

Reverend Clifford Barnett

Several years ago Reverend Barnett was greeting his congregation at the Brighton Rock AME Church after his sermon. One of the seniors in his congregation stopped him on her way out and said, "Reverend, I am getting three of my granddaughters from Chicago. I am going to become a parent all over again." Reverend Barnett thought for a moment and said to her, "You're going to need some help!"

This first conversation with a grandparent caregiver became the foundation for citywide, statewide and national outreach to kinship care families. Reverend Barnett began his efforts by starting a support group that met at this church. The group was so successful he resolved to expand support groups to everyone who needed them in a place where everyone could access them....the Portsmouth Public Schools. Reverend Barnett has established a kinship care support group in 14 local schools and created two new programs, Grand's Place and Grand's Pals where local teenagers and college students provide activities for the children while the grandparents participate in the support groups or take some badly-needed personal time for themselves. His work in Portsmouth has become nationally recognized as an outstanding example of how community and faith-based organization can better serve kinship care families.

Reverend Barnett speaks often about the importance of encouraging individuals to find an "issue that makes them pound the table"- an issue to which they are passionately committed. Quite simply, Reverend Barnett has made the issues facing kinship care families the issues that make him pound the table and the reverberations of his work can be felt across the country.