

Giving up the day job?

Kinship Carers and Employment

Contents

1. Key findings	2
2. Introduction	4
Why this report?	4
Context	4
Methodology	6
3. Findings: about the kinship carers and the children they are raising	7
4. Findings: kinship carers and work	9
Employment status of kinship carers	9
Giving up work when children move in	10
Profile of kinship carers who gave up their jobs	12
Pressure from children's services to give up work	14
Employers' responses to requests to take leave or for flexible working	15
Examples of supportive employers	17
Specific difficulties faced by older kinship carers	17
5. Conclusions	18
6. Policy recommendations	19
7. Notes and bibliography	20
Graphs	
Graph 1: Age of respondents	7
Graph 2: Main source of income of respondents	7
Graph 3: Ages of the children in kinship care	8
Graph 4: Employment status of kinship carers before taking on the children and current status	9
Graph 5: Impact of children moving in on working kinship carers' employment status	11
Graph 6: Employment status of kinship carers who gave up their job when the children moved in, before and current	12
Graph 7: Current main source of income of carers who gave up their job when the children moved in	13
Graph 8: Employers' response when the children moved in	15
Graph 9: Duration of leave for the kinship carers	16

1. Key findings

86%

of kinship carers are under 65

Just

36%

of kinship carers are currently working

3 out of 4

were working before taking on the children

- 86% of kinship carers who took part in the survey are of working age (under 65) and 41% are under 55.
- 63% are living with a partner, 29% are divorced, separated or single and 9% are widowed.
- Nearly three in 10 (27%) are dependent on welfare benefits as their main source of income.
- Six in 10 children in kinship care in our survey are aged seven or over (59%). This means that their carers do not benefit from parental leave as only people with parental responsibility for a child under five or a disabled child have the right to time off work to look after their children.
- Three in 10 respondents also provide care for a partner, older relative or a neighbour, of whom half (47%) are providing more than five hours a day of care.
- Just 36% of kinship carers are currently working, of whom 22% are working part-time and 14% are working full-time. Three in 10 (29%) are retired.
- This contrasts starkly with the three out of four (73%) kinship carers who were working before taking on the children, half of whom worked full-time.
- Almost half (47%) of the kinship carers who were previously working gave up work when the children moved in. A further three in 10, (31%) reduced their hours, and just one in five (21%) continued working as before.
- More than eight in 10 of those who gave up work when children moved in (83%) say they would have liked to have stayed in work.

Just

13%

of kinship carers who gave up work are currently working

41%

of those who gave up work when children moved in are now dependent on welfare benefits

Kinship carers have no entitlement to leave when children move in

- Just 13% of those who gave up work are in work now.
- Four in 10 (41%) of those who gave up work when children moved in are now dependent on welfare benefits as their main source of income.
- 24% of working kinship carers were offered flexible working, 8% were offered paid leave, 13% were offered unpaid leave and 2% took a career break. Kinship carers have no entitlement to leave when children move in, unlike new parents or those adopting a child.
- More than half (54%) of respondents who were working when children moved in said their employers were supportive. However, many kinship carers chose not to tell their employers of their situation (16%), or gave up their job without asking for flexible working or leave (9%). 19% said their employers were not supportive.
- Evidence from the Labour Force Survey suggests that older kinship carers, especially those aged 55 plus, may find it particularly difficult to re-enter the job market after a break.
- Respondents reported that being able to work flexibly and/or take leave helped them to cope with the pressures on them when children move in.
- A significant minority of carers are told by social workers they must give up work otherwise the child will be taken into care or adopted.

2. Introduction

200,000 grandparents and other relatives in the UK are bringing up children because their parents are no longer able to

Many children in kinship care have suffered multiple traumas

Why this report?

This report provides a picture of the employment status of grandparents and other relatives raising children (kinship carers) before and after taking on children, and explores the link between dropping out of the labour market and being a kinship carer.

Context

Kinship care in the UK

There are around 200,000 grandparents, older siblings, aunts, uncles and other relatives in the UK bringing up 200,000-300,000 children because their parents are no longer able to, often due to severe difficulties such as parental death, drug or alcohol abuse, disability or serious illness, imprisonment, domestic violence, or abuse and neglect¹. These carers are known as 'kinship' or 'family and friends' carers. Many of the children they are raising would be in care if their relative had not stepped in.

Since the implementation of the Children Act 1989 local authorities have been required to arrange for looked after children to live with family and friends where that is consistent with their welfare, and 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 has recently been restated in Statutory Guidance to local authorities on Family and Friends Care, published in April 2011.

Research shows that many children living in kinship care have suffered similar multiple traumas to those in local authority care, and a high proportion have emotional or behavioural problems or a disability, often as a result of their experiences with their birth families². A recent study concluded that 85% of children in kinship care who have had contact with children's services face difficulties at the point when they come to live with their carer³.

Children may move into kinship care at any age, not just during the early years, and evidence from the 2001 Census shows that older children are disproportionately represented among those in kinship care compared with children in the population overall⁴. Kinship carers have no equivalent to maternity leave or adoption leave to help them settle children and deal with the huge upheaval in their lives when children move in, often with no notice. Many are not even entitled to unpaid parental leave. They may also be taking on several siblings at one time.

Kinship carers often have to deal with multiple appointments with schools, social workers and lawyers. They may have to arrange education, legal orders and financial support, at the same time as supporting the children and perhaps dealing with their own bereavement following the death of the child's parent or the stress of difficult family circumstances.

A previous Grandparents Plus survey found that a high proportion of kinship carers face difficulties such as isolation, stress and stigma⁵. A high proportion live in poverty, with 65% reporting living on low incomes (below £300 a week), often as a result of giving up work when children move in⁶.

Only a minority of kinship carers receive a financial allowance from the local authority or any kind of practical support⁷. There is no clear relationship between the needs of the children and whether or not the carers are entitled to receive support.

There is anecdotal evidence, including from calls to Grandparents Plus' Advice and Information service, that feeling they may have to give up work is a powerful disincentive to becoming a kinship carer. We also know that placements may break down and children have to be taken into care or adopted because kinship carers fail to get financial support from the local authority and do not want to end up on benefits through having to give up work.

There is a strong economic case for supporting kinship carers

Children in kinship care feel loved and secure

There is a strong economic case for supporting kinship carers to avoid children unnecessarily being taken into care. It costs £40,000 per annum to keep a child in independent foster care, and there is a national shortage of 9,000 foster carers⁸.

Children in care also face increased risk of poverty and other adverse outcomes in adulthood. Although outcomes for children in care have improved in recent years, there remains a significant and widening gap between these and the outcomes for all children. They are over-represented in a range of vulnerable groups including those not in education, employment or training post-16, teenage parents, young offenders, drug users and prisoners⁹.

Most important of all, children in kinship care feel loved and secure and are able to maintain links with their birth families. The placements tend to be more stable than with unrelated foster carers and children's behaviour is perceived to be less problematic¹⁰.

Kinship carers' entitlements at work

When a child first moves in, kinship carers often find it difficult to balance all the different demands of work and care. Often children arrive without notice, perhaps following a late night call from children's services. There may be lots of meetings to attend – for example with social workers, solicitors and the child's school. Often the kinship carer may need to find a new school place for a child if they live in a different area and they may also face difficulties with housing, especially if they have taken on a sibling group, with their accommodation becoming overcrowded. They may need to move house, ask for a social housing transfer or make adaptations to their property. Kinship carers who are working may need to arrange care for the children after school, during the school holidays and if they are unwell.

There is no specific entitlement for kinship carers at work. However:

Employee rights

All employees have a right to take a reasonable amount of **unpaid time off to deal with emergencies** involving someone who depends on them and to make any arrangements that are needed.

A minority of kinship carers are entitled to **parental leave** (normally unpaid). This gives parents of children under five, or disabled children under 18, the right to take time off work to look after their children. Each parent can take a total of up to 13 weeks' parental leave for each child up to their fifth birthday. If the child is disabled (receiving Disability Living Allowance) each parent has the right to take up to 18 weeks' parental leave until the child's 18th birthday. Kinship carers who are employees, have worked for their employer for at least a year, and have legal parental responsibility for the child (for example, who have a Residence Order or Special Guardianship Order) have the right to parental leave. However this type of leave may not start when the kinship carer needs it most as it takes time – sometimes many months – to take legal advice and apply to Court for such orders. Kinship carers who are foster carers are not entitled to parental leave, because they do not have legal parental responsibility for the children.

Anyone can ask their employer for **flexible working arrangements** but the law gives most parents (and kinship carers) the statutory right to request flexible working. This right applies to someone who has or expects to have responsibility for a child under 17, a disabled child under 18 or is caring for a disabled adult, and has worked for their employer for at least 26 weeks. The right extends to people with a Residence Order or Special Guardianship Order, foster carers and guardians and their spouses, partners and civil partners. Entitlement may not start when children first move in because of uncertainties about the legal status of the living arrangement.

Evidence from enquiries to our Advice and Information Service indicates that kinship carers are often unaware of their entitlements.

Methodology

This report is based on a survey of the 1,800 members of Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Network funded by the Big Lottery Fund and run by Grandparents Plus. Membership of the Network is free and open to all kinship carers. Members are mostly recruited by word of mouth, online and also in response to media stories highlighting family and friends care. Others are recruited via their membership of kinship carers' local support groups.

The survey was carried out early 2012, using both postal questionnaires and an online version via Survey Monkey. The design and content of the survey builds upon a similar survey conducted in 2010. 263 valid responses were received (a response rate of 15%) and were cleaned to remove obvious errors and inconsistencies and the paper responses were logged on Survey Monkey. We also followed up a sample of responses with telephone interviews to get a more detailed insight into the employment situation of respondents.

In comparison with data on kinship carers from the analysis of 2001 Census data¹¹, it is clear that kinship carers who are not grandparents are heavily under represented, as are those from ethnic minorities. It is likely that kinship carers who have only been in a full-time caring role for a short period are also under-represented, along with kinship carers from the most marginalised and vulnerable social groups.

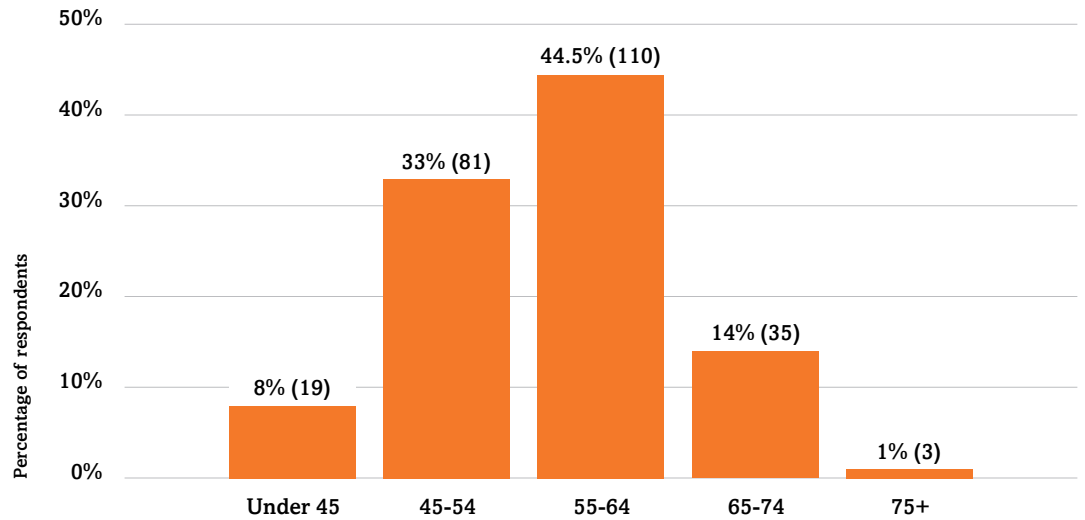
This report focuses on the employment findings from the survey, and presents a summary of other findings on the demographic characteristics of kinship carers and the children they are raising to provide context to the employment findings.

All the names in the report have been changed.

3. About the kinship carers and the children they are raising

Over nine out of 10 kinship carers responding to the survey are grandparents. 86% are of working age (under 65) and 41% are under 55. Nearly nine in 10 (88%) are women.

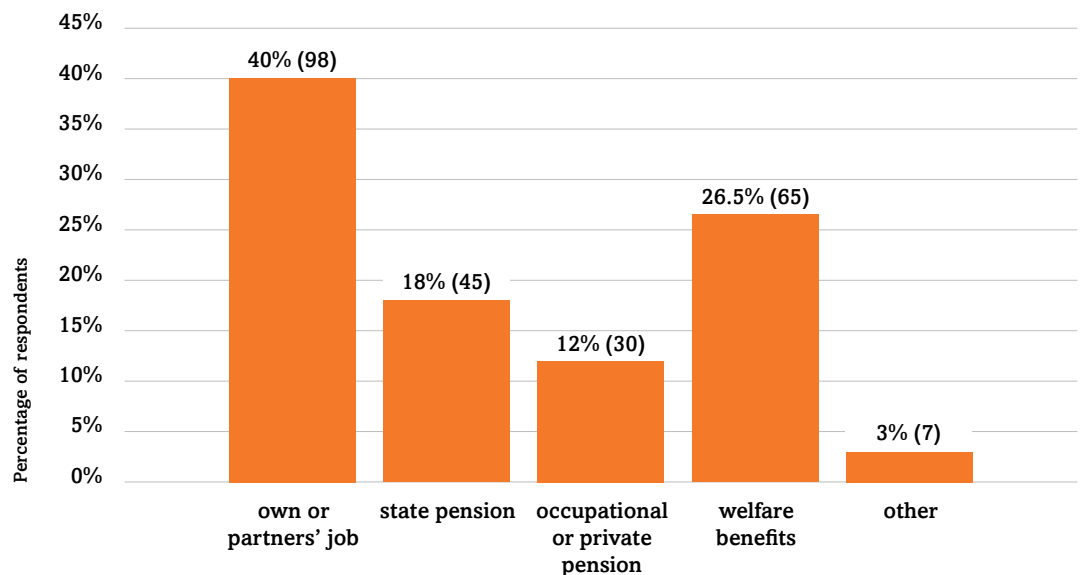
Graph 1: Age of respondents



Note: Response rate 100%.

Four in 10 (40%) say that their main source of income is their own or their partner's job. Nearly three in 10 (27%) are dependent on welfare benefits and two in 10 (18%) rely on the State Pension for their main source of income.

Graph 2: Main source of income of respondents



Note: Response rate 100%.

3 in 10

respondents also provide care for their partner, an older relative or a neighbour

63% of carers who responded to the survey are living with a partner, 29% are divorced, separated or single and 9% are widowed.

96% of respondents are grandparents and 96% are white.

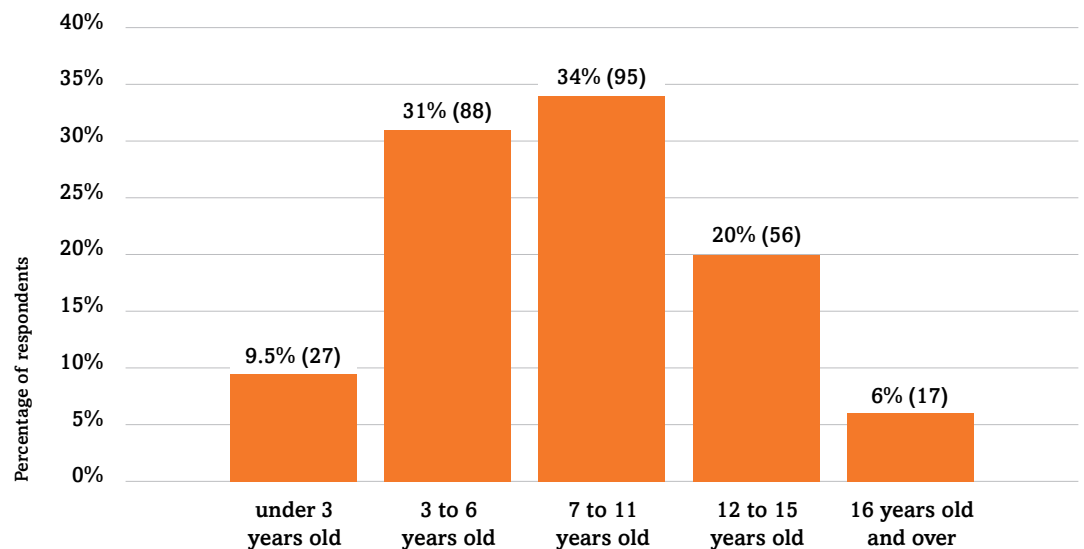
Almost half of respondents (44%) have a disability or health condition.

Three in 10 respondents also provide care for someone else (for example their partner, an older relative or a neighbour), of whom half (47%) are providing more than five hours a day of care.

About the children

Six out of 10 of respondents are looking after one child (not including their own children). 27% look after two children and 11% are looking after three or more. 15% also have children of their own under the age of 18 living with them.

Graph 3: Ages of the children in kinship care



Note: Response rate 100%.

42%

42% are raising children with special educational needs or a disability

Six in 10 children in kinship care are aged seven or over (59%). This means that their carers do not benefit from parental leave as only parents or persons with parental responsibility of children under five have the right to take time off work to look after their children.

Four in 10 (42%) of carers say one or more of the children they are raising have special educational needs or a disability. Around three in 10 have a child with emotional or behavioural problems, 10% are raising a child with Asperger's syndrome or autism and 15% have a child with a learning disability.

The most commonly cited reason why kinship carers step in to take on the care of a child is because of parental drug or alcohol misuse (44%), followed by parental abuse or neglect (37%), and parental illness or disability (18%).

3. Kinship carers and work

Almost half of working kinship carers gave up work when the children moved in

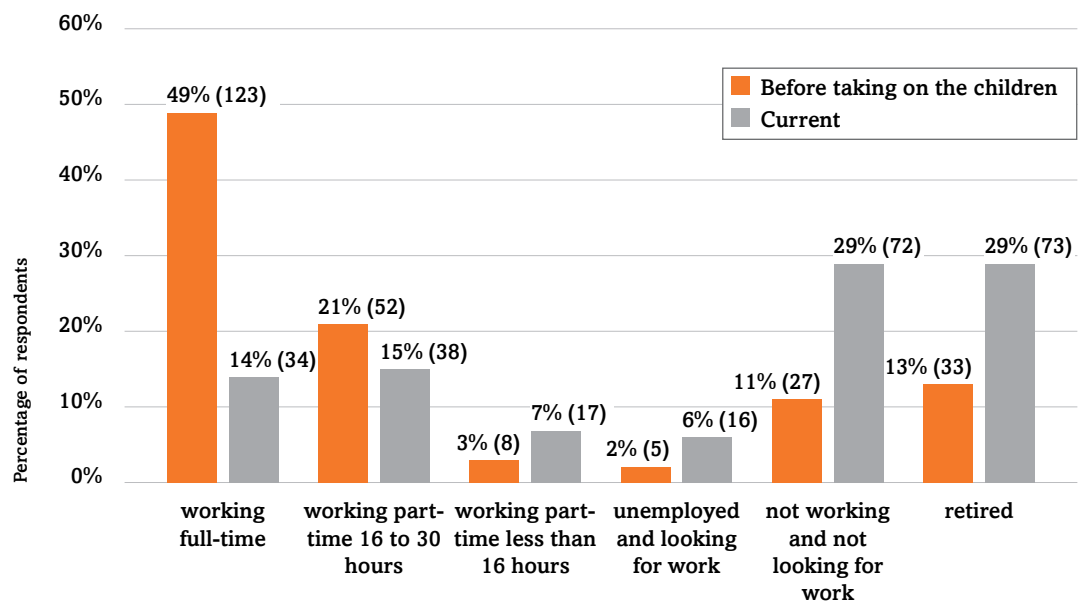
Employment status of kinship carers

36% of kinship carers are currently working¹, of whom 22% are working part-time and 14% are working full-time. Three in 10 (29%) are retired.

This contrasts starkly with the high number of kinship carers who were working before taking on the children. 73% of carers were working before the children came to live with them, and half of those (49%) worked full-time.

Almost half of working kinship carers gave up work when the children moved in and three in 10 reduced their hours (see graph 5).

Graph 4: Employment status of kinship carers, before taking on the children and current



Note: Response rate 95%.

Some kinship carers make super human efforts to combine work and care of children. Their lack of entitlement to leave when children move in – even as in the case study below when they take on the care of a newborn baby – imposes enormous strain on them.

Case study: Aileen, juggling full-time work and care

Aileen, a single grandmother in her early 50s, is bringing up three grandchildren as well as working full-time. Her twin granddaughters aged eight are living with her and she has recently taken on the care of her grandson from birth because her daughter has physical and learning disabilities and is unable to care for him without full-time support. The baby's father also has a learning disability and is not in contact with the child. Prior to the birth of the baby Aileen's disabled daughter left the supported housing where she was living to live with Aileen so that she could spend time with the baby. Aileen's trade union persuaded her employer to allow her to take the equivalent of paternity leave and she has temporarily reduced her working hours to four days a week – the baby is just 12 weeks old. Aileen is finding it an enormous struggle to hold down her job because of her multiple caring roles. If Aileen had been entitled to take the equivalent of paid maternity leave when her grandson was born, this would have enabled her to care for her grandson, arrange childcare for him in the longer term, as well as arranging support for her daughter to enable her to play a role in bringing up her child.

¹ Of kinship carers who provided their work status in the survey

Just

13%

of those who gave up work
are in work now

Kinship carers face
enormous barriers in re-
entering the labour market

Giving up work when children move in

47% of working kinship carers gave up work when the children moved in, 31% reduced their hours, and just one in five (21%) continued working as before. (86% of carers who took part in this survey are under the age of 65.)

We estimate that around 9,000 people a year¹², mostly women, give up work when they become a kinship carer. A high proportion – an estimated 60,000 in total¹³ – remain out of work for many years and often do not return, resulting in huge loss of earnings and PAYE and NI receipts. Another consequence of kinship carers leaving the labour market is that a high proportion become dependent on welfare benefit payments and the children are at increased risk of growing up in poverty.

More than eight in 10 (83%) of those who gave up work when children moved in say they would have liked to have stayed in work. Just 13% of those who gave up work are in work again now.

Kinship carers often have a strong desire to stay in work. However, they have only very limited entitlement to take leave when children move in. This lack of entitlement, the challenges of juggling work and care for often vulnerable children, and in some cases unwillingness on the part of employers to accommodate flexible working, all contribute to the high proportion of kinship carers who drop out of the labour market. Kinship carers often face enormous barriers in re-entering the labour market after a break, including poor health, difficulties in finding part-time or flexible work and employers' attitudes, both real and perceived, especially if they are older¹⁴, reflected by high long term unemployment rates amongst workers over 50 in the UK.¹⁵

“My employer made life unpleasant and untenable. Despite my union’s intervention I felt compelled to leave; when I eventually left they gave me three months’ pay in lieu of notice.”

Jude, grandmother raising a teenage granddaughter.

“I was refused home working or reduced hours and I worked for social services!”

Mary, grandmother raising a boy aged four.

People who were self-employed mentioned the specific difficulties linked to that status:

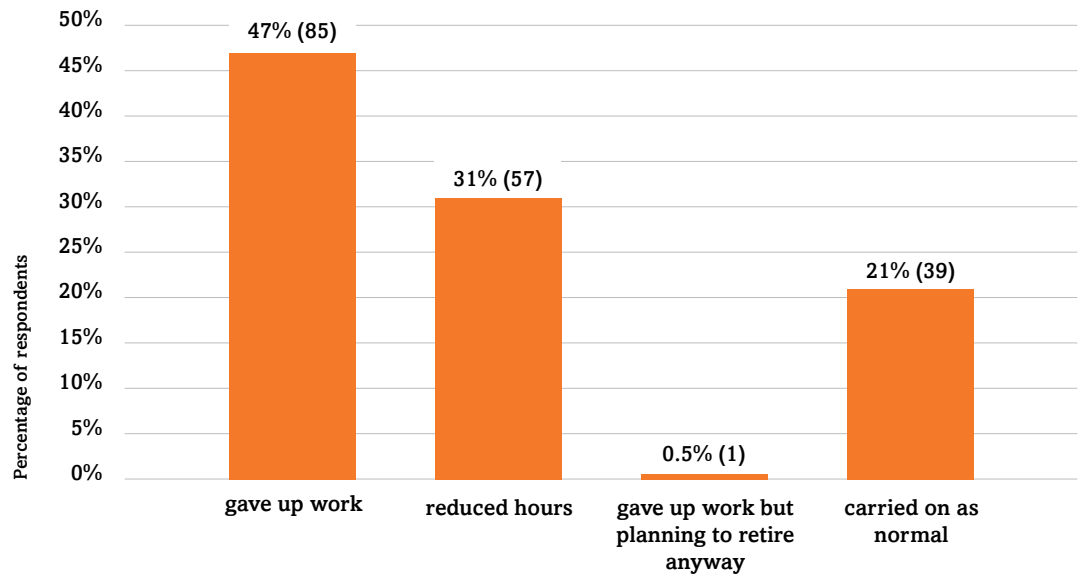
“There needs to be something to cover people who are self-employed as it is particularly difficult for us to take time off. I had to deliver for my clients to deadline and that was it.”
Sacha, grandmother raising a boy aged five.

Kinship carers with older children in particular suffer from their lack of time off entitlements, as they cannot get parental leave if the child is over five years old. Even if the child is under five, kinship carers often do not have parental responsibility at the time when the child moves in and are thus unable to take parental leave. This was the case for Donna (see case study below).

Case study: Donna, not able to take parental leave

Donna was working as a sales representative, earning £73,000 a year and having use of a company car. She used to look after her granddaughter Lara, aged five, at the weekends. The parents of the child were very young and their relationship spiralled into fighting and domestic violence. As her parents' relationship deteriorated, Lara came to live with her grandmother (Donna). Children's services told the mother she had six months to sort out her problems or Lara would be put up for adoption – all without Donna's knowledge. Donna only became aware adoption was on the cards after a solicitor friend warned her to watch out for it. In the meantime, Donna's employer, a female in her 60s, said to her, talking about her granddaughter: 'I don't know why you're not getting her adopted'. Donna used her twenty days' holidays to attend children's services and court appointments, and then started using unpaid leave. Her employer was very unhappy. The social worker was also pressurising Donna to give up her job, which she eventually did because otherwise Lara would have been put up for adoption. Donna is now dependent on benefits and at risk of losing her home. Children's services are now trying to get Donna back in the labour market.

Graph 5: Impact of children moving in on working kinship carers' employment status



Note: Response rate 95%.

Half of those who gave up work are women living without the support of a partner

83%

say they would like to have stayed in work

Profile of kinship carers who gave up their jobs

Kinship carers who give up work often become dependent on welfare benefits and only a small minority are able to re-enter the labour market. Almost half of those in our survey who gave up work are women living without the support of a partner.

87 kinship carers in our survey, or 47% of all who were previously working, gave up work when children moved in. Of whom:

- Just 13% are now back in work
- 41% are now dependent on welfare benefits as their main source of income
- 83% say they would have liked to have stayed in work
- 92% are women
- 46% are separated, divorced, widowed or single
- 25% are now retired.

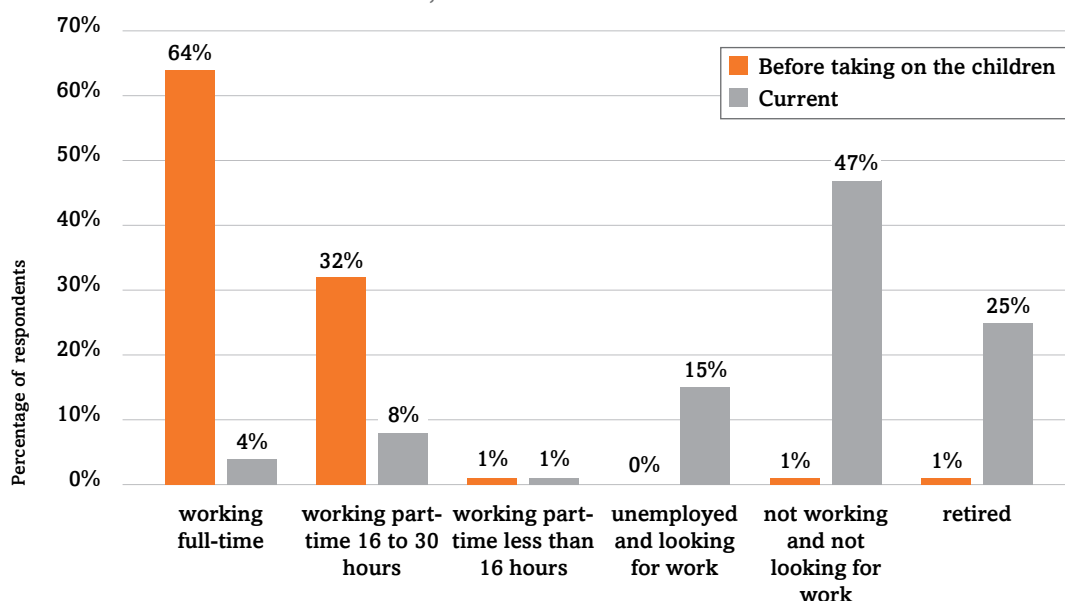
There is a strong association between becoming a kinship carer and leaving the labour market. Yet most kinship carers say they would like to have remained in work after the children moved in.

Case study: Margaret and her husband both gave up their jobs

Kinship carers often feel that giving up their job is in the children's best interests because they need to be able to devote all their energies to looking after them, to enable the children to settle and to help them recover from the traumas they have experienced.

Margaret, 54, and her husband Clement, 55, are bringing up four granddaughters aged two, four, six and eight. Margaret worked as a payroll manager for 13 years. Initially, she was expecting to have the girls temporarily, so she took holidays and paid leave. After three months, Margaret realised it was going to be a permanent arrangement and applied for Special Guardianship. She stopped working to look after the four girls full-time. Her husband was working as a long distance truck driver, but gave up his job after eight months because Margaret was finding it difficult to cope with four young children whilst he was away.

Graph 6: Employment status of kinship carers who gave up their job when the children move in, before and current



Note: Response rate 95%.

“You can’t get another job and are pushed into poverty for the rest of your life”

Many kinship carers who gave up their jobs when the children moved in quote their lack of financial resources:

“I love looking after my grandson and would not change this for anything, but I get annoyed that so many people give up their savings and jobs to step in and get no support from the Government. If grandparents didn’t do what we do, how much would it cost the Government? We should be helped more with a little support.”

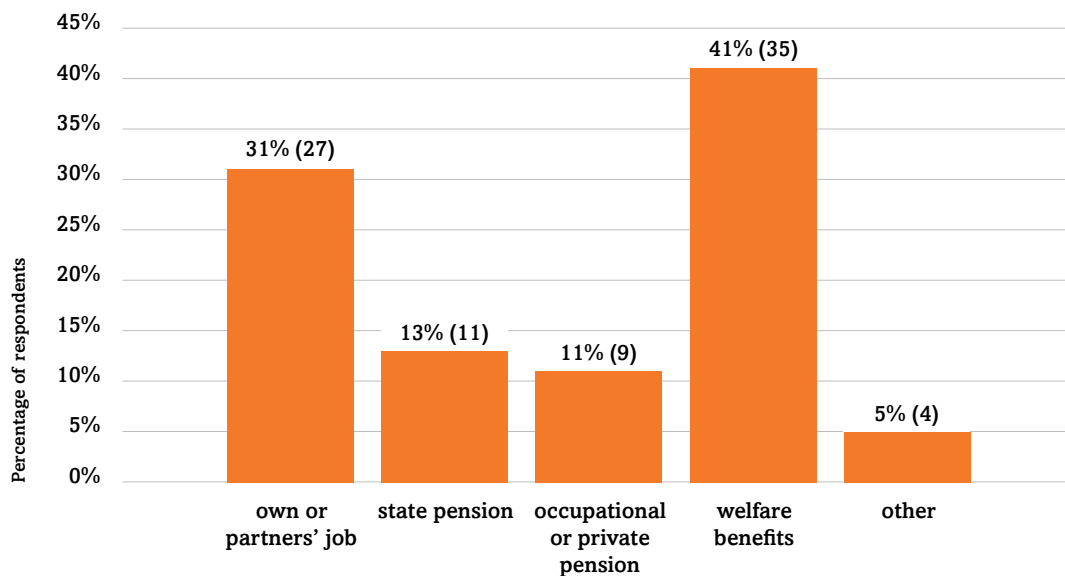
Eleanor, grandmother raising a little boy, now unemployed and looking for work.

Some kinship carers underline the implications for their retirement of having to give up work and become dependent on state benefits:

“It is exhausting, especially the poverty side of it, never being able to afford a holiday etc. Because you have initially given up work, you can't get another job and are therefore pushed into poverty for the rest of your life as no pension means always on state benefits.”

Suzie, grandmother raising a little girl, now relying on welfare benefits as her main source of income.

Graph7: Current main source of income of carers who gave up their job when the children moved in



Note: Response rate 95%.

Carers often feel they have no choice but to give up work as they do not want the children to be taken into care

“Social services said, ‘You’re working, why do you want your granddaughter?’”

Pressure from children’s services to give up work

“I was told to give up work by social services or they would take my grandchild away from us.”

Jo, grandmother raising her three- year-old granddaughter. Jo is now unemployed and looking for work.

A significant minority of kinship carers say social workers insist that they give up work, sometimes with a threat that otherwise children will be taken into care or adopted. These carers are not permitted to make their own decisions about how best to meet children’s needs and whether they feel able to meet their caring responsibilities whilst remaining in work. Carers often feel they have no choice but to follow social workers’ direction as they do not want the children to be taken into care. Evidence from calls to our Advice and Information Service indicates that kinship carers who give up work are often not offered any financial support from children’s services.

Jo explains:

“I used to work as a teaching assistant. I loved it. At first I took time off to look after my granddaughter, but after five months I realised the arrangement would be permanent. The social worker told me there was no way I could work. She said, ‘If you don’t stop working, we’ll take her away.’ My employer was OK to be flexible but I had to give up. Now I can’t go back to the school job, I’ve had five months off. I have no letter to explain the situation from social services to future employers, no support to bring her up.”

“I had two jobs, one in a homeless charity and one in a pub. The local authority said I had to give up both of them. I haven’t worked since 2007.”

Catherine, aunt kinship carer to her two nieces and mother to three children.

Donna was pushed by social workers to stop working and on the other hand told by her employer to give up her granddaughter for adoption:

“Social services said, ‘You’re working, why do you want your granddaughter?’ They didn’t want me working. They implied it’s because I was working full-time that my daughter got into that situation [ie got pregnant at a young age]. My employer was not understanding at all. She said she didn’t know why I wouldn’t let the baby be adopted.”

Donna, grandmother raising her seven- year-old granddaughter.

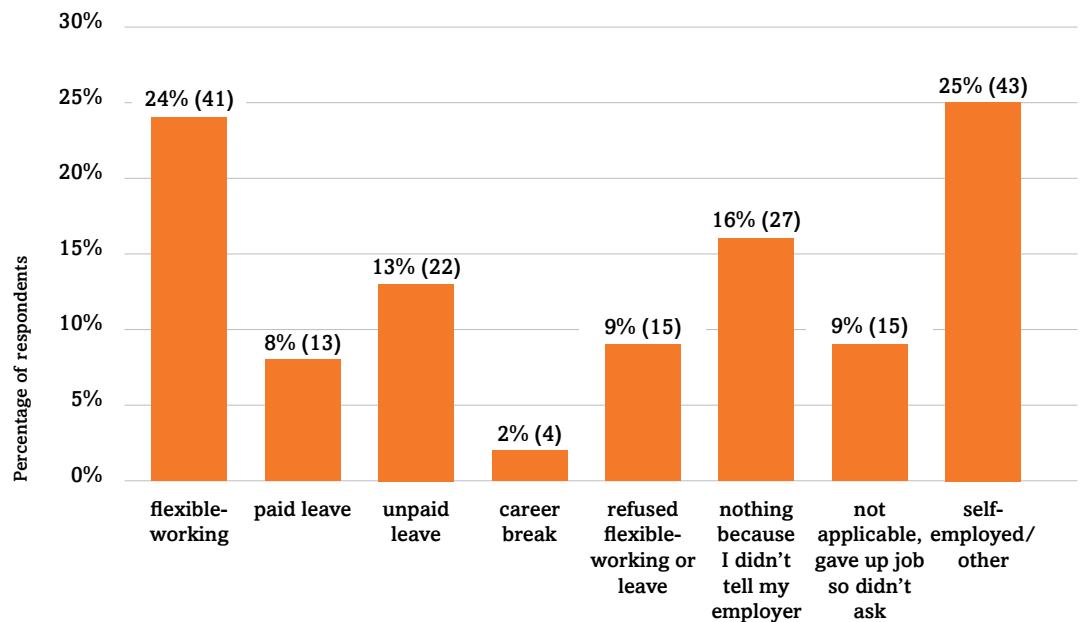
A statutory entitlement to take leave when children move in would help relieve the conflict between the requirements of children’s services to focus full-time on children’s needs and the need and desire of many carers to stay in work. And where the children’s needs require their carer to take a long break from work – eg for more than a year – children’s services should always provide financial support to kinship carers¹⁶.

Employers' responses to requests from kinship carers to take leave or for flexible working

Kinship carers in the survey were asked what employers offered them in terms of flexible working and time off when the children moved in:

- 24% of working kinship carers were offered flexible working (41)
- 8% were offered paid leave (13)
- 13% were offered unpaid leave (22)
- 2% were offered a career break (4)
- 9% were refused flexible working or leave (15)

Graph 8: Employers' response when the children moved in



Note: Response rate 95%.

54%

felt their employers were supportive.

16%

chose not to tell their employers of their situation

For many carers, a period of leave followed by flexible working enables them successfully to remain in work and bring up the children:

“My employers weren’t supportive initially and told me they wouldn’t keep my job open. But in the end they gave me unpaid leave for 12 months and I returned part-time, term-time initially, and am now working full-time again.”

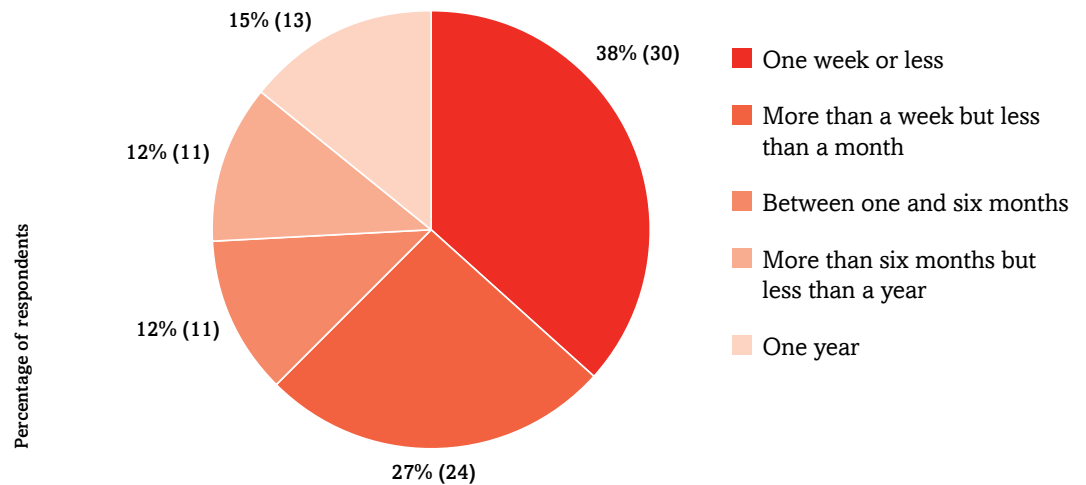
Beth, aunt raising her nephew as well as her own two children.

Over half of respondents (54%) who were working when the children moved in felt their employers were supportive. However:

- 16% chose not to tell their employers of their situation (27).
- 9% gave up work without asking for leave or flexible working (15)
- 9% gave up work after being refused leave or flexible working (15).
- 19% of respondents who were working at the time when the children moved in said employers were not supportive (30).

89 carers took leave of some kind when the children moved in. Of the 89, more than half took less than a month off.

Graph 9: Duration of leave for the working kinship carers



Most of the carers who were offered leave took some form of paid leave:

- 25% took annual leave (29)
- 8% took sick leave (9)
- 17% were granted paid special leave (20). (Some kinship carers in the survey report being on paid compassionate leave when children moved in following the death of their son or daughter)
- 28% took unpaid leave (33)
- 14% (16) were self-employed and took unpaid leave

“I was self-employed at the time so I was free to not work and look after my grandson full-time. However I had no money coming in, no security.”

Jean, grandmother raising three-year-old grandson.

“They allowed me to take time off when I needed it and are still flexible about the times I work”

The number of over 50s out of work for more than a year stands at a 15 year high

Examples of supportive employers

Despite the lack of a legal entitlement to leave when kinship carers take on the care of a child, a significant number of employers are supportive, for example by allowing employees to take leave.

We have examples of good practice by employers, which can have lasting beneficial impact on kinship carers and the children they are bringing up:

“[My employer was] understanding of problems I faced and happy to allow me to take leave at short notice to cope with my grandchild's repeated illness/hospitalisation (but not eligible for carer's leave).”

Jo-Anne, working part-time, grandmother raising grandson.

“They allowed me to time off when I needed it and are still flexible about the times I work as long as I make up my hours.”

Carmen, widowed grandmother working full-time and bringing up two grandsons.

Specific difficulties faced by older kinship carers

Older kinship carers, aged over 55, may find it particularly difficult to re-enter the job market after a break, resulting in lasting financial difficulties, debt and/or poverty for themselves and the children they are raising:

“I was a manager at the time and had to be in the office Monday to Friday and felt my job was threatened if I was to take time off... So I had no choice other than to resign which I really did not want to do but my grandson's needs were more important. I am struggling financially now because of it.”

Fran, grandmother aged 57 raising grandson, unemployed and looking for work.

The difficulties of older kinship carers re-entering the labour market after a prolonged break reflect the difficulties of older workers in general trying to get a new job after a long absence from work – including poorer health, lack of opportunities to work part-time or for flexible working, perceived and actual employer attitudes¹⁷. Kinship carers are also likely to be suffering from high levels of stress, and 65% have raised stress levels, twice the rate as in the general population¹⁸.

The number of over 50s out of work for more than a year has doubled since the start of the recession, to stand at a 15 year high¹⁹.

5. Conclusions

The impact on kinship carers of giving up their jobs is profound.

Employment status is clearly affected by becoming a kinship carer. Many kinship carers find they have to give up their jobs to look after the children, although the majority would have liked to stay in work. 36% of kinship carers in our survey are currently working. This contrasts starkly with the 73% of kinship carers who were working before taking on the children.

47% of working kinship carers gave up work when the children moved in, 31% reduced their hours, and just 21% continued working as before.

Kinship carers are rarely entitled to parental leave because the children they are looking after tend to be older than five, the cut off age for parental leave. Almost six in 10 children in kinship care in our survey are aged seven or over (59%). Furthermore, even for those kinship carers looking after children under the age of five, they often have no entitlement to parental leave when the children first move in (when leave is most needed) because children often move in following a crisis at home and it takes time to apply for a legal order to give kinship carers parental responsibility. Kinship carers who are foster carers are not entitled to parental leave, because they do not have legal parental responsibility for the children.

Kinship carers with, or applying for, a Residence Order or Special Guardianship Order to grant them parental responsibility are often unaware of their right to request flexible working, and employers may not be aware of this entitlement.

The impact on kinship carers of giving up their jobs is profound. Many are women aged between 55 and 65 and find it difficult, if not impossible, to re-enter the labour market. They face formidable twin hurdles of ageist employer attitudes – long term unemployment rates among older workers who lose their jobs are at the highest level for 15 years²⁰ – and finding flexible work that they can fit around their responsibility for raising often vulnerable and needy children. Many have long-term health conditions or also provide care for a disabled or elderly relative, partner or friend. Almost four in 10 (38%) are lone carers without a partner to rely on for financial, emotional and practical support. Many rely on welfare benefits to survive. Some will fall into poverty, and this in turn will impact on the children they are looking after. This reflects the findings of the 2001 Census data analysis which found that the majority of children in kinship care were living in poor and deprived circumstances and will be affected by this for a long time²¹.

Kinship carers need much greater rights to flexible working and parental leave to enable them to balance work and care. This would make sense for the children they are bringing up, and also would make financial and economic sense. An estimated 60,000 kinship carers in the UK have left the labour market to care.

Kinship carers who give up work often become reliant on welfare benefits and are no longer paying income tax. Our survey found that of those kinship carers who gave up their job, only 13% are now in work and 41% are dependent on welfare benefits as their main source of income.

Ageing workforces and other demographic changes also mean that employers need to retain skilled and experienced workers.

Some pragmatic solutions are possible that would meet both the needs of kinship carers and employers. Kinship carers should be entitled to paid leave when children arrive, in the same way that new parents are entitled to maternity leave or adoption leave. We also want to see maternity leave transferable to a grandparent or other family member where the mother or father is unable to take care of the child. These solutions are detailed in the policy recommendations section.

But for those cases where a period of leave from work and/or the right to request flexible working is not enough, children's services need to fulfil their legal responsibility to ensure that kinship carers receive financial allowances and that carers are not unfairly penalised and forced into poverty by "doing the right thing" and stepping in to bring up a child who would otherwise be in care. We also want to see all kinship carers entitled to a national financial allowance.

6. Policy recommendations

1. Entitlement for kinship carers to take paid leave

Kinship carers should be entitled to a period of paid leave equivalent to maternity or adoption leave when they take on the care of a child. This would give them time to manage the upheaval in their lives and settle the children whilst keeping their job and reduce the risk of them having to give up work.

We propose that the leave should be payable in specified circumstances, eg where the parent has died or is severely incapacitated, where the child is subject to care proceedings or where the carer has obtained a Residence Order or Special Guardianship Order and there is professional evidence of the incapacity of the parent to look after the child.

2. Extension of parental leave

Kinship carers should be entitled to take up to 13 weeks' parental leave until the child's 18th birthday. This entitlement should be available both to kinship carers who have, or expect to have, parental responsibility for children they are bringing up and for those who are foster carers.

Kinship carers are rarely entitled to parental leave as the children they are bringing up are usually over four years old. Extending parental leave to kinship carers with parental responsibility would give them greater capacity to meet the needs of often vulnerable children, particularly when children first move in or where problems emerge a while after children have moved in.

3. Transferable maternity leave where the mother or father is unable to take care of the child

Kinship carers who take on the care of babies face particular challenges. We want to see maternity leave transferable to a father, grandparent or other family member in exceptional circumstances where the mother is unable to take the leave herself, for example due to illness or disability, to enable them to take care of a child.

4. Right to request flexible working

Extending the right to request flexible working to all workers, as the Government has proposed, would make clear that all kinship carers have that entitlement, irrespective of the legal status of the living arrangements of the children they are looking after. It would help change the workplace culture and reduce any perceived stigma around asking for flexible working and the fear of being seen as unreliable. It would clear up problems around lack of awareness of right to request flexible working.

5. Children's services responsibilities towards kinship carers

Local authorities must implement fully the Statutory Guidance on Family and Friends Care. Children's services need to respect their obligations towards kinship carers, including paying financial allowances based on the needs of children. This report provides evidence that kinship carers may feel pressurised into giving up work by social workers, or that they may give up work and then find that no financial support from children's services is forthcoming, despite legal obligations to assess carers and in many cases to provide financial allowances.

5. National Financial Allowance

Grandparents Plus backs the Kinship Care Alliance's call for a National Financial Allowance for kinship carers who look after a child for more than 28 days.

7. Notes and bibliography

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About Grandparents Plus

Grandparents Plus is the national charity (England and Wales) which champions the role of grandparents and the wider family in children's lives, especially when they take on the caring role in difficult family circumstances.

We do this by:

- campaigning for change so that grandparents' contribution to children's wellbeing and care is valued and understood.
- providing evidence, policy solutions and training so that grandparents get the services and support they need to help children thrive.
- building alliances and networks so that grandparents can have a voice and support each other, especially when they become children's full-time carers.
- providing advice and information for family and friends carers.

Our confidential Advice and Information Service for kinship (family and friends) carers can be reached on 0300 123 7015 or go to our website www.grandparentsplus.org.uk

Visit our website for details on how to get involved with our:

- Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Network, which provides family and friends carers with opportunities to share experiences, meet together and access practical information.
- campaigns for more support for family and friends carers
- Kinship Care Group for professionals who are working in local authorities with family and friends carers.



We champion the wider family who care for children

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