



Grandparents plus

Response to Care Matters: Transforming the Lives of Children and Young People in Care

January 2007

This is an edited version of Grandparents Plus' online response to the Care Matters consultation by the Department for Education and Skills.

We also contributed to and agreed the joint response to the Green paper co-ordinated by Family Rights Group – *The role of the state in supporting relatives raising children who cannot live with their parents*. This is attached as an Appendix.

1. Background

Grandparents plus is a charity which raises awareness of the importance of grandparents and the extended family in children's lives, and especially vulnerable children.

We carry out project work in different settings and with different partners. Examples include: learning with grandparents, grandparents raising grandchildren as a result of drug or alcohol misuse by the parents, intergenerational work and developing a network of grandparents raising grandchildren.

2. The proposed pledges to children in care

There needs to be a more explicit pledge to children that, where appropriate, local authorities will always give priority to exploring the option of a placement within the extended family before considering stranger care, and to consult the children on this.

3. Outcomes for children in care

Emotional health should be a measure of a successful placement.

4. Children on the edge of care

We support the proposals in the response co-ordinated by Family Rights Group. Kinship or family and friends care needs to be given much higher priority. Children's services need to invest more into supporting extended families to enable them to care for children "on the edge of care".

5. Evidence based commissioning

In order to support evidence-informed commissioning around family and friends/kinship care the DfES needs to establish the baseline for the numbers of families providing kinship care both inside and outside the care system. We propose that a question be included in the next census to establish how many grandparents and other family members are raising children because their parents are unable to. There is a precedent for this in New Zealand.

6. What more could be done to support family and friends carers?

We suggest you set up a Task Force or Commission of Enquiry to explore the different ways in which kinship care support can and should be developed and promoted within children's services. This Task Force would be asked to produce practice guidelines for commissioners.

7. Evaluation and promulgation of good practice in kinship/family and friends care

Our joint report with Adfam, "Forgotten Families, the needs and experiences of grandparents who care for children whose parents misuse drugs and alcohol" explored the problems for grandparents raising grandchildren as a result of drug and alcohol misuse and found that, with a few notable exceptions, neither social services nor DAATs were providing adequate support to extended families who were raising children. The report has been sent to the DfES and contains a number of examples of good practice. These need to be properly evaluated and information disseminated. This could be another responsibility for the Task Force, proposed in the previous section.

8. Enabling partnership working

Interagency interventions, with multi-disciplinary training, and protocols around confidentiality are needed to enable partnership working.

9. Stigma

Much more needs to be done to address the stigma of families in these situations, to encourage extended families raising children to seek support.

10. Support groups

Local authorities and drug agencies should be encouraged to help families to set up support groups.

11. Financial support

The Task Force we propose needs to consider the financial needs of kinship carers, with a view to providing better support to families to ensure that these children are not disadvantaged as compared with those in foster care.

12. Targets

Decisions about kinship/family and friends care have to be based on what is in the best interest of the child and his or her emotional and physical well being - ie the Every Child Matters outcomes. Targets, as with the adoption targets, which have acted as a disincentive for kinship care, are not desirable except insofar as that every assessment should consider family and friends/kinship care as a first option.

13. Conclusion

We welcome the inclusion of family and friends/kinship care in Care Matters, but are disappointed that it comes so low down the agenda.

For further information please see the Family Rights Group response which we have signed up to (Appendix), and our report, "Forgotten Families, the needs and experiences of grandparents who care for children whose parents misuse drugs and alcohol". The latter can be downloaded from our website www.grandparentsplus.org.uk.

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