



For immediate release

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Grandparents call for support for ALL vulnerable children in wake of new report

Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Trust NZ published the 'first cut' report of the findings of their 2016 Grandparent and Whanau Carer Survey conducted in May 2016 on their website today.

"The empty nest is refilled: the joys and tribulations of raising grandchildren in Aotearoa", a 98-page report by Dr Liz Gordon of Pukeko Research Ltd, follows the largest and most extensive study of its type in New Zealand to date. In coming months, a series of further topic specific in-depth reports are also planned.

Funded by a Lotteries Community Sector Research Fund grant it reveals the significant social and economic challenges faced by over 1100 grandparent and whanau carers. It includes data specifically collected on 1324 of the over 1700 vulnerable children they are raising because their parents are unable or unfit to parent them.

"We welcome the timeliness of this report which shines so much light on the difficulties faced by grandparents/kin raising children," says GRG Trust NZ Founder and Executive Trustee, Diane Vivian.

"It makes for very sobering reading on the issues facing the children and their carers. It confirms our past research and exposes the fact that little has changed as they struggle to get support, and yet for carers with teens and children with psychological problems or disabilities or if they have housing issues their problems have become more complex."

"At a time when there are big changes happening with Child Youth and Family and the new Oranga Tamariki being set up to focus on the needs of vulnerable children, this research is incredibly important to help shape policy and practice in future for all agencies working with these families," says Vivian.

The report cites that on average grandparent carers in this study look after 1.8 children. Applied to the Census 2013 figures for the 9543 grandparents in a parental role, over 17,000 children are being raised by their grandparents. This compares with the 2,091 children placed by Child Youth and Family into non-family "out-of-home" or foster care placements to the end of June 2016.¹

Approximately 70% of the children in grandparent care are supported by the Unsupported Child Benefit accessed through Work and Income. Survey participants had a lot to say about their difficulties accessing this vital financial support. Some reflected positive experiences with Work and Income staff, but most were negative with some describing their treatment as "humiliating" "horrible and degrading", "I was treated like dirt" and "they treat you as if you were scum."

"The comments made about their experiences with Child Youth and Family and Work and Income also mostly makes for grim reading and echoes what I hear daily on our 0800 helpline," notes Vivian. "It's pretty clear to us that there is a lot of work to be done going forward to ensure that grandparent/kin carers get the help they need from the new agency for Vulnerable Children and Work and Income in future."

“The survey also shows that 72% of the children in grandparent care have had some involvement with Child Youth and Family, but it is mostly limited to them being notified of a concern and then asking the grandparents to get parenting orders through the Family Court,” says Vivian.

Of the 950 children where Child Youth and Family was involved only 380 went through the Family Group Conference process.

“This can be a problem because it is at the FGC stage that an ongoing plan for support for the children can be put in place. Out of the 1324 children in this study less than a third went through this process. We know from experience that there are many vulnerable grandchildren that CYF ought to be supporting with access to professional support and resources, but they don’t get it as they are quickly dispatched into grandparent care and left to fend for themselves,” says Vivian.

This observation is echoed by one of the survey recipients who said ‘CYFS could not wash their hands of us quickly enough. No support whatsoever once they had written the report that convinced the Family Court to allocate the children to my care. I asked for a FGC, but nothing was forthcoming.’

“CYF will call on grandparents to care for these children who have come from abusive, often violent and dangerous circumstances with ‘P’ addicted parents and ask them to get orders through the Family Court which means they also incur high legal costs using their retirement savings or end up with legal aid charges on their properties while the irresponsible parents mostly pay for nothing,” says Vivian.

Nearly half of the survey participants said drug abuse was the reason for the children going into grandparent care and in questions related to whether a diagnosis had been given for a psychological problem or illness 41% of children have had a diagnosis. The majority of the responses ticked were for behavioural issues such as destructive behavior, attachment disorder, conduct disorder, violent or aggressive behaviour, PTSD or anxiety disorder.

“All of these behaviour problems are really challenging for grandparents/kin and they need better support to cope with this. We had hoped that Oranga Tamariki might be the answer, but it is early days yet,” says Vivian.

Only carers who fit the definition of “permanent caregiver” or “special guardianship” under the recent changes to the Children Young Persons and Their Families Act 1989 will have access to the support of the new Permanent Care Support Services (PCSS) that has been set up by the Ministry for Social Development to support vulnerable children under the new agency.

“We are really concerned about this because as our survey findings suggests only about a third of the grandparent/kin carers have got parenting orders fitting these criteria which means that around 12,000 vulnerable children in grandparent care/kin care will miss out on support from this new agency.”

“Despite being overtly disadvantaged as carers, this report also clearly shows the commitment and love these carers have for their grandchildren which somehow gets them through the many challenges. But it is also plain to see that they are not valued or properly supported in raising these vulnerable children. They need better financial support, access to professional support and in many cases to learn trauma-informed care strategies to cope. We hope that in our discussions with the Ministry and the new Oranga Tamariki in future we can address this for the benefit of all our vulnerable mokopuna. They are our future!” says Vivian.

¹. <http://www.cyf.govt.nz/about-us/key-statistics/kids-in-care.html#Distinctchildrenandyoungpeopleinoutofhomeplacements3>

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Please go to www.grg.org.nz to access more information or read the [PDF of the Report here](#).

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