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Grandparents  
plus

We champion the wider  
family who care for children

# Kinship Care

## State of the Nation 2016



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# Executive summary

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41%

of kinship carers are looking after two or more children. Almost half the carers (49%) say they are bringing up at least one child with special needs.

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42%

42% say they or their partner had to give up work when they took on the care of children.

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46%

of kinship carers say their income is not sufficient to meet the children's needs.

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This report is based on the largest ever national survey of kinship carers. It explores the experience of kinship families, and draws comparison with findings from our 2010 Survey What if we said no?<sup>1</sup>

Analysis of 2011 Census data indicates that there are 153,000 children in England being raised by a family member. 51% are living with a grandparent, 23% with an older sibling, and the rest are living with aunts, uncles, cousins and other relatives<sup>2</sup>. These carers are known as 'kinship' or 'family and friends' carers.

## Key findings

- Parental drug or alcohol misuse is the most common reason children are unable to live with their parents. 48% of the children in kinship care have experienced parental abuse or neglect, compared to 28% reported in 2010.
- 41% of kinship carers are looking after two or more children. Almost half the carers (49%) say they are bringing up at least one child with special needs, most commonly emotional and behavioural difficulties (36%). Of these children, 25% have received no specialist help. There appears to be no relationship between a child's needs and their legal status, with a similar proportion of children with special needs under each type of legal agreement.
- At £16,000, the average annual household income of kinship families is well below the national average. 42% say they or their partner had to give up work when they took on the care of children, and 34% rely on benefits as their main source of income. 46% of kinship carers say their income is not sufficient to meet the children's needs.
- There is a rise in the proportion receiving an allowance from their local authority (58% compared to 33%), likely linked to the rise in the use of Special Guardianship Orders (50%, compared to 20% in 2010) as opposed to Child Arrangements Orders (formerly Residence Orders) to formalise kinship care arrangements. Access to financial support is still primarily determined by the legal arrangement in place as opposed to the needs of the child, with only designated foster carers entitled to an allowance.
- 62% of kinship carers say they didn't feel well supported at the time of taking on the care of the children. 82% say Grandparents Plus now supports them with essential information and advice.

## Conclusions and recommendations in brief

- There needs to be greater recognition and support for the vital role of kinship carers in providing stable loving families for children unable to live with birth parents, and greater focus on providing all vulnerable children with the support they need to thrive, irrespective of the type of family they are living in.
- National and local government should ensure kinship carers have adequate financial resources to meet children's needs, and pay allowances to carers based on children's needs irrespective of the legal arrangement in place. Kinship carers should be protected from benefit cuts, and exempt from requirements to seek work.
- Greater efforts should be made to help kinship carers stay in work, including paid and unpaid leave in certain circumstances.
- Local authorities should be required to appoint a designated lead for kinship care to ensure that appropriate support services are available to kinship carers and the children they're caring for. All agencies in contact with children – including schools and health services – should be aware of, and able to signpost kinship families to, available support.
- The views of children in kinship care and their carers should be sought regularly, and should inform practice and the development and delivery of support services.

# Introduction

## Methods

This report is based on a survey of members of the Grandparents Plus Support Network for the wider family raising children.

The survey was carried out in January 2016, using both online and postal questionnaires. 602 responses were received from carers raising over 944<sup>3</sup> children. This is the largest ever survey of kinship carers.

There are some limitations to the sample. Our sample is constituted of members who filled in the survey, therefore it might not reflect the kinship population as a whole. For example, 86% of respondents are grandparents, whilst 51% of kinship children in England<sup>4</sup> are living with a grandparent. It is also clear that ethnic minorities are under-represented: 93% of respondents are White British, whilst in England 80% of the population are White British.

## Kinship care in the UK

The Children and Young People's Act 2008 states that family and friends care should be the first option when children cannot live with their parents. This principle was restated in Statutory Guidance to local authorities on Family and Friends Care, published in April 2011 by the Department for Education.

A growing body of research indicates that many of these children have experienced abuse, neglect and other severe difficulties with parents, have similar needs to 'looked after' children<sup>5</sup>, and would be in the care of the state if their family member had not stepped in to care for them.

Previous Grandparents Plus research indicates that around half the children in kinship care are with their carers because of parental drug or alcohol abuse, and a similar proportion have experienced abuse or neglect with parents. Other common reasons why a child may be living in kinship care include parental death, serious illness or disability (including mental illness), domestic violence, imprisonment and rejection. Around 95% of these children are not 'looked after' by the local authority<sup>6</sup>.

Some kinship children live in informal arrangements, whilst others live under different types of legal arrangements. In recent years there has been a substantial increase in the number of Special Guardianship Orders granted for previously looked after children. In most cases these are made to family members. In 2005/2006, 3% of children in England had ceased to be looked after for a Special Guardianship Order, whilst in 2011/2012, 8% of children left care for a Special Guardianship Order<sup>7</sup>.

A series of court judgements have indicated that local authorities need to give greater regard to family members when looking at long term placements for children who cannot live with birth parents. This is despite Government policy that favours adoption over kinship care for children who have no prospect of returning to birth parents. There are also encouraging signs of growing recognition of the importance of supporting children with Special Guardianship Orders. For example, the Government has introduced support designed to improve educational outcomes for children under Special Guardianship Orders who were previously looked after<sup>8</sup>.

The legal principle that family and friends care should be the first option for children who cannot live with their parents is not underpinned by a statutory entitlement to support. Research indicates that for children in kinship care there is no relationship between their needs and the financial support their carers receive, which is determined by the legal status of their living arrangements<sup>9</sup>. Only children living with kinship carers who are approved family and friends foster carers have a legal entitlement to financial and practical support, and for other kinship families support is discretionary and usually means tested. Whilst many of those living in kinship care under Special Guardianship Orders do receive some kind of support, others receive no support at all from local authorities and their carers are often dependent on the welfare benefits system.

Many kinship carers struggle on very low incomes, below the poverty line<sup>10</sup>. A typical Grandparents Plus Network member is a grandmother aged 55 or over, often with a long term health condition. Stepping in to raise a child will often have a significant impact on her finances, employment status, relationships and wellbeing. Our annual survey aims to show how kinship carers and the children they are bringing up are faring and how the demands of raising kinship children impact on carer's lives.

In this year's survey we explore how well supported kinship carers feel. We also look at their financial situation. Finally, we ask questions about children's relationships with their parents and kinship carers' concerns about their ability to support those relationships.

Uniquely, kinship carers find themselves in the middle of a complicated web of relationships, in between the children they are raising and the parents who cannot do so. Even when children are no longer living with parents, their early experiences with their parents can have profound and far reaching effects on their psychological wellbeing, their ability to regulate their emotions, develop healthy relationships and enjoy successful lives<sup>11</sup>.

Kinship carers' capacity to support children's ongoing relationships with parents, to help them make sense of their experiences and to enable them to feel safe and loved will influence their wellbeing both now and in adulthood.

# About the children

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# 49%

of the carers are raising children with special needs.

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# 52%

of children are in kinship care as a result of parents misusing drugs and alcohol.

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In this section we look at the needs of the kinship children being raised by the carers who responded to our survey, and the reasons why they are in kinship care. We also report findings on Court Orders, professional support children have received and how long they have been in kinship care.

## Children with disabilities or special needs

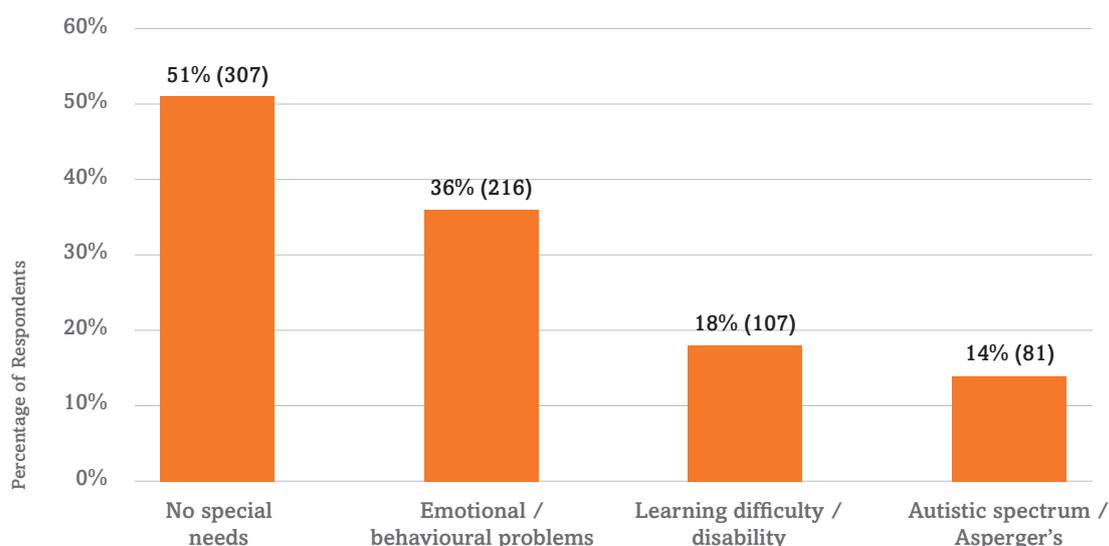
Almost half of the carers say they are raising children with special needs (49%). More than a third (36%) are raising children with emotional and behavioural problems, one in five (18%) are raising a child with a learning difficulty or disability, and one in six (14%) say they have a child on the autistic spectrum. This is very similar to the picture reported by carers in our 2010 survey when 48% said they were raising one or more children with special needs. 55% say the children have received specialist support of some kind<sup>12</sup>.

22% of all kinship carers disagree with the statement that the children are getting the support they need for healthy emotional and social development.

*'I have been bringing up the children since June 2008. The youngest child has a test this week for ADHD and Asperger's syndrome, also attachment disorder due to his time with his mother.'* *Widow caring for her two grandchildren.*

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Graph 1: Prevalence of special needs



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# 48%

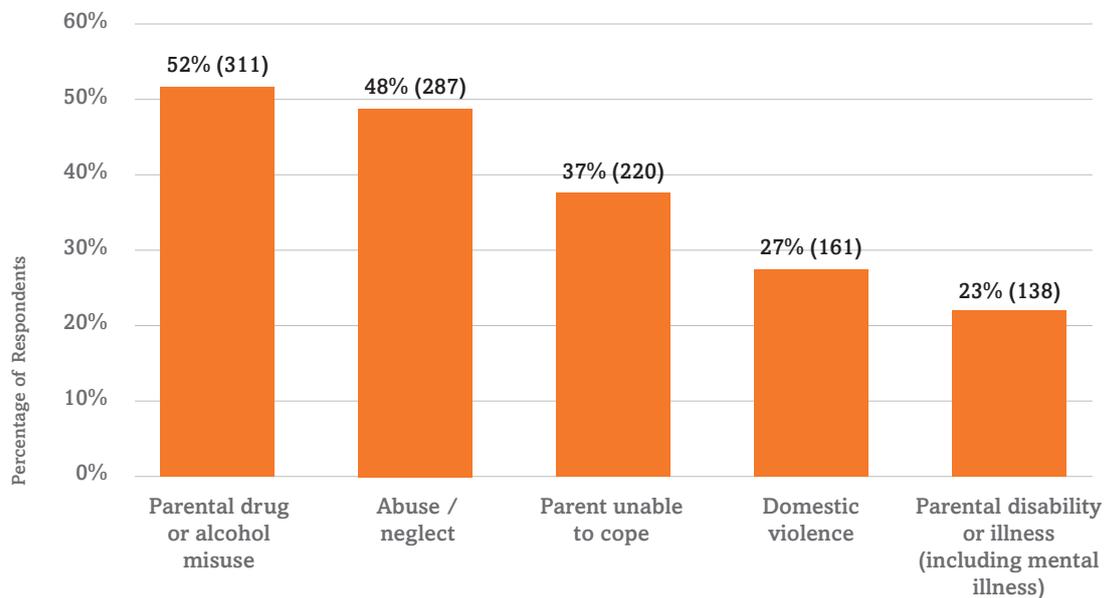
of the children experienced abuse or neglect from parents.

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## Reasons why children are living in kinship care

More than half of survey respondents say that children are in kinship care as a result of parents misusing drugs and alcohol (52%). Almost half of the children experienced abuse or neglect from parents (48%)<sup>13</sup>. This is a sharp increase compared to 2010 when only 28% reported abuse. The two factors are often interlinked, as parents who are misusing drugs or alcohol are more likely to abuse or neglect their children.<sup>14</sup> Other commonly cited reasons why children are in kinship care are that the parents could not cope with the children (37%), domestic violence (27%) and parental disability, illness or ill mental health (23%).

Graph 2: Primary reason why children are unable to live with their parents



**50%**

of kinship carers who responded to the survey have a Special Guardianship Order, compared to 20% in 2010.

### Legal status

The survey finds a sharp increase in the proportion of kinship carers with Special Guardianship Orders, and a decline in the proportion with Residence Orders/Child Arrangements Orders.

50% of kinship carers who responded to the survey have a Special Guardianship Order, compared to 20% in 2010<sup>15</sup>. Special Guardianship Orders came into effect in 2005 and give the Special Guardian parental responsibility for the child and enable carers to override the views of parents if necessary<sup>16</sup>.

Residence Orders (created in 1989) were replaced in April 2014 by Child Arrangements Orders<sup>17</sup>. Child Arrangements Orders determine where the child lives, and may also specify details of the child's contact with their parents, including when the child spends time with each parent and other contact such as by phone. It gives shared parental responsibility to the carer and the parents. In our sample, 36% of carers have a Child Arrangements Order or a Residence Order. In 2010, 59% had a Residence Order.

13% of carers say they have no legal order for the kinship children they are raising (20% in 2010).

9% of the kinship carers in our survey are foster carers, almost double the proportion found in the analysis of 2001 census data (4% in our 2010 survey). Kinship foster carers do not have parental responsibility<sup>18</sup>, which is held by the local authority and the parents. The local authority must pay the carer an allowance which is at least the level of the national minimum fostering allowance.

The survey finds no evidence of any relationship between children's needs and legal order, with the same proportion of children with special needs under different legal arrangements.

**70%**

of carers raising a child with special needs receive no allowance from their local authority.

### Financial allowances

Previous research has indicated that kinship carers bringing up children who are not looked after face difficulties accessing financial and practical support<sup>20</sup>. In this survey we found that 70% of respondents with a Special Guardianship Order get an allowance and 36% of respondents with a Residence Order and Child Arrangements Order. However 40% of carers raising a child with special needs receive no allowance from their local authority. This adds to the evidence that there is little, if any, relationship between children's needs and allowances, which are instead linked to legal status.

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# 40%

of respondents with a Special Guardianship Order get an allowance.

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# 43%

say the children have received no help.

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*'We received no support as it's a private arrangement.'* Grandmother raising one grandchild.

*'They say it's a private arrangement, it's not. Still trying to get an allowance. Was told by our social worker that we would get one but then when we applied we were turned down.'* Grandmother raising one grandchild.

### Professional support

We asked the carers about any support the children have received to help to overcome their difficulties.

43% say the children have received no help. Half of carers (52%) disagree with the statement that they are getting the support they need to bring up the children. 22% of kinship carers who are raising children with special needs say they have received no help. 25% of carers say the children they are raising have received counselling, 21% have had support from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

Schools often play a supportive role in the children's lives. Half of kinship carers (53%) agree that the children are getting the support they need to learn and achieve at school<sup>21</sup>, only 18% disagree. 28% are getting specialist educational support. In the 2014 Grandparents Plus survey, 29% said they turned to a teacher to help them deal with a kinship child's emotional needs.

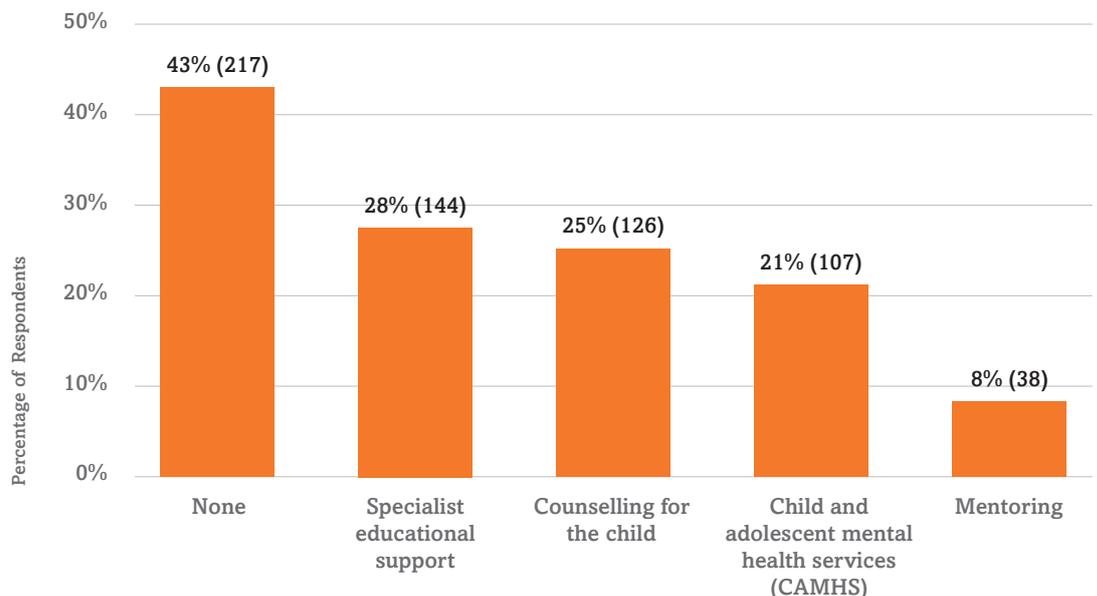
*'One child needed counselling and received it through school, she has benefitted immensely from this. The high school also give the two girls mentors to go to if any problems occur.'* Grandmother raising three grandchildren with special needs.

### Length of time in kinship care

Half (53%) of the respondents to the survey have been looking after the children for more than five years (38% in 2010). 15% have been looking after the children for up to two years. The low numbers of kinship carers who have looked after children for up to two years might be due to the fact that people who have only recently taken on the care of children are less likely to be members of our Support Network.

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Graph 3: Support received by the children



# About the carers

62%

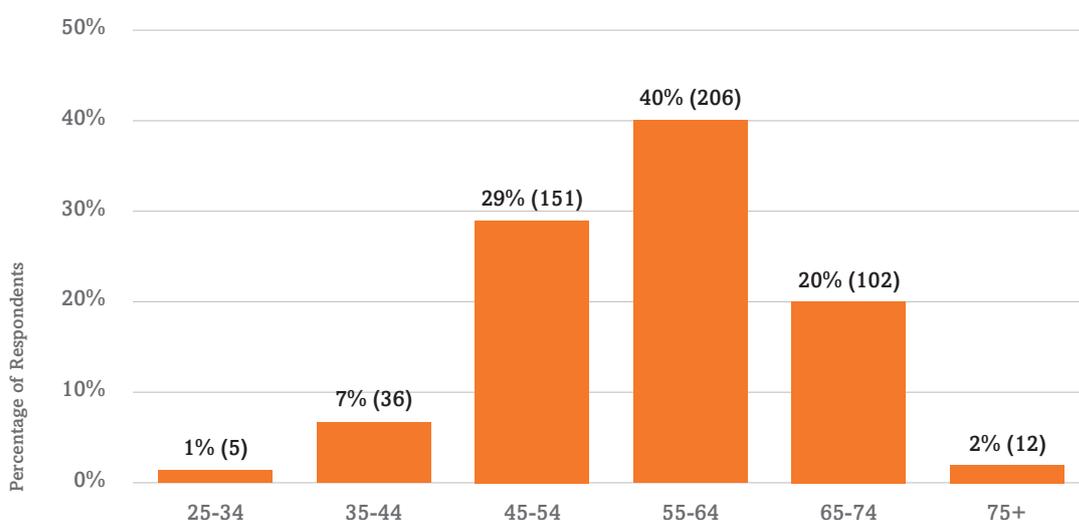
62% are aged 55 plus (58% in 2010), 22% are aged 65 plus.

## Demographics

There are 602 respondents in the 2016 survey, our highest number of responses to date. 86% of respondents are grandparents (96% in 2010). 93% are white British (96% in 2010) and 85% are female.

The respondents tend to be older: 62% are aged 55 plus (58% in 2010), 22% are aged 65 plus. Many kinship carers also suffer from poor health: 42% have a disability or a long-term health condition (60% in 2010).

Graph 4: Caregiver age



42%

42% have a disability or a long-term health condition.

## Multiple responsibilities

Around four in 10 of kinship carers (41%) are looking after two or more children, a similar proportion to 2010. 15% are looking after three or more children. Almost half (49%) are looking after at least one child with special needs.

One in three are lone carers (34%), and two thirds (66%) are living with a partner. 27% are also providing care for someone else, for example their own children, their partner or an older relative.

Many kinship carers tell us they find it difficult to cope. 59% say they are not getting the emotional support they need. 40% say that in general they do not feel respected for their role as a kinship carer.

27%

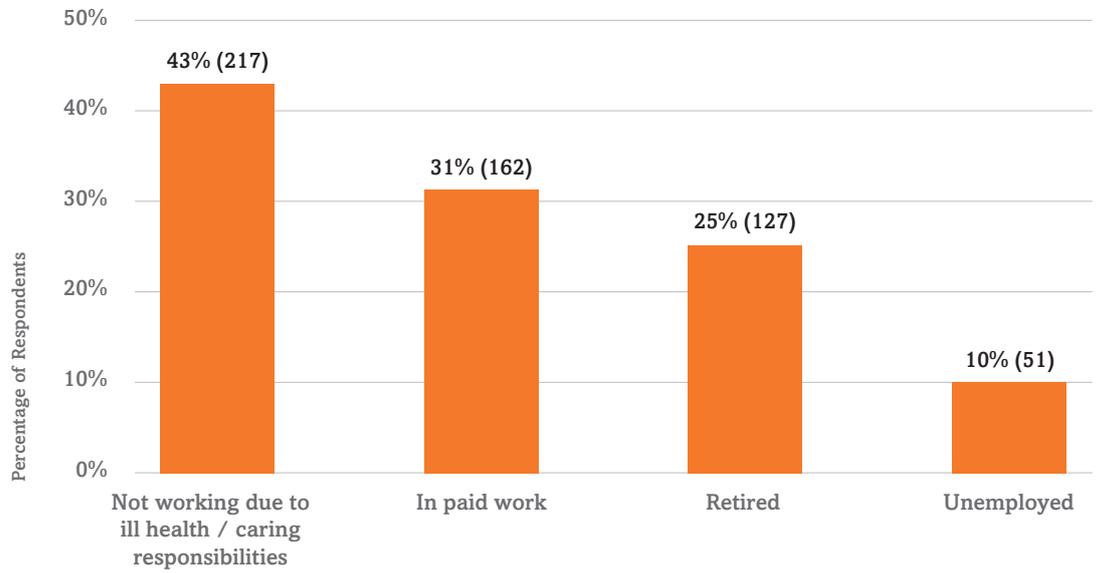
27% are also providing care for someone else.

## Employment and worklessness

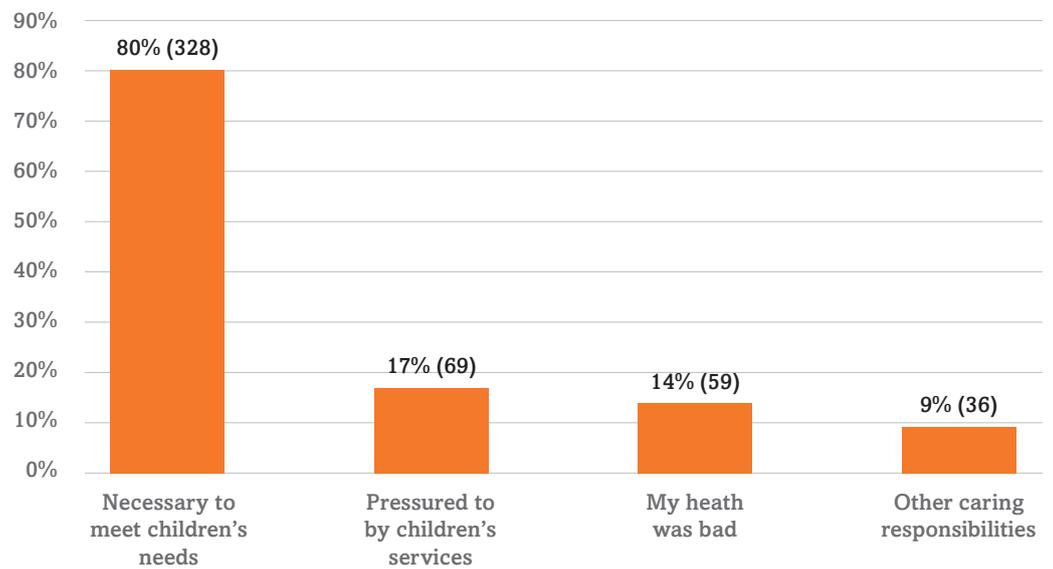
Half of kinship households in our survey have no working adult. Only a third of kinship carers who responded to the survey are working (31%). 33% are not working due to ill health or caring responsibilities. 25% are retired. This is a smaller proportion than in 2010, when more than a third (36%) were retired, reflecting delayed retirement and the increase in the state retirement age for women. 34% rely on benefits as their main source of income (33% in 2010).

42% of carers or their partners who were working gave up work when they took on the children, compared with 28% of carers in 2010. 28% say they or their partner reduced their hours to care for the child. 80% of those who stopped working say they felt it was necessary to meet the children's needs, 17% felt pressured to do so by children's services.

Graph 5: Employment status



Graph 6: Reasons why kinship carer gave up work



*'My husband will retire in three months- significant drop in income again. I gave up work to care for the children. I was the main breadwinner.'* Grandmother raising two grandchildren.

*'We get by but had to give up well paid jobs and sacrifice pension provision. What will happen when the girls are over 18?'* Grandparents raising four grandchildren.

### Carers on low income<sup>22</sup>

This survey adds to the weight of evidence indicating that many kinship families are managing on low incomes or are living in poverty. The average equivalised median income of kinship<sup>23</sup> carers in our survey is £313 a week compared to the UK equivalised median average of £453<sup>24</sup>. The average annual household income for our kinship carers is approximately £16,000.

30% are on council tax benefit (which is an indicator of low income).

*'We get child benefit and child tax credits but this doesn't even cover school costs (travel, lunches, uniform, equipment, trips) let alone everything else he needs.'* Grandparents raising their grandson.

*'I have had my eldest granddaughter for 14 years, and youngest for 10 years, and I have had to fight through court for allowance. As of last year they started to pay me with no back payments.'* Grandmother raising two grandchildren.

Graph 7: Weekly household income



37%

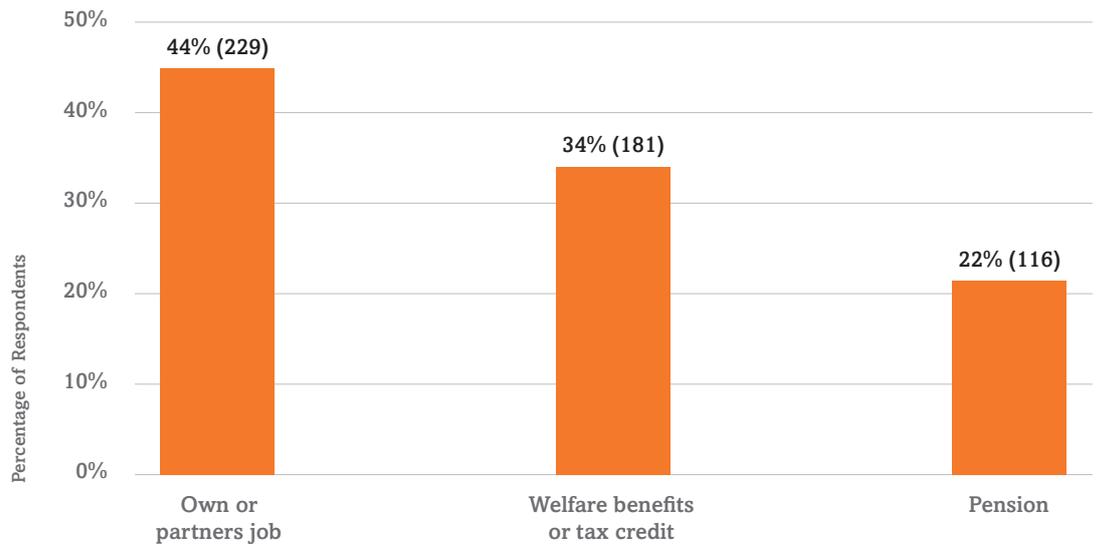
of respondents are below the UK Relative Low Income Threshold.

Kinship families in our survey are two and half times as likely to be poor as families in the general population. 37% of respondents are below the UK Relative Low Income Threshold<sup>25</sup>, compared to 15% of the general population.

### Income sources

Compared with 2010, kinship carers in our 2016 survey seem more likely to be dependent on benefits as their main source of income, and fewer appear to rely a pension as their main source of income. 44% say their main source of income is their or their partner's job (48% in 2010 said income from a job was a main source of income). 34% rely on benefits as their main source of income (same as in 2010).

Graph 8: Main source of family income



**58%**

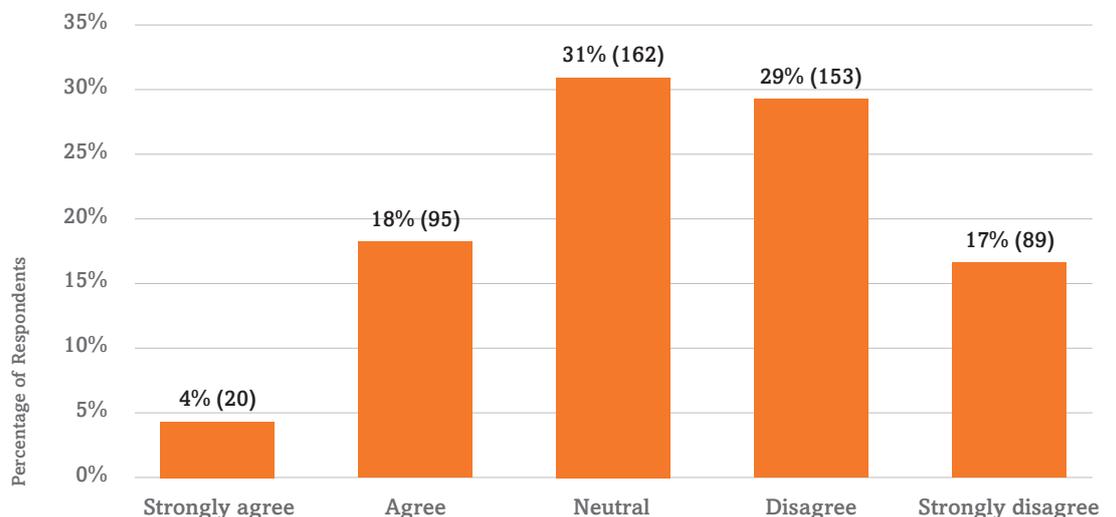
of respondents are getting a regular financial allowance from their local authority, compared to 33% in 2010.

58% of respondents are getting a regular financial allowance from their local authority, compared to 33% in 2010.

### Perception of adequacy of income

Almost half (46%) of kinship carers who responded to the survey disagree with the statement that their income is sufficient to meet the children's needs.

Graph 9: My Income is sufficient to meet the children's needs



<sup>13</sup> The questions were asked slightly differently in 2010 and 2016.

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say they are using savings and 75% are worried about retirement.

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32% say they are finding it difficult to make ends meet, compared with 41% in 2010 who said they were struggling financially. Kinship carers with a regular allowance from the local authority were less likely to say they were finding it difficult to make ends meet, with 25% saying they were struggling.

54% say they are using savings and 75% are worried about retirement.

*'Financial advice and support is still an ongoing issue with local authorities finding it all too easy to omit advising what you should be or could be getting.'* *Divorced grandmother bringing up one child.*

### Financial support for kinship carers with Special Guardianship Orders

Kinship carers with a Special Guardianship Order have a median income of £333 a week compared to £313 a week for all kinship carers who responded to the survey, but remain significantly below the UK average of £453<sup>26</sup>. In our survey, 70% of kinship carers with a Special Guardianship Order are getting a regular financial allowance from their local authority.

36% of kinship carers who are Special Guardians say their income is not sufficient to meet the children's needs compared to 46% of all kinship carers.

Despite the fact that Special Guardians seem to be marginally better off than carers on other types of orders, several people expressed concerns about the Special Guardianship Order allowances being means-tested:

*'When we fostered our granddaughter we were entitled to a kinship foster care allowance, but now as special guardians our allowance is means-tested, even though we are doing the same job.'* *Grandmother raising one child.*

*'I get a Special Guardianship Order allowance. This is based on income but not based on what we have had to give up work wise and the things we have to buy to accommodate the children.'* *Grandmother raising one child.*

### Support when children move in

Most kinship carers (62%) didn't feel adequately supported at the time of taking on the care of the children.

*'I bought a cot, bed, high chair etc. myself and social workers just interfered rather than helped. Any help I asked for was seen as a weakness and unable to cope.'* *Single grandmother raising a grandchild with special needs.*

*'I was given the child and left to get on with it.'* *Divorced grandmother bringing up one grandchild.*

*'The police brought the child, social services came a week later and said 'the child is safe with you' and they were closing the case. We were left with a suicidal child, no legal rights and no help, we had to find out everything ourselves.'* *Grandparents raising one grandchild with special needs.*

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didn't feel adequately supported at the time of taking on the care of the children.

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82%

say Grandparents Plus provides essential information and advice.

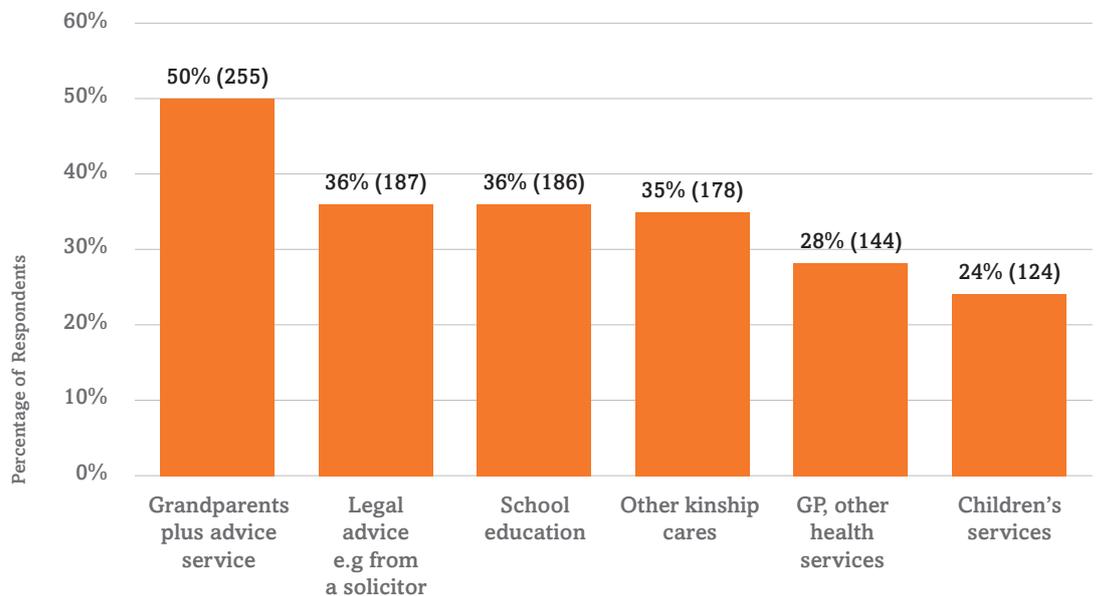
### Access to information and advice

82% say Grandparents Plus provides essential information and advice. Of the 69% of kinship carers who say they needed practical advice and information, half (50%) turned to the Grandparents Plus Advice Service, 36% sought advice from schools and 35% turned to other kinship carers.

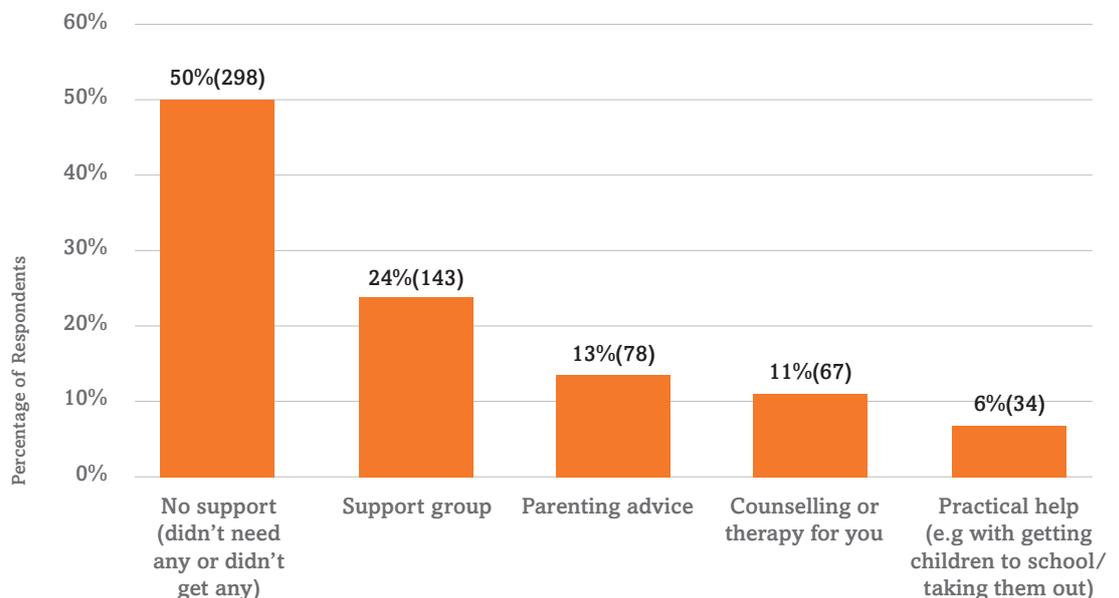
*'Thank you. For over 10 years you have always been there with help and advice. Forever grateful.'* Widowed grandmother raising two grandchildren.

*'Grandparents Plus has been an invaluable source of information. They are literally the only ones I can turn to for advice. Statutory services have been terrible and left me completely in the dark with regards to the children's entitlements.'* Grandmother raising three grandchildren with special needs.

Graph 10: Sources of advice and information used



Graph 11: Support received by the carers



# Relationships with the children's parents

73%

of carers say the children have contact with their mothers.

34%

say contact with the mother is beneficial.

In this section we look at relationships with the children's mothers and fathers and the Court Orders stipulating the terms of contact.

73% of carers say the children have contact with their mothers, and half (47%) have contact with their fathers. In the majority of cases, kinship carers say contact is neutral or beneficial.

However, contact can trigger a range of painful emotional responses in children, and some children are re-traumatised by contact, particularly where parents are unable to meet their needs. These may include parents who let them down by failing to turn up for contact, parents who ignore them and parents who are drunk or high on drugs. It is clear that some kinship carers find managing contact difficult and would welcome more support with this vital aspect of their role from professionals.

Lack of contact can also be a source of distress and difficulty, for example where a parent has died or rejected the child. A child who has experienced difficulties in their early lives with birth parents may have problems forming new relationships, including with kinship carers. They are also at increased risk of emotional and behavioural difficulties. Kinship carers may need help in understanding the emotional and developmental impact of these experiences on the child and how best to support them.

## Contact with the mother

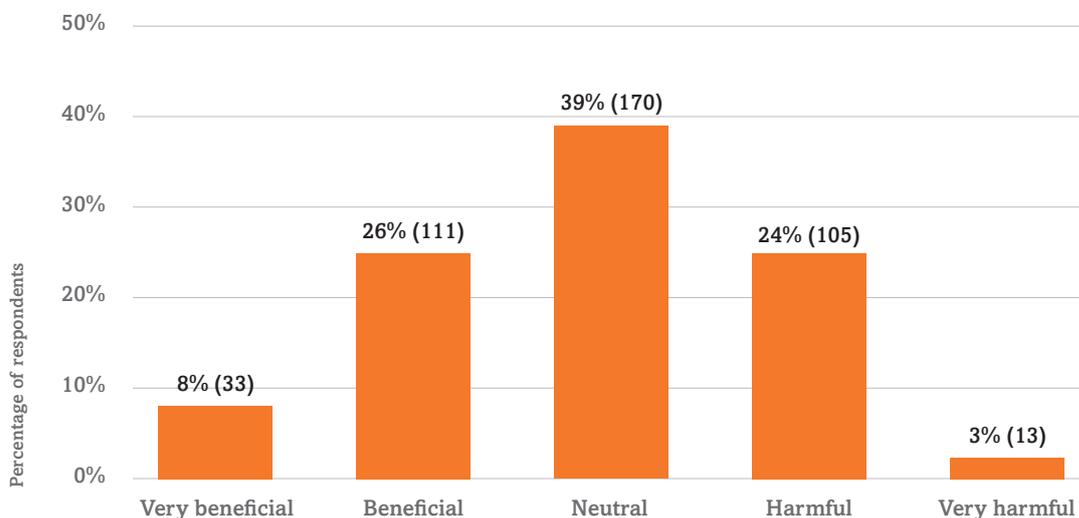
73% of carers say the children have contact with their mother. 39% of carers describe the contact as neutral, and 34% say it is beneficial. However, of those who say children have contact, a quarter (27%) report contact with the mother as harmful or very harmful. In the minority of cases where kinship carers say contact is harmful for children, this is because the mother is unreliable and lets the children down, because the child is upset before or after seeing the mother, or because the mother behaves insensitively or unkindly towards the child.

Kinship carers are more likely to report that the children are upset or behave in a way they find challenging after contact with the mother compared with after contact with the father.

*'Because of early trauma my two kinship kids are affected so whenever they see mum it all comes back.'* Grandparent raising one child.

*The youngest child sees his mother once every two weeks and is very irritable and unsettled on return. He is only 15 months.'* Grandmother raising three grandchildren.

Graph 12: How would you describe contact with the mother?



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In **44%**

of cases, carers say contact with the father is beneficial.

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### Contact with the father

Under half of the carers (47%) say the children have contact with the father. In 44% of cases, carers say contact is beneficial, and neutral in 37% of cases.

For one in five (20%) of these children, contact is harmful or very harmful.

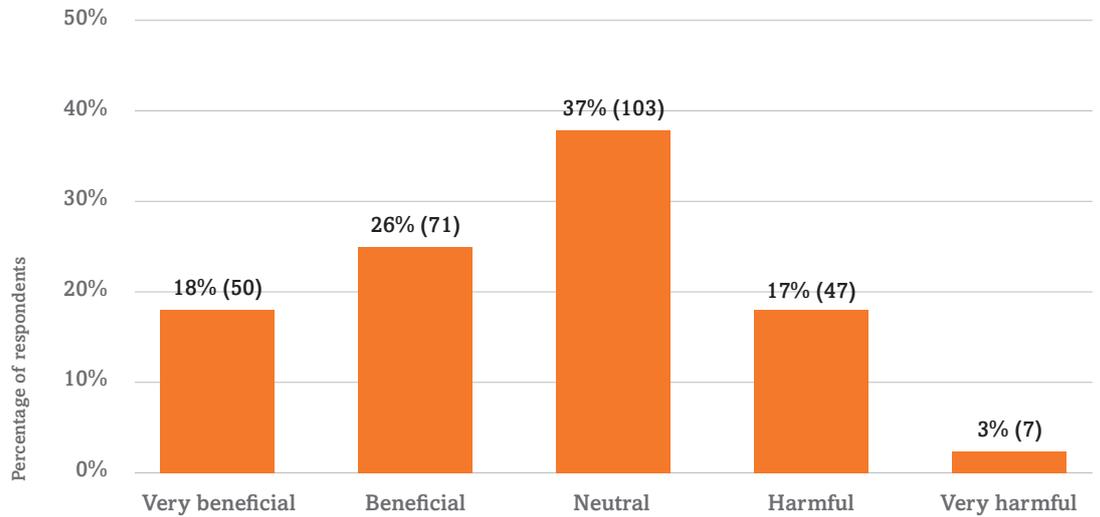
In the minority of cases where kinship carers report that contact is a problem, it is usually because the father is unreliable and lets the child down, because the child is upset before or after seeing the father, or because the father is drunk or affected by drugs when they see the child.

*'There has been contact but now stopped due to non-molestation order. My son takes drugs and has a mental illness.'* Grandparent raising one child.

*'Dad made threats to snatch from centre.'* Grandmother raising two children.

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Graph 13: How would you describe contact with the father



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**68%**

of all survey respondents would like advice on how to help the children cope with their relationship with their parents.

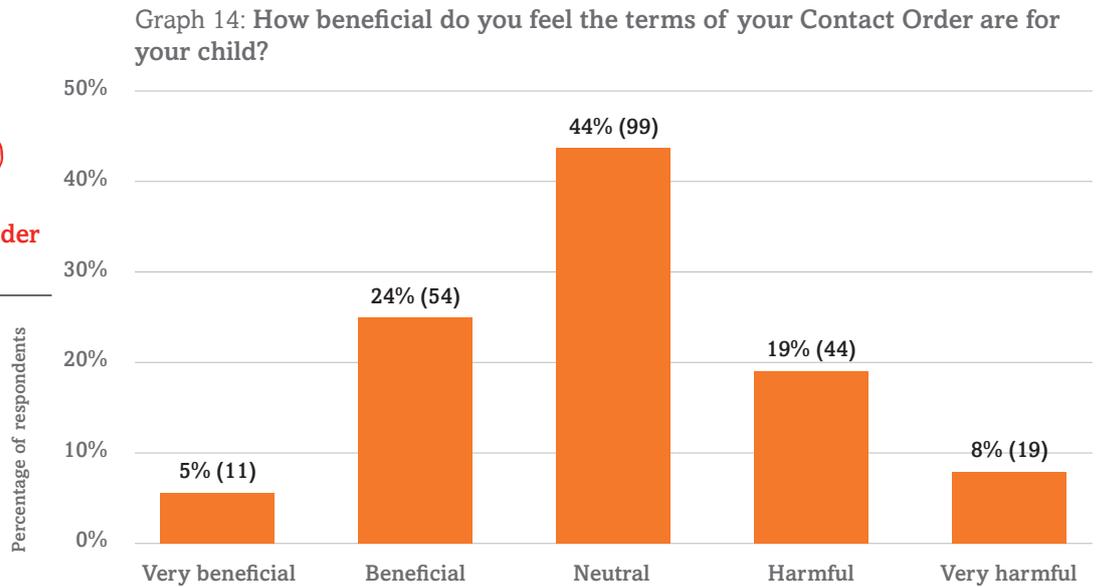
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### Difficulty of supporting relationships with the parents

The relationship with the parents is an area of difficulty for many kinship carers. Two thirds (68%) of all survey respondents would like advice on how to help the children cope with their relationship with their parents, and almost half (45%) would like help on what to do if contact is not beneficial to the children.

27%

feel the terms of the court order are harmful or very harmful.



40% of those who responded to the survey say they have a Court Order specifying arrangements for contact with both or one of the parents. Of those with a Court Order, 44% feel the terms of their Court Order are neutral. However almost a quarter (27%) feel the terms of the Court Order are harmful or very harmful. This is cause for concern, as Court Orders should be in place to protect the child's interests.

*'There is phone contact only by order of court. The mother is often slurring, drunk, on drugs, not on this planet to be able to speak with a child.'* Divorced grandmother looking after one grandchild.

*'I have found the stress of trying to do siblings' contact through a Court Order, parent contact (with my daughter) and the knock-on effect on my other children and grandchildren very overlooked. I am currently taking court action so my granddaughter can see her siblings. The accusations the father has made about me are exhausting and I feel the system doesn't care about the mental issues kinship carers have.'* Grandmother raising her special needs granddaughter.

# Conclusions

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A large, hand-drawn number '27%' in red, with a slightly rough, sketchy texture. The percentage sign is also hand-drawn and integrated with the number.

of children with special needs are getting no support.

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## Children's needs

The survey of our Support Network finds that most children in kinship care have experienced serious adversities and trauma with birth parents before moving in with carers, and more than half experienced abuse and neglect. Almost half (49%) of kinship carers in our survey are raising a child with special needs, unchanged since 2010 (48%). Many carers say they have difficulty accessing the support they need, and one in five (20%) of children with special needs are getting no support.

## Carers

The demographic profile of kinship carers in our survey has aged since 2010, with 62% aged over 55 compared with 58% in 2010, and 22% aged over 65 compared with 12% in 2010. However fewer are retired – a quarter (25%) compared with 36% in 2010, reflecting later retirement and entitlement to the State Pension for women. In 2010 the state retirement age for women was 60, it is now almost 64.

Most respondents (86%) are grandparents, but a lower proportion than in 2010 (96%), reflecting a broadening of our Support Network to include more aunts, uncles and other relatives.

## Legal status and financial allowances

Many more kinship carers who responded to the survey have Special Guardianship Orders (50% compared to 20% in 2010). A third of carers (32%) have either a Residence Order or a Child Arrangement Order compared with 59% in 2010. However, we find no evidence of any relationship between children's needs and the legal status of the living arrangement. Many children with emotional and behavioural difficulties are living with carers under Residence Orders, Child Arrangement Orders or no legal order.

There has been a big increase in the proportion receiving a financial allowance from the local authority, from 33% in 2010 to 58% in 2016. However 40% of carers raising a child with special needs receive no allowance from their local authority.

## Income and employment

Despite the increase in those getting financial allowances, 37% are managing on incomes below the poverty line of 60% median equivalised income, and 48% say they don't feel they are getting the financial support they need. For kinship carers who do receive a regular financial allowance, the proportion who say they don't feel they get the financial support they need is lower – at 28%. However half of kinship carers with an allowance (51%) say they are using savings to manage and 77% are worried about their retirement.

34% of kinship carers are dependent on welfare benefits for their main source of income, often because they or their partner gave up work to take on the care of children. Fewer kinship carers appear to be in receipt of a pension than in 2010 even though they are older. Kinship carers have been particularly disadvantaged by the sharp rise in the state pension age for women, and by increased conditionality requirements for welfare benefits, because so many of them have to give up work when they take on care of children. In this survey, in line with other surveys, we found that nearly half of those who were working (42%) say either they or their partner had to give up their job. Kinship carers, unlike adoptive parents, have no legal entitlement to take leave from work when they take on the care of children, and for older kinship carers especially, it is difficult for them to re-enter the labour market.

Despite the welcome increase in the proportion receiving financial allowances, it is clear that allowances are failing to protect kinship carers against the impact of a range of policy changes, including the increased State Pension age and reductions in welfare benefit entitlement affecting many carers.

Of particular concern is the impact of these changes on kinship carers looking after children under Residence Orders, Child Arrangements Orders or no legal order who are not receiving financial allowances. This survey found, reinforcing other research findings, that there is no relationship between legal status and children's needs, and some of the most vulnerable children are being looked after by informal carers without a legal order or with a Residence Order and with no financial support in place.

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A large, hand-drawn number '37%' in red, with a slightly rough, sketchy texture. The percentage sign is also hand-drawn and integrated with the number.

of kinship carers are managing on incomes below the poverty line.

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### **Children's relationships with their parents**

Three quarters of kinship carers (73%) said that children have contact with their mother, and half (47%) said they have contact with their father. In most cases the carers report that this contact is either beneficial or neutral for the children. However in a quarter of cases where children have contact with mothers, carers felt this was harmful for children, because the mother is unreliable, insensitive or unkind toward the children or because the children find contact upsetting. In a fifth of cases where children have contact with their fathers carers felt this was harmful for children. Of particular concern is the fact that a quarter of carers (27%) looking after children with a Court Order specifying contact between parents and children felt the terms of the order were harmful to the children.

Two thirds of carers say they would like advice on how to help children cope with their relationship with their parents.

# Recommendations

National and local government should recognise and support the vital role of kinship carers in providing stable loving families for children unable to live with birth parents, and ensure that all vulnerable children receive the support they need to thrive, irrespective of the type of family they are living in.

## Financial allowances and welfare benefits

1. National and local government should ensure that kinship carers have adequate financial resources to meet children's needs and enjoy a decent standard of living, i.e. above the UK Relative Low Income Threshold.
2. Kinship carers should be protected from welfare benefit cuts, including the benefit cap, which risk propelling families into poverty. When kinship carers need to stay at home to provide for the needs of the children, they should be exempted from requirements to seek work, in the same way as foster carers.
3. Local authorities should pay financial allowances to kinship carers to cover the costs of raising a child, based on the child's needs, including to carers with a Residence Order or a Child Arrangements Order.

## Employment protection

4. Kinship carers applying for a Special Guardianship Order should be entitled to paid leave equivalent to adoption leave when they take on the care of a child. This would give kinship carers time to settle the children, and reduce the large number who have to give up their jobs in order to meet the child's needs.
5. All kinship carers should be entitled to unpaid adjustment leave, to enable them to deal with crises including when children first move in, so that they can take time off to meet the children's needs without the need to give up work.

## Access to advice, information, support and training

6. Every local authority should be required under primary legislation to appoint a designated lead for kinship care, and to ensure that appropriate support services are available for kinship carers and the children they are caring for, including counselling, advice, information, training and peer support groups to meet families' needs, irrespective of the type of legal arrangement.
7. All kinship families should be able to access support with managing contact and helping children's relationships with their parents.
8. The remit of virtual schools and designated teachers should be extended to include all children growing up in kinship care. Kinship carers should be offered suitable information and training to enable them to support their children's education.
9. The views of children in kinship care and their carers should be sought and should inform practice and the development and delivery of support services.
10. 10. As part of a process of assessing local needs every local authority should be required to collect data on the number of children in family and friends care in their area.

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- <sup>13</sup> 287 out of 598 for that question
- <sup>14</sup> Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs, 2004, Hidden harm: responding to the needs of children and problem drug users. London: Crown Copyright
- <sup>15</sup> In 2011 the figures were 44% drug and alcohol, 37% abuse / 2013 45% abuse, 44% drugs and alcohol.
- <sup>16</sup> Special Guardianship Guidance, February 2016, DfE  
[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/503547/special\\_guardianship\\_guidance.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/503547/special_guardianship_guidance.pdf)
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see also Guidance for local authorities, Family and Friends Care, 2010, DfE  
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- <sup>18</sup> Some of the carers in our sample who say the children are under a care order are not receiving financial allowances. This could be because the carers wrongly believe the child is under a care order and in reality falls under a Residence Order or Child Arrangements Order
- <sup>19</sup> Selwyn, J. & Farmer, E., 2012, The Poor Relations, *ibid*
- <sup>20</sup> See Appendix one: views and attitudes of kinship carers 2016
- <sup>21</sup> Data on income tends to be less reliable as fewer respondents answer questions relating to how much they earn and respondents may incorrectly report their income. Here we have asked for respondents' household income including benefits and after tax.
- <sup>22</sup> Equivalised median income calculated using Households Below Average Income (HBAI) equation. (Equivalisation adjusts income based on household size). Calculation is as follows:
- <sup>23</sup> Respondent household Income/(0.67(respondent)+(0.33(if respondent married/living with partner)+(0.2\* Number of children in the household (kinship children+ own children))). The HBAI weights children below 14 at 0.2, and children 14 and over at 0.33 – since GP+ survey did not survey children's age all children treated as under 14.
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- <sup>25</sup> Below 60% of median income (£272/w). The UK Relative Low Income Threshold is calculated at 60% of the UK's average (median) equivalised median income. In 2013-2014 the UK equivalised median weekly income was calculated to be £453, making the low income threshold £272.

# Appendix 1: Views and attitudes of kinship carers 2016

The following benchmarking questions will be repeated annually, to measure change over time.

How strongly do you feel about these statements?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	N/A
I got the support I needed when the children first moved in	5%	16%	16%	24%	38%	
I am getting the financial support I need	5%	26%	21%	19%	29%	
I am getting the emotional support I need now	2%	13%	26%	30%	29%	
Overall, I am getting the support I need to bring up the children now	2%	16%	29%	30%	23%	
I am respected as a kinship carer	8%	21%	32%	25%	15%	
I am getting the information and advice I need for bringing up the children	1%	16%	35%	28%	19%	
The children are getting the support they need to learn and achieve at school	14%	39%	22%	10%	8%	6%
The children are getting the support they need for healthy emotional and social development	13%	35%	26%	12%	10%	4%
My income is sufficient to meet the children's needs	4%	18%	31%	29%	17%	

## About Grandparents Plus

Grandparents Plus is the national charity which champions the vital role of grandparents and the wider family in children's lives– especially when they take on the caring role in difficult family circumstances and when they have lost contact with children. We do this because we want to make children's lives better.

Our Family and Friends Advice Line  
(0300 123 7015 ) is open between 10am and 3pm  
Monday to Friday.



We champion the wider  
family who care for children

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