



Kinship Care
COVID-19
Impact Report
July 2020

Context

Grandparents Plus - tracking kinship carers experiences and concerns during COVID-19

Informed by the stories we hear from our front-line work and our monthly surveys; we are building an evolving picture of what it is like to be a kinship carer during these unprecedented times. By continuously tracking the mood, experiences and fears of kinship carers throughout this journey we are on together, we can respond - as a charity and as a wider sector to better meet their needs.

Why us?

At **Grandparents Plus** we are uniquely placed to understand what kinship carers are feeling and thinking. Our project workers are in kinship families' homes on a daily basis supporting them with their day to day problems. Our advice team is talking to 15 kinship carers a day, guiding them through a huge range of complex personal and practical issues. Our community of over 7,000 kinship carers are extremely engaged in our work and we consult with them regularly on how they are doing. And our vocal social media communities of over 10,000 people reveal the very real fears and frustrations of a wider kinship community.

How we use the information gathered through our consultations and wider work

As the kinship care charity, Grandparents Plus is responding to the concerns and experiences shared, by developing advice, guidance and support to meet them. Our **Kinship Response** service, currently being used by 62 local authorities gives special guardians access to support, still delivered by our expert project and advice workers, but now delivered online, via apps and over the phone, including guidance for carers on how to set up and use these new technologies to get support and stay connected.

We also use this information to inform and strengthen our communications with decision makers to make sure that the issues facing kinship carers are raised at local and national levels and help ensure that kinship families get the recognition and support they need.



Summary

Kinship carer COVID-19 consultation #3: June 2020

Date of survey: 8-18 June

Number of respondents: 108

Summary of key concerns

- Kinship carers are struggling financially and emotionally with the impact of lockdown restrictions
- They are worried about the best course of action when it comes to schools reopening
- There remains strong concern about the easing of restrictions too early



How this has changed from first COVID-19 consultations

Our first COVID19 consultation was carried out on 18 March as the lockdown was first being rolled out. At this time many carers with additional health concerns were already self-isolating but schools were still open. There was considerable anxiety around what would happen to the carer if they contracted COVID19 and who would look after the children.

Our second consultation was carried out at the beginning of May. At this time the lockdown was into its 6th - 7th weeks and suggestions about easing restrictions and schools opening to more pupils were starting to become more pronounced. The results of this survey showed the exhaustion felt by carers, their concerns over the well-being of the children in their care and their practical difficulties in home-schooling. There was also a return to the anxiety felt in the first survey of the impact of Covid-19 on them and their families if the easing of lockdown happened too soon.

This consultation was carried out between 8 and 18 June. At this point, the lockdown had become less restrictive with people who couldn't work from home being encouraged to go back to work, an increase in the amount of time people could spend outdoors and discussions of further easing.

The results of the previous surveys can be read here: [March](#) | [May](#).

Key concerns

Kinship carers concerns and experiences during COVID-19 lockdown: June 2020

The impact on kinship carers

Carers are now digging deep financially, emotionally and practically. After over 12 weeks of juggling work responsibilities with child care and home-schooling, trying to stay on budget while coping with the needs of a family at home all the time, carers have had enough.

We asked kinship carers if they had a message for the people in power and, if so, what? they told us:

“Yes. Remember us first next time. Get the support in place quicker.”

“Don't forget us and look at all of us. Many of us seem to fall through the net under all circumstances because our children somehow didn't meet the criteria of previously looked after and yet they have the same needs and issues.”

“... We are the forgotten carers.”

87% (94 carers) said they have been affected emotionally, mentioning feeling stressed, isolated, tired and trapped.

57% (62 carers) have experienced practical issues, struggling with work and childcare, trying to do the shopping and filling the gaps left by the lack of activities for their children without a break or respite.

60% (65 carers) told us their financial situation has got worse, with some telling us they are now using their savings for day to day expenditure.

The impact on children in kinship care

71% (77 carers) say their children are struggling with the lack of routine, missing friends and family and not being able to do their usual activities.

42% (45 carers) believe their children's mental health and behaviour has worsened as a result of lockdown.

“My granddaughter suffers with bad anxiety more at night. She finds it hard to sleep she keeps asking me if she is going to be ok.”

Key concerns

Kinship carers concerns and experiences during COVID-19 lockdown: June 2020

Children's behaviour

25% of respondents (27 carers) told us they are experiencing aggression from the children (an additional 2 carers had experienced this in the past). For many this included being hit or pushed. Other aggressive behaviour included violent tantrums, verbal aggression, emotional outbursts and violence towards siblings.

"Punched, kicked, pushed and have things thrown at me on a daily basis. Also get screamed and sworn at multiple times a day. It's like living in a domestic abuse relationship."

The re-opening of schools

Schooling continues to be a difficult area for carers.

Only 14% (15 carers) whose children were eligible for a school place, due to being keyworkers or because the child met specific criteria at the start of the lockdown took this up. For those that didn't take up the place the vast majority believed it to be too risky.

Anxiety remains high around the return to school. But the decision to send the child back to school was split evenly.

47% (51 carers) said they would send their child back to school if they were able.

47% (51 carers) said they wouldn't, 6 carers told us they thought they would send their children back but wouldn't make a final decision until they were sure it was safe.

Most carers who said they would send their children back to school did so because they felt that it was felt to be better for the child's emotional health (23 of 51 carers) or for their child's education (9 of 51 carers).

75% of carers who wouldn't send their children back to school felt it was not safe to do so (38 of 51 carers).

"The schools have not proved to me to be a safe environment"

Key concerns

Kinship carers concerns and experiences during COVID-19 lockdown: June 2020

Schooling continued...

"The schools have not proved to me to be a safe environment"

"My child wanted to go back and be with her friends and teacher. I don't want her education to fall too behind."

"(Yes) For the routine and for the emotional side of things. I would rather her stay at home with me but in the long run it will have more effect on her mental health"

Worry over restrictions easing

On the easing of lockdown most carers remain anxious.

42% (45 carers) told us they didn't think lockdown restrictions should be eased while.

21% (23 carers) said it would make little difference either because they were shielding or would simply continue to observe the stricter lockdown rules until they felt safe.

17% (18 carers) said they were worried but looked forward to more normality.

16% (17 carers) felt that the easing was positive.

"Desperate for things to return to normal, but petrified at the same time. We can't financially exist as it is, but we have taken the lockdown so seriously and don't want to risk a second wave."

"I am shielding so I can't go out still. But the thought of going out until the virus is gone or a vaccine has been found scares me terribly"

"...Restrictions lifted too early as we are not out of this yet. We still obey the first rules - Stay at Home and Stay Safe."

Conclusion

What needs to happen

Kinship carers have specific and urgent concerns and needs at this time. They were already a vulnerable and poorly supported group – the coronavirus makes them even more vulnerable, in terms of their health, pressure of caring for children, increased isolation and reduced access to local peer support. They are scared for their families and for what might happen. This situation is likely to continue for many months yet and even as restrictions ease, many carers will need to maintain isolation for some time to come. Kinship carers need tailored advice, practical resources and support from people they trust.

As one kinship carer put it:

“It’s about time we had more support from the government there just isn’t enough people to support in authority. If it was not for grandparents plus supporting us too, we would have no one.”



Recommendations for local authorities and national government

1. Fund voluntary sector to extend existing frontline services to provide tailored advice, practical resources and support to as many kinship carers as practicable.
2. Designate a hardship fund so frontline workers can get essential items to kinship families as quickly as possible, for example beds, food, laptops for children.
3. Guarantee respite for kinship carers and special guardians who fall ill with symptoms if they want/need it.
4. Local authorities should pause all means tested financial assessments – and communicate this to carers to reduce anxiety about finances.
5. Provide Emergency welfare benefits for all kinship carers and special guardians – we suggest £50 a week – to reduce financial pressures.
6. Consider that all children not living with parents should be classed as children in need under s.17 Children Act 1989 and should receive LA support if they require it.



Grandparents Plus is the national kinship care charity.

Our free support for kinship carers include a specialist advice service and kinship community of over 7,000 kinship carers. Our kinship carer support programmes are delivered in partnership with local authorities in the North East, Yorkshire, the Midlands and London.

Our work will continue to be informed by kinship carers' experiences. To discuss kinship carers' COVID-19 concerns and practical solutions, please contact Lucy Peake, Chief Executive, Grandparents Plus via lucy.peake@grandparentsplus.org.uk.

Grandparents Plus Advice Service: Call us on **0300 123 7015**. Our advice service is open Monday to Friday from 9.30am-3.30pm with additional evening opening hours on Tuesday and Thursday from 8-9.30pm.



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