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## New housing developments geared toward grandparent-led families



Pemberton Park is a new apartment complex in Kansas City that's designed specifically for grandparent-led families.

Sylvia Maria Gross

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by Sylvia Maria Gross  
Marketplace for October 13, 2011

TRANSCRIPT



Sylvia Maria Gross  
Emma Williams and her granddaughter, Lyric, walk around Pemberton Park.

**KAI RYSSDAL:** What little new housing that's being built in this country right now is being closely geared to the ways the American economy -- and its society -- are changing. Fewer sprawling suburbs. More urban living.

And in Kansas City, Mo., a nod to demographics. Developers there are building homes that cater to a very specific changing family dynamic.

From KCUR, Sylvia Maria Gross explains.

**EMMA WILLIAMS:** Oh, there she is. Hi mom! Don't run so fast.

**SYLVIA MARIA GROSS:** Sixty-two-year-old Emma

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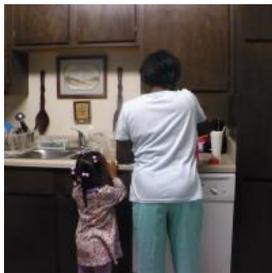
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Sylvia Maria Gross  
Emma Williams and Lyric in the kitchen of their new apartment designed for grandparent-led families.

Williams is picking up her 3-year-old granddaughter Lyric at Headstart.

**WILLIAMS:** I had five of my own, so you know I wasn't planning on raising children. Oh god, no!

But Williams' daughter, Lyric's mom, has a drug problem, and Williams says she'd already lost one grandchild to protective services. So when Lyric was a month old, Williams took her in.

**WILLIAMS:** That's my sugar! You mess with her, you might as well spit on me.



Sylvia Maria Gross  
The playground at Pemberton Park has wheelchair access.

Williams was living in a one-bedroom trailer at the time. She couldn't move into senior housing with a child. So when she heard about Pemberton Park, she said her prayers were answered. It was an entire apartment complex designed exclusively for grandparents raising grandchildren.

Williams and Lyric moved into their two-bedroom apartment in June. It has a central room with living and dining spaces that open into a kitchen with a big island in it.

**LYRIC:** Get the milk. I get the milk.

This is one of 36 apartments at Pemberton Park. Like senior housing, they're handicap accessible -- with wide doorways, rails in the bathrooms and low cabinets. Outside there's a

Special Report: Money Through the Ages

Multigenerational home numbers on the rise

playground with a ramp for wheelchairs. And activity rooms and a computer lab, which 13-year-old Shawn Gassway appreciates. He's making friends and he admits, it's hard to get out of line here.

**SEAN GASSWAY:** It's a lot, a lot of grandmas in these apartments.

A lot of grandmas. Pemberton Park opened in March, and two-thirds of the apartments are now filled, mostly with grandmothers and their grandchildren.

Brian Collins envisioned this project. He's with a local developer, Cougar Capital.

**BRIAN COLLINS:** It's sometimes unusual that a project comes to you where not only does it make sense economically and commercially, but it tugs at your heartstrings too.

Collins had read about a similar project in the Bronx -- the nation's first grandfamily apartments, which opened six years ago. He found out there are some 15,000 households in the Kansas City area headed by grandparents, and many are below poverty level. He held focus groups with grandparents to find out what their needs were.

**COLLINS:** Those households needed support with the children, especially after school, helping with their homework. Grandparents needed a place to get away from the kids.

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Cougar Capital partnered with the city to receive tax credits from the state and federal government. The Kansas City project is one of a half-dozen around the country, which are all public housing of some sort. But with 2.7 million grandparents raising grandchildren around the country, other developers are paying attention.

Donna Butts heads the group Generations United, and has tracked the growth of grandfamily housing.

**DONNA BUTTS:** We've been approached in the last several years from for-profit developers who are realizing that communities of the future are not what the communities of the past look like. I think there's a growing need for housing for multi-generational households.

Back in Kansas City, Pemberton Park residents are getting to know each other -- there's a Halloween party in the works. City officials say they've never seen this level of community in a public housing project. With her granddaughter sitting on her lap, Emma Williams says it's changed her.

**WILLIAMS:** Before I moved here, I was one of those, you see me coming in, you see me go out, and that's all you've done -- was see me. And they have made me come out of my shell. So we sit out front and just talk 'til it's dark outdoors.

With grandmas leading the way, the proverbial village just may be coming back.

In Kansas City, I'm Sylvia Maria Gross for Marketplace.

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rosemary massey - Oct 28, 2011

hello i am a grand mother 48yr  
is there a program in savannah  
had granddaughter since birth she is now 9year old.

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Blanford Robinson - Oct 14, 2011

I think this is an accurate portrayal of what the future American household will look like.

One of the biggest financial and social inefficiencies in America is its culture of hyper-individualism.

Aggregation and sharing of resources within families and communities will make us all richer in the short, medium and long term.

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