer and socially harmful work practices.

How can the idea and practice of self-care operate in such situations? For instance, Anna said she would designate a “No-Phone, No Social Media” time. While it’s certainly convenient to have everything at one’s fingertips, the fast-paced digital world has its disadvantages. Needing to be online all the time has become a real problem for most people, but especially those leading busy professional lives. And while many view taking five minutes to scroll through their feed as “relaxing”, what they don’t realize is it can actually fuel root causes of stress and anxiety. Social media is an incredibly powerful marketing tool for public service professionals, but it’s important to recognize when that tool might be consuming too much of their daily life, and take breaks when possible. She also choose to leave work at the door. It’s hard to keep an even work-life balance if there aren’t clear boundaries. Though it can be tempting, taking work home is one of the least helpful things for achieving that happy medium in life. Whether it’s a case file, tough question, or client research-all of those things can be done on work time. Take the time spent at home to reset, returning to work recharged and ready to take on any task.

In conclusion, Anna proposed a new point of view that as a public service professional, ignoring your body's needs can hurt your ability to think, focus, and help others in need. Whereas engaging in self-care can boost the mind, body, and spirit, which help lift those abilities in proximity as well. Being able to balance the challenges of work with the importance of self-care is one of the most important leadership qualities for all people who want to be a good public service professional.