

Family and Friends Care

“What if we
said no?”

Methodology

This report is based on 255 responses to a survey of the Network of Grandparents Raising Grandchildren funded by the Big Lottery Fund and run by Grandparents Plus. Membership of the Network is free and open to all family and friends 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 family and friends carers local support groups. The Network currently has around 1,150 members.

The survey was carried out during August and September 2010, using both postal questionnaires and an online version via Survey Monkey¹. The design and content of the survey builds upon a similar smaller survey conducted in 2009².

255 valid responses were received (a response rate of over 22 %)³ and “cleaned” to remove obvious errors and inconsistencies and the paper responses were logged on Survey Monkey. The chief income earner’s occupational grade was estimated according to respondents’ answers about their own and their partner’s (if they have one) current or most recent occupation, whichever was the most senior.

Because of the lack of baseline data about family and friends carers, there is no way of knowing how representative the sample is of all family and friends carers in the UK. It is likely that family and friends carers who have only been in a full-time caring role for a short period are under-represented, along with family and friends carers from the most marginalised and vulnerable social groups. It is also likely that family and friends carers who are not grandparents (e.g. aunts or uncles, siblings or friends) are under-represented.

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1. Key findings

Over

9 out of 10

family and friends carers responding to the survey are grandparents

57%

gave up work or reduced their hours to take on the care of a child

6 out of 10

family and friends carers has a chronic health condition or disability

- Over nine out of 10 family and friends carers responding to the survey are grandparents. In many respects they are similar to other grandparents – in terms of age or occupational grade – but they are likely to be poorer because they have given up work or reduced their working hours when they took on the care of a child. They are also more likely to be in poor health – six in 10 (60%) have a chronic health condition or disability such as arthritis, high blood pressure or anxiety/depression.
- 57% gave up work or reduced their hours to take on the care of a child.
- 88% are under the age of 65 and 42% are under 55. Over 8 out of 10 (83%) are women.
- Two out of three (64.5%) family and friends carers say they have a household income of under £300 a week.
- 52% of carers are working or have a partner who is working. One in three cite welfare benefits as a main source of income, and one in four (27%) rely on the basic state pension. Only a third (36%) get an allowance from their local authority for looking after their grandchild/children.

38%

of carers have been looking after the child or children for more than five years

48%

are looking after a child with a disability or special needs

6 out of 10

feel less isolated because of their membership of the Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Network.

- One in three (33%) receive council tax benefit and one in five (22%) are in receipt of housing benefit, above national averages.
- Around four in 10 (41%) are single (living without a partner) compared to 24% of all 45 to 64 year olds. They are more likely than other family and friends carers to have given up work and be dependent on welfare benefits or the state pension. 37% receive housing benefit.
- 38% of the carers have been looking after the child or children for more than five years and 36% have been looking after them for between two and five years.
- 7% of survey respondents do not receive any kind of benefit or allowance for looking after the child, not even child benefit.
- Half (48%) are looking after at least one child with special needs or a disability.
- Nearly half (47%) say they are looking after the children because of parental drug or alcohol abuse.
- Six out of 10 (59%) family and friends carers said they feel less isolated because of their membership of the Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Network.

2. Context

There are estimated to be around 200,000 family and friends carers in the UK looking after around 300,000 children because parents are no longer able to fulfill that role⁴, for example because of parental drug or alcohol abuse, disability or long-term illness, death, child abuse or neglect, domestic violence or imprisonment. 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. Despite these requirements, only 15% of foster placements are with family and friends carers and just 11% of all local authority placements⁵. The evidence base on the numbers and circumstances of both carers and children living in family and friends care is very limited, particularly in relation to those who are not foster carers (the vast majority).

Partly because of this lack of data, family and friends carers are largely invisible to both policy makers and service providers. Their lack of visibility renders them vulnerable to unintended consequences of changes in government policy, such as planned cuts to both public services and welfare benefit entitlement announced by the Government in the June 2010 Budget and the October 2010 Comprehensive Spending Review.

This survey aims to provide a clearer picture of the demographic, personal, economic and financial circumstances of family and friends carers, the children they are looking after and the reasons for children coming into their care. Many family and friends carers are involved in court proceedings to formalise their legal status and may incur legal expenses in doing so. The survey also aims to provide baseline information on the numbers of carers with a court order, those who have incurred legal expenses and also the proportion who receive allowances from local authorities for the children they are looking after. Finally, the survey aims to gather information about support received from social services by family and friends carers, and to elicit their views on the support they feel they need.

3. About the family and friends carers

Over

8 out of 10

(83%) of family and friends carers who responded to the survey are women

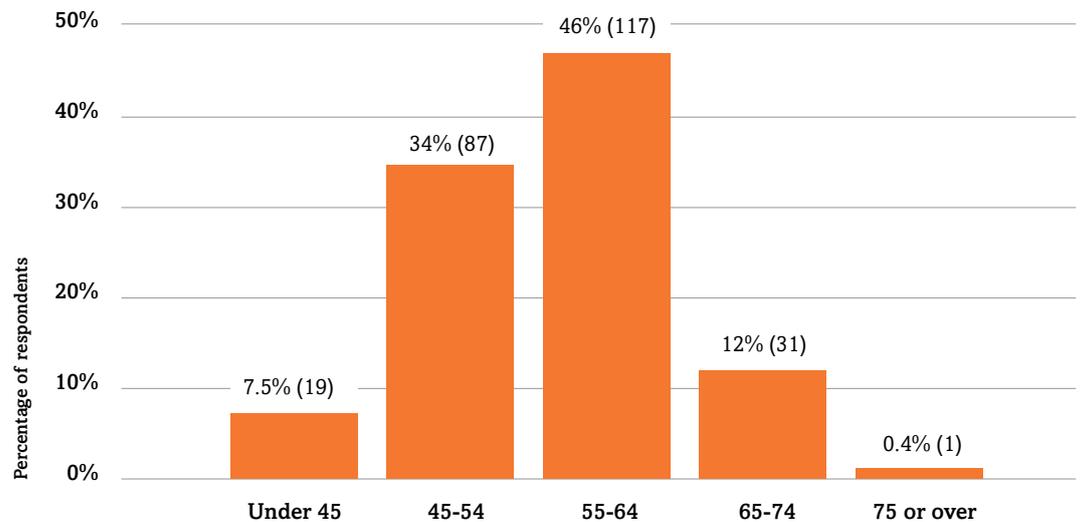
Demographics

Almost all (96%) of the family and friends carers who responded to our survey are grandparents, but a small minority are great-grandparents, aunts, uncles or friends. The proportion of grandparents is higher than that reported in another recent survey (Family Rights Group, 2010) and in studies of family and friends carers who are foster carers, which found that between 40% and 60% are grandparents, and that aunts and uncles are also a large subgroup (Farmer and Moyers, 2008; Hunt, Waterhouse and Lutman, 2008; Laws, 2001).

The majority of carers who responded are aged between 45 and 64, however 7.5% are aged under 45, and 12% are over the age of 65. The age profile of the carers broadly reflects the age of grandparents in the UK population⁶. The ethnicity of the carers is also similar to the profile for the UK population as a whole, however white, black/black British and mixed ethnicity groups are somewhat over-represented, and Asian groups are significantly under-represented.

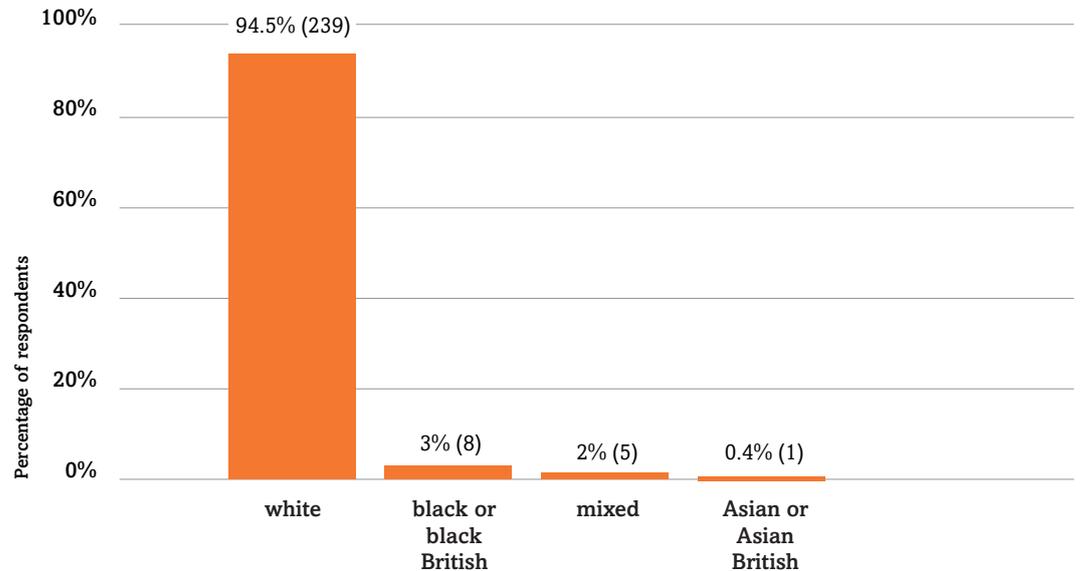
Over eight out of 10 family and friends carers who responded to the survey are women. 59% are living with a partner while a third are separated or divorced and 7% are widowed. They are more likely to be living without a partner than people of similar ages in the wider population (41% compared with 24% of all 45 to 64 year olds⁷).

Graph 1: Age of family and friends carers



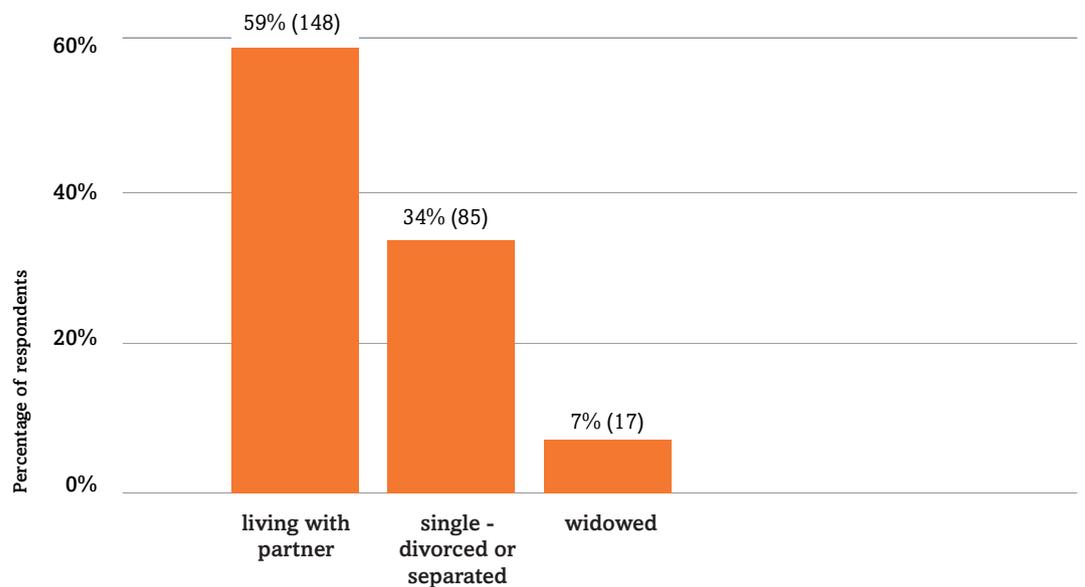
Note: Response rate 100%.

Graph 2: Ethnicity of family and friends carers



Note: Response rate 99%.

Graph 3: Partnership status of family and friends carers



Note: Response rate 98%.

Prior to taking on care of a child

72%

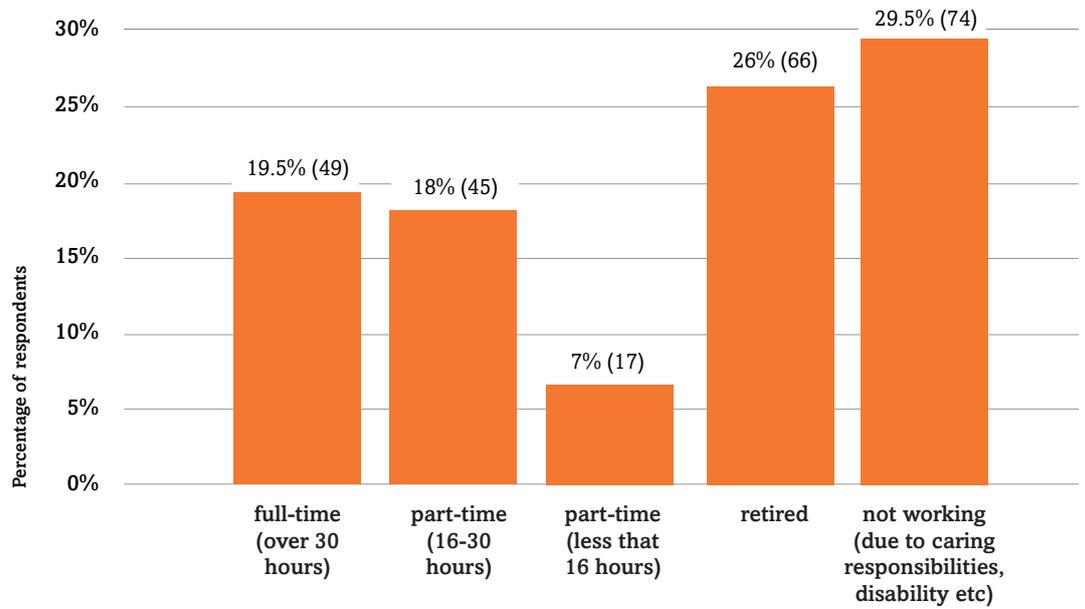
of the family and friends carers who responded to our survey were in work

Employment

Over four in 10 of the family and friends carers (45%) who responded to our survey are working, however the majority are either retired, or not working due to their own poor health or their caring commitments. 28% report that they gave up work to take on the care of a child, and a further 29% reduced their hours closely reflecting the findings of another survey (Family Rights Group, 2010). This suggests that prior to taking on care of a child 72% were in work, which is very similar to a recent survey of 72 grandparents which found that 74% were working before taking on the care of a child (Broad, 2010). The employment rates of carers prior to taking on the care of the child is also broadly similar to employment rates for all adults of comparable ages in the population⁸.

Over half of the family and friends carers (52%) are either working themselves or have a partner who is working. The occupational group of the chief income earner in the carers' households is broadly comparable to the UK population as a whole, based on National Readership Survey classifications⁹. Carers come from a wide variety of occupational backgrounds, ranging from unskilled workers to college lecturers, civil servants and managers.

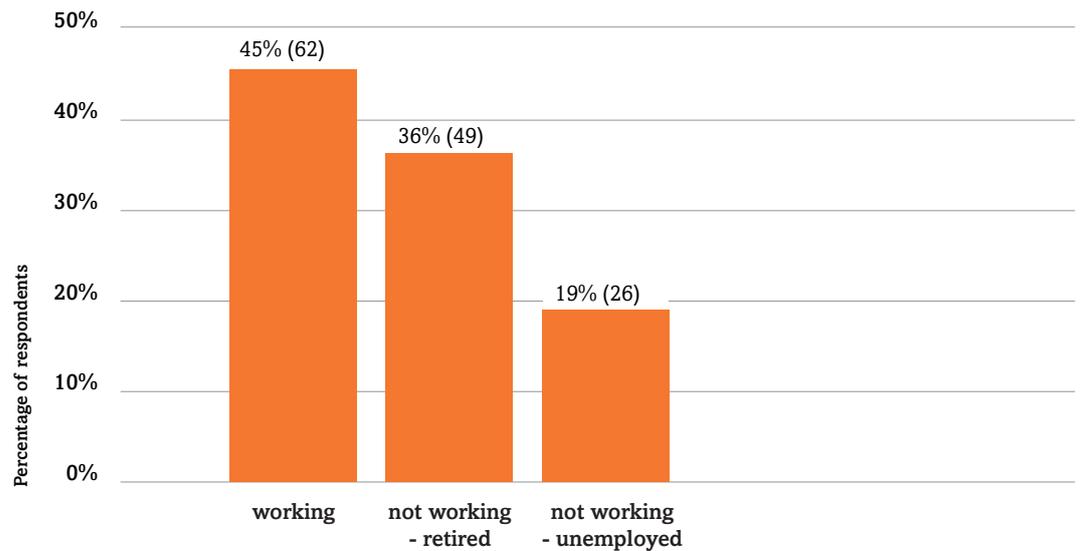
Graph 4: Employment status of family and friends carers



Note: Response rate 98%.

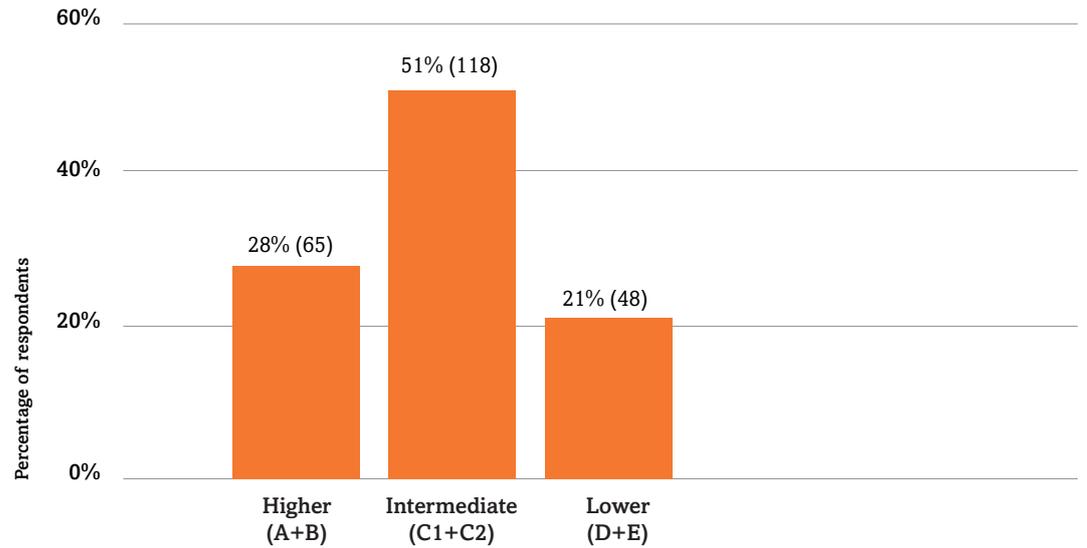
“I would love to give up work to give these children the attention that they need. It seems I am forever stressed trying to balance work and life. I fear for my health at times.” Grandmother raising two granddaughters aged under seven.

Graph 5: Employment status of partners of survey respondents



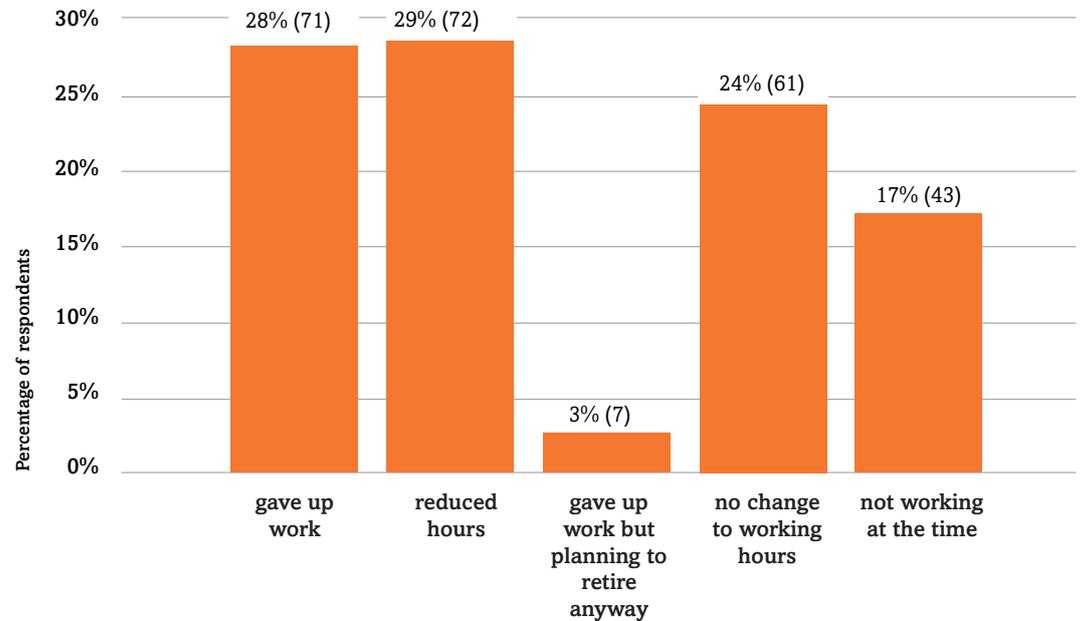
Note: Response rate of those living with a partner 93%.

Graph 6: Occupational level of chief income earner (present or most recent occupation)



Note: Response rate 91%.

Graph 7: Family and friends carers who gave up working or reduced hours to take care of a child



Note: Response rate 98%.

“My husband reduced his hours at work because my grandchildren both have disabilities. They need constant care. 10, 20 years ahead these children are still going to need us to look after them. We can’t even think about retirement.”
Grandmother raising two disabled grandchildren aged four and one.

3 in 10

report net household incomes (including benefits and after tax) of below £200 a week

Income

The majority of family and friends carers are on low or very modest incomes in comparison with the average household income of approximately £500 a week¹⁰, with around three in 10 (32%) reporting net household incomes (including benefits and after tax) of below £200 a week and a further 33% on incomes of between £200 and £300 a week.

This is in contrast with the social grade of family and friends carers based on occupation of the chief income earners which broadly reflects the distribution between lower, middle and higher occupational groups for the wider population. Almost half of carers (48%) report that income from their or a partner's job is the main or one of the main sources of income for their household and a third identify welfare benefits as a main source of income. 27% say that the basic state pension is their main source of income (of whom around half do not have any other income except benefits or allowances) and 20% also receive an occupational or private pension. Only 7% are claiming pension credit.

41% of carers describe themselves as “struggling” financially and 49% say they are “coping”. Just 10% describe themselves as “comfortable”. Again, this reflects a recent survey which found 78% of grandparent carers' financial situation had worsened since their grandchild had come to live with them (Broad 2010). The gap between carers' incomes, their occupational status and national average household income indicates the very significant financial impact of taking on the care of a child.

Graph 8: Reported weekly net household income (including benefits and after tax)



Note: Response rate 92%.

Welfare benefits and allowances

Four out of 10 (41%) of the family and friends carers receive welfare benefits to help meet household costs. 84 respondents (one third of those who responded to the survey) state that they receive council tax benefit. However, this is significantly higher than the estimated proportion (22%) of households in the general population who receive council tax benefit¹¹. 56 (22% of the total) say they receive housing benefit, which is similarly above the national average of 18%¹². 11% say they receive incapacity benefit and 7% are on pension credit. The relatively high levels of the carers in receipt of means tested benefits compared with the population as a whole provides further evidence that they are more likely to be on low incomes¹³. This risk of low income among family and friends carers reflects the impact of giving up work or reducing working hours to take on the care of a child/children. It is almost certainly also associated with the high incidence of a disability or chronic health conditions among carers, and the fact that they are more likely to be single.

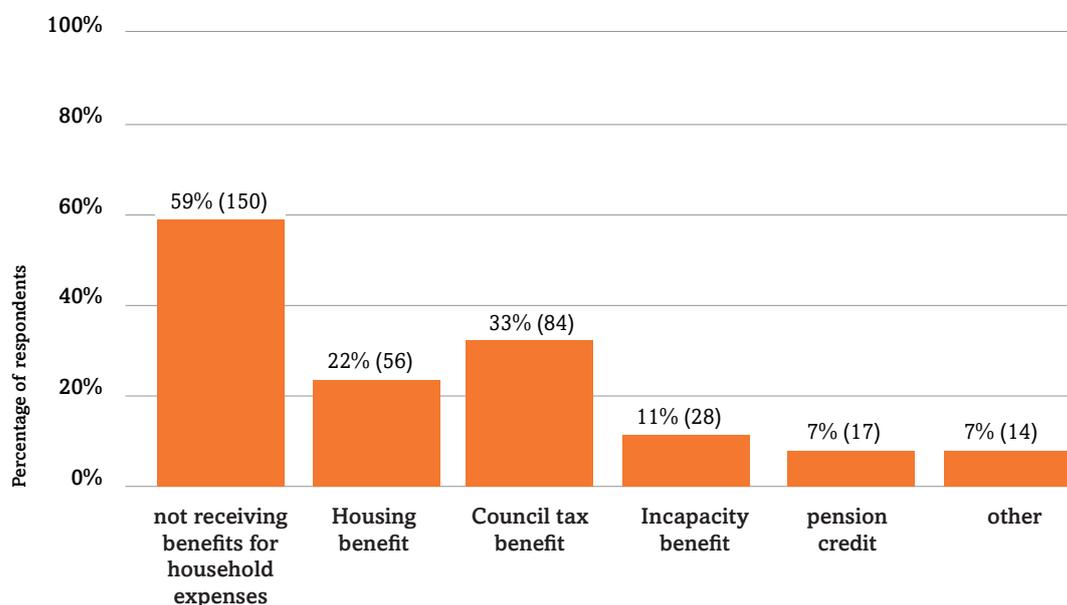
Single carers, 99% of whom are women, are significantly more likely than other family and friends carers to be in receipt of income related benefits (47%) or the state pension (34%). Out of a subsample of 101, 48.5% get council tax benefit and 37% get housing benefit, indicating that they are at particularly high risk of being on a low income. This is partly due to the fact that fewer have any income from work – just 39% compared with 48% of all family and friends carers – and are more likely to have given up work to take on the care of a child - 36% compared with 28% - reflecting the additional burden of parenting alone.

Graph 9: Main source(s) of income for family and friends carers



Note: Response rate 95%.

Graph 10: Welfare benefits received by family and friends carers to cover household expenses

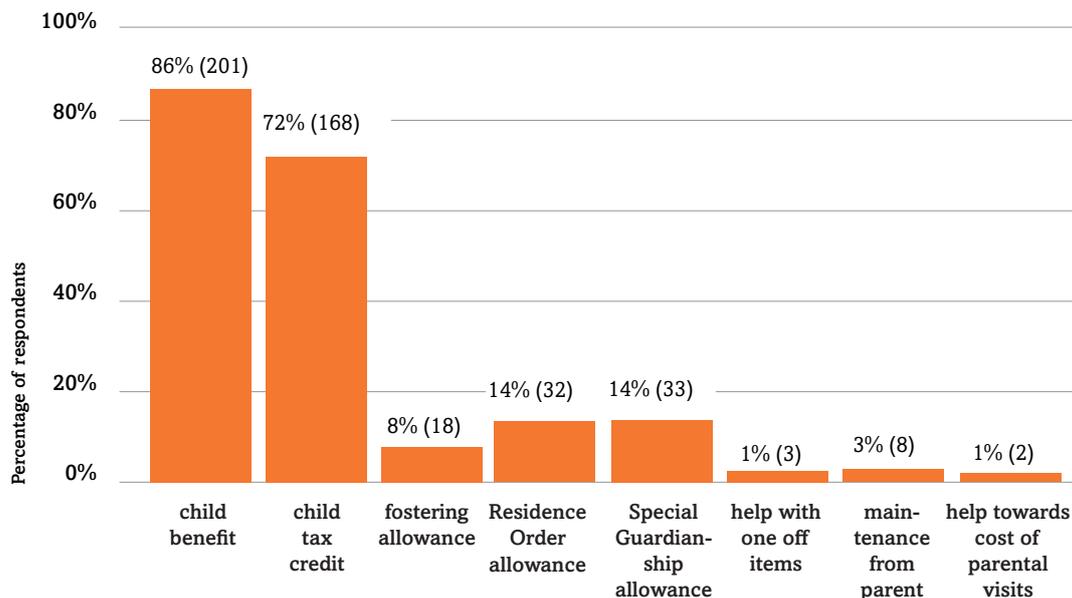


Note: Response rate 96%.

“I believe that there are insufficient benefits available to people looking after their grandchildren. The Government must save thousands of pounds not paying out benefits to young/unable parents. My great fear is that as my grandson gets older his emotional wellbeing may be affected and there has been no input from social services to advise on this aspect of his life. My career has also been seriously affected and thus my ability to financially support him.”
Grandmother raising her grandson.

“Why should our grandchild suffer because we are unable to provide as much financial support as foster carers for things like dance classes and clubs? We feel that we are left out with no financial help. It is all on our backs.”
Grandmother raising her granddaughter.

Graph 11: Allowances and benefits received by family and friends carers for looking after child/children



Note: Response rate 92%.

“I’ve had my granddaughter for six months now and not received a penny in child benefit or child tax credit. My daughter’s not contesting it, it’s just incompetence.”
Grandmother raising two-year-old granddaughter.



7% of family friends get no benefits or allowances

Of the 236 family and friends carers who answered this question, 86% say they received child benefit. 72% say they also receive child tax credits.

Only one third (33%) of the family and friends carers receive an allowance from the local authority for looking after the children. Of the 144 carers who say they have a Residence Order, only 32 (14%) receive a discretionary Residence Order Allowance from the local authority. 49 survey respondents have a Special Guardianship Order, of whom 33 (67%) say they are receiving a Special Guardianship Allowance (also discretionary). 80% of the carers have some kind of formal arrangement but 20% have no legal order for a grandchild they are raising.

These findings indicate that child benefit and child tax credit are for most of the family and friends carers in the survey the only support they receive from the state for taking on the care of a child, even though many of the children would otherwise be in local authority care.

18 carers, 7% of those who answered the question, do not receive any benefits or allowances of any kind for looking after the children, not even child benefit.

Household size

At least 10% of the family and friends carers are living in households of five or more people, and 80% are in households of three or more. This compares with a national average household size of 2.4¹⁴.

Over

77%

of the family and friends carers say that they were involved in legal proceedings when taking on care of a child

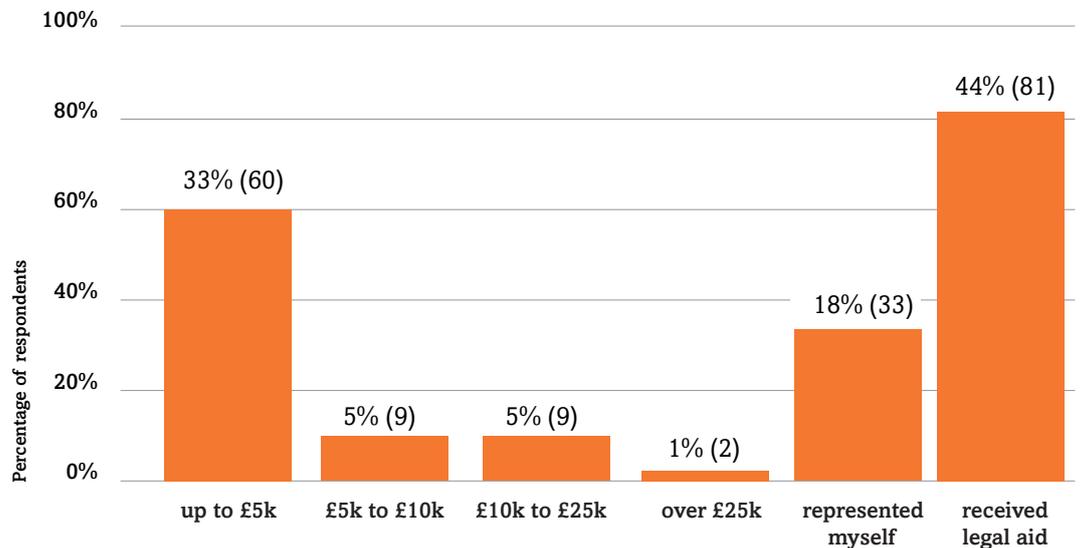
Cost of legal proceedings when taking on the care of a child

Three quarters (77%) of the family and friends carers say that they were involved in legal proceedings when taking on the care of a child. 60 carers, or one third of those who answered the question, say they paid up to £5,000 in legal fees while 81 (44% of those who answered the question) said they received legal aid. 11 respondents, (6% of those who answered the question) paid legal fees of over £10,000 and two respondents paid over £25,000 in legal fees.

“We can’t get legal aid because of my husband’s part-time job and the benefits we get for the children.” Grandmother raising three grandchildren and her own school-aged daughter.

“My one wish would be to [receive some] legal representation, free of charge, as we are just not on the right side of getting legal aid. The mother does receive legal aid and keeps demanding more and more which eventually ends up in court and we are worried about what will happen when we do not have any money left.” Grandmother raising two grandsons aged under 12.

Graph 12: Legal costs paid by family and friends carers



Note: Response rate 96%.

“My granddaughter was taken away from her mother, my daughter, due to both physical and mental abuse. This has caused a lot of problems in the family. Financially it has almost crippled us, we have had to have loans to cope with the legal side due to no fault of our own. Before this unfortunate incident we were a happy financially secure couple. This has changed dramatically, both as a couple and financially due to the stress we have had to deal with. Please, please help us!” Grandmother raising her granddaughter.

Almost

6 in 10

of family and friends carers report that they have either a disability or chronic health condition

Health and well-being of family and friends carers and their partners

Six in 10 (60%) of family and friends carers report that they have either a disability or chronic health condition. Arthritis is the most commonly reported condition, followed by high blood pressure. A significant proportion have a mental health condition such as depression or anxiety. Three in 10 (30%) of all survey respondents say they have a disability or health condition that has a moderate or severe impact on their ability to carry out every day tasks and activities. However only four respondents (1.8% of sample) receive help from adult social services on account of their disability or health condition. Other recent research paints a similar picture, with 55% of a sample of 72 grandparent carers saying their physical health had worsened since their grandchild had come to live with them, and 40% saying their mental health had worsened (Broad, 2010).

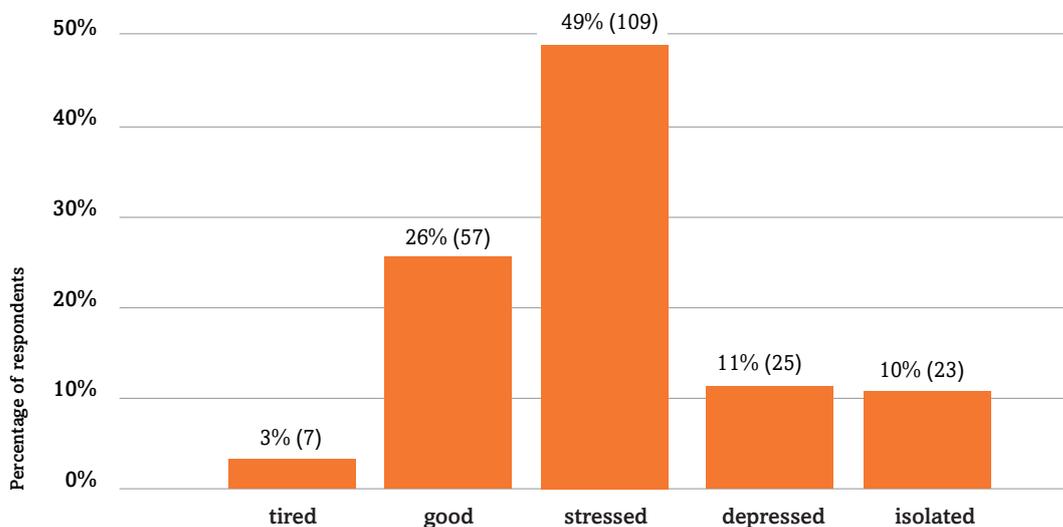
Almost half (47%) of the partners of family and friends carers have a chronic health condition or disability. One in 10 (10%) family and friends carers say they are providing personal care to their partner.

Overall three in 10 (30%) family and friends carers are also a carer for an elderly or disabled relative, partner or friend. 10 respondents (4%) say they are caring for another adult as well as their grandchild and their partner.

Most family and friends carers say they lack personal well-being and 109 respondents, half (49%) of those who answered the question, describe themselves as “stressed”. Others describe themselves as “depressed”, “isolated” or “tired”, with only around one in four (26%) describing their personal well-being as “good”.

“I am desperate for help. I live in a small village, and a lot of people look down on me because of my daughter’s addiction and prison. I need a break; I have not had any time off in 5 years.” Great-grandmother caring for seven year old great-granddaughter.

Graph 13: How would you describe your personal wellbeing?



Note: Response rate 87%.

“We are at the end of our stress level. [We’ve] been fighting for help for the past 10 years and [got] nothing. Social services tell us because we cope they will give us no help.” Grandfather raising four children of his own as well as his grandson.

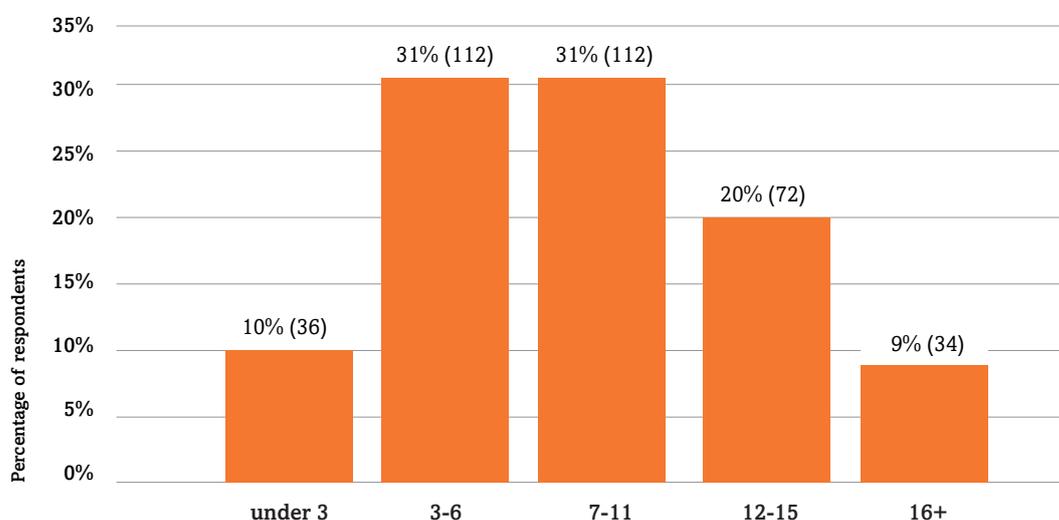
4. About the Children

The family and friends carers are looking after a total of 366 children who are not their own (nine did not answer the question). 15% of carers also have children of their own under the age of 18 still at home. The majority of carers, 59%, are looking after one child who is not their own, but four in 10 (41%) are looking after more than one child, of whom three carers are looking after four children and two carers are looking after five children.

14% of family and friends carers also have children of their own under the age of 18 living at home.

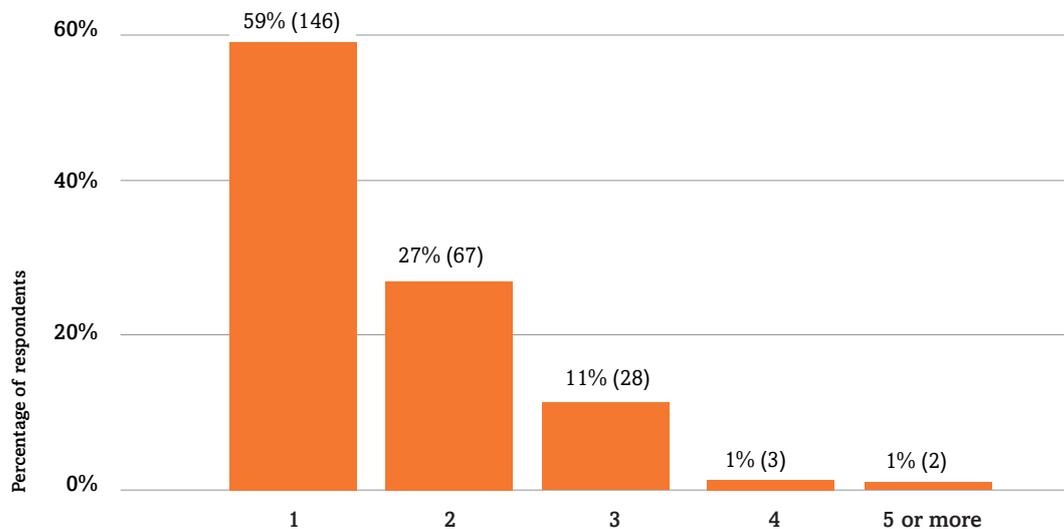
Slightly more children being looked after are boys (52%) than girls (48%).

Graph 14: Ages of children being looked after



Note: Response rate 97%.

Graph 15: Numbers of children other than their own who family and friends carers are looking after



Note: Response rate 96%.

“When my sister died of cancer and my brother-in-law got a new partner, I had her two as well my brother-in-law’s two.” Grandmother raising her granddaughter and providing regular childcare for four nieces and nephews.

Almost half (46%) of the family and friends carers are looking after at least one child with a disability or special needs of some kind, of which emotional and behavioural problems are the most common, affecting around one in three (32%) children. This reflects findings from other research on family and friends foster care (Farmer and Moyers, 2008; Hunt, Waterhouse and Lutman, 2008). 18 (7%) family and friends carers say they are looking after a child with autism or Asperger's syndrome. This translates to nearly 5% of the children looked after, (assuming that no carer is looking after more than one child with autism or Asperger's) which is five times the rate of Asperger's/autism diagnosis for all children¹⁵. There also appears to be a much higher rate of learning disability/difficulty among the children looked after than in the wider population, with 16% of the children affected, compared with around 2% of all children¹⁶.

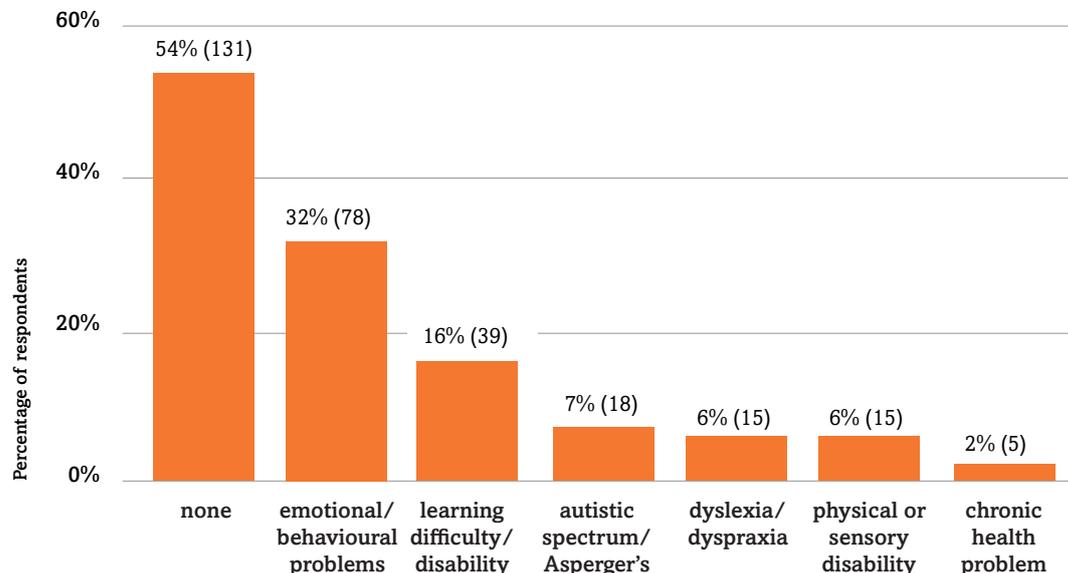
4 in 10

say one or more of the children they are looking after have difficulties at school

Around four in 10 carers say one or more of the children they are looking after have difficulties at school, the most common being problems making friends with other children. A significant proportion – around 7% – say the child they are looking after suffers bullying. However, despite the high level of emotional and behavioural difficulties which the children experience, the children do not seem to be posing a significant problem to schools. Only one carer reported that a child they are looking after had been permanently excluded, just five out of 239 carers who answered the question said truanting was a problem, and eight said a child had been referred to an educational welfare officer.

“My granddaughter has developmental delay and microcephaly and my grandson has developmental delay, epilepsy and microcephaly as well as physical disabilities. He’s got a lot of problems and doesn’t walk at all... We’ve got our two younger [secondary school aged] daughters at home too. I do get DLA [disability living allowance] for them but I don’t get any financial help from social services and I don’t get anything their mum wouldn’t get if she’d still got them.”
Grandmother raising two grandchildren with disabilities.

Graph 16: Special needs/disability of children in family and friends care



Note: Response rate 97%.

“My granddaughter has emotional problems and recently we have been successful in obtaining support for her... This has been a particularly stressful year as I have had my other daughter and granddaughter living with me for several months. I came very near to breaking point a few weeks ago because of the stress of it all and the effect it was having on my granddaughter and our relationship. I really thought I would have to put my granddaughter into foster care as I just was not coping Thankfully things have improved. I have been referred to Family Support Service which I am hopeful will help. It really is a very isolating experience. I know I have got to try and get a life of my own but I feel so tired and it's too much of an effort.”
Grandmother raising her 12-year-old granddaughter.

8 in 10

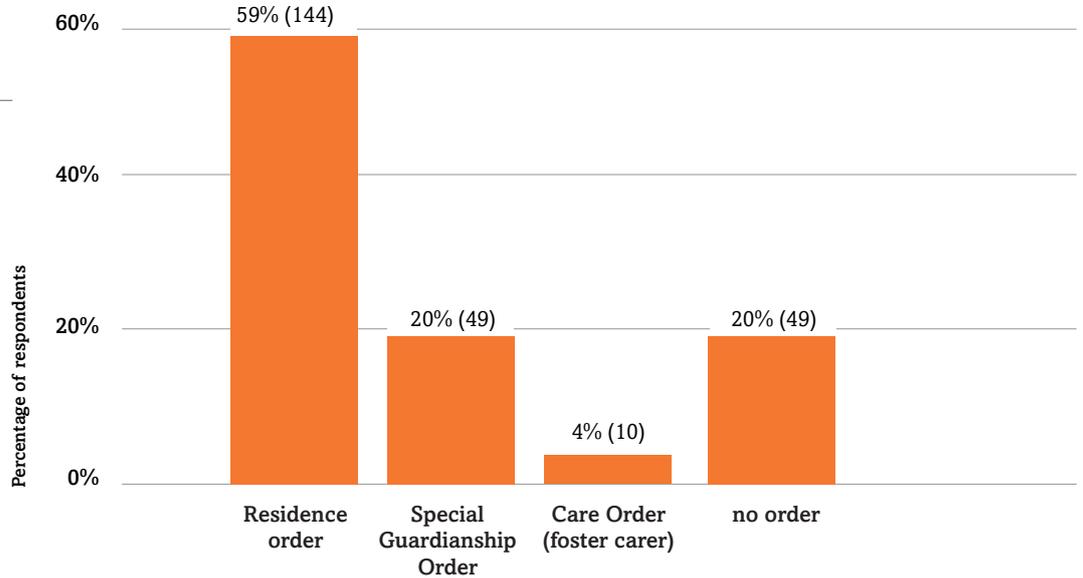
have a court order for the children they are looking after

Note: Response rate 96%.

Court orders

Eight in 10 family and friends carers have a court order of some kind for the children they are looking after. 59% have a Residence Order and 20% have a Special Guardianship Order. Just 4% have a Care Order and are family and friends foster carers¹⁷.

Graph 17: Family and friends carers with a court order for looking after the child/children



Nearly

4 in 10

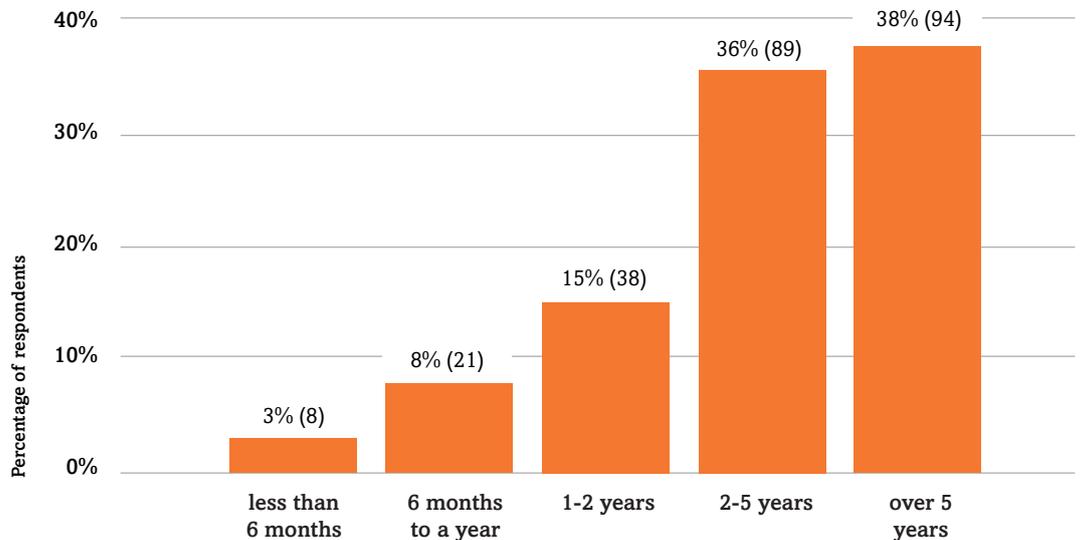
carers have been looking after the child or children for more than five years

Note: Response rate 98%.

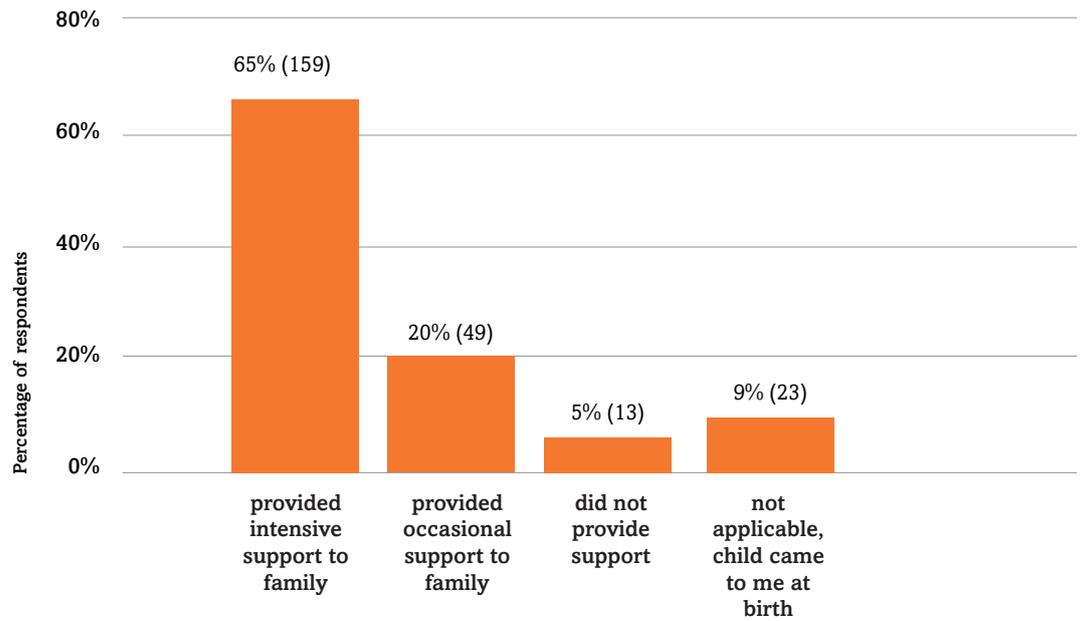
Length of time children have been living in family and friends care and relationships with the parents

Nearly four in 10 of the carers (38%) have been looking after the child or children for more than five years, with a further 36% saying they have looked after the child or children for between two and five years. It is likely the Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Network members are over represented by carers who have been looking after children for a long period, because newer carers are less likely to have heard about the Network; this nevertheless indicates the very substantial long-term commitment which many carers are making. Furthermore, almost two thirds (65%) of carers say they were providing intensive support to the family in the years before they began looking after the children.

Graph 18: Length of time that the child/children have been living with the family and friends carer



Graph 19: In the years before the child/children came to live with you, how would you describe the support you offered?



Note: Response rate 96%.

In around seven out of 10 cases family and friends carers are still in touch with the child or children’s mother. 26% of carers (or 36% of those who are in touch) describe the relationship with the child’s mother as “good” while the same percentage describes the relationship as “difficult”. Just over half of family and friends carers are in touch with the father. 19% (or 35% of those who are in contact) describe the relationship with the father as “good” and the same percentage describe it as “difficult”.

Another recent survey looked at the impact of taking on care of a child on grandparents’ relationships with their partner, friends and other family members, and found that while relationships with their spouse or partner was generally “holding up”, relationships with other family members and especially relationships with friends had worsened (Broad, 2010).

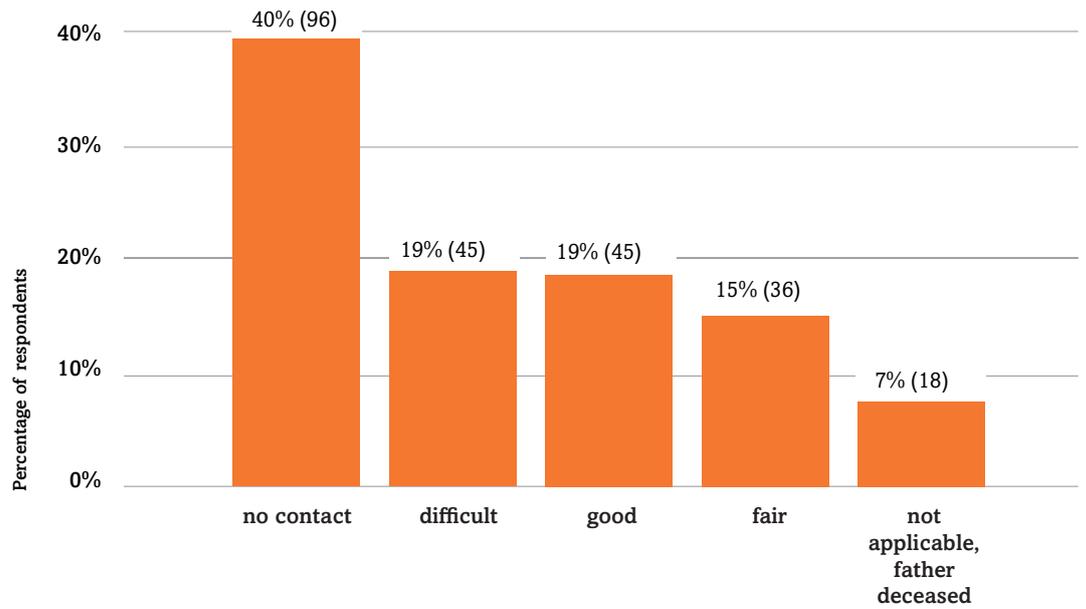
“I would love to meet other single grannies, caring for their children, for moral support. I find childcare (for outings etc) prohibitive and dread losing “my” friends. My other daughter (over 18) lives here too and finds it difficult to know whether she is my grandson’s sibling or parent. It had a bad effect on her ‘A’ levels and she has dropped out of university.” Grandmother caring for her grandson aged under 12.

Graph 20: How would you describe your relationship with the child’s/ children’s mother?



Note: Response rate 97%.

Graph 21: How would you describe your relationship with the child's/ children's father?



Note: Response rate 95%.

“Our granddaughter will be leaving us soon to go back to her mother who is in recovery. The whole experience we have been through with our daughter has been terrible and devastated the entire family. Our two sons now have a much more distant relationship with us, they feel we should have dropped our daughter (she is adopted). I think they resent the time and effort we have given our granddaughter and the fact that we are unable to give as much to their children. Family celebrations are non existent now and I dread birthdays, Christmas etc and we can't get it right with any of our children because of the situation we are in.”
Grandmother raising her granddaughter.

47%

of carers say the reason for taking on the care of a child/children is parental drug or alcohol abuse

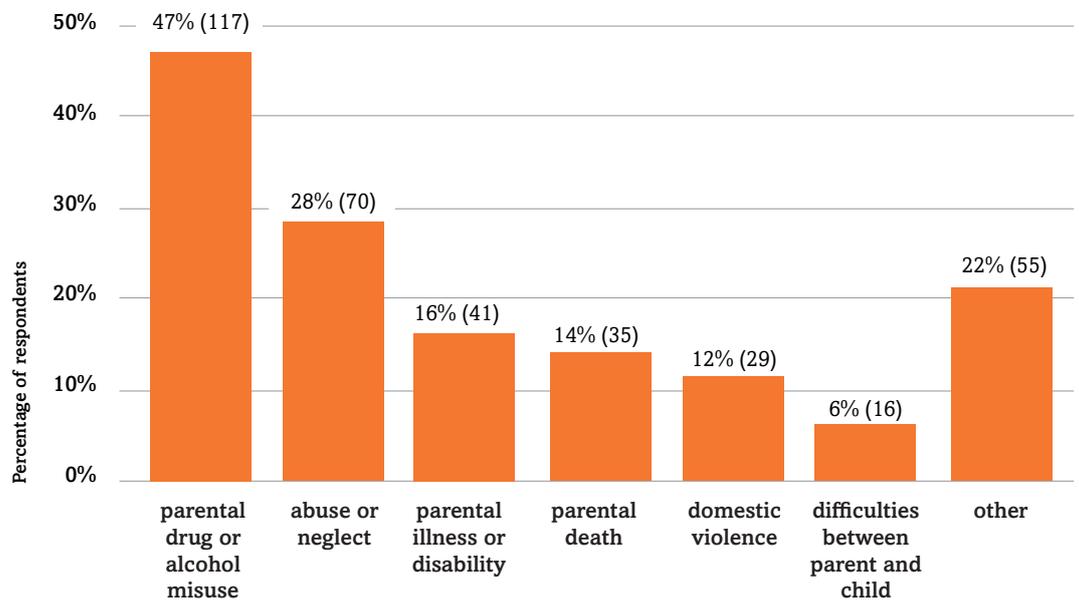
Reasons for children being in family and friends care

The most common reason given by carers for taking on the care of a child/children is parental drug or alcohol abuse (47%), followed by child abuse or neglect (28%). Respondents to the survey were able to give more than one response to this question, and of the 117 respondents who cited drug or alcohol abuse as a reason for the child being in their care, 27% also indicated that child abuse and neglect was a factor, and 15% also mentioned domestic violence.

Other frequently given reasons for taking on the care of a child include parental illness or disability, including mental illness, cited by 16% of carers, parental death (14%) or domestic violence (12%). Less common reasons given are difficulties between a parent and child, parental abandonment, poverty, parent being very young and child's disability.

“My daughter left the children with us one weekend and didn't come back. You are grieving for the child you have lost. We just try to focus on the grandchildren.”
Grandmother raising two grandchildren.

Graph 22: Reasons why child is in family and friends care



Note: Response rate 98%.

68%

of carers say they did not receive the help or support they needed from social services

Contact with children's social services

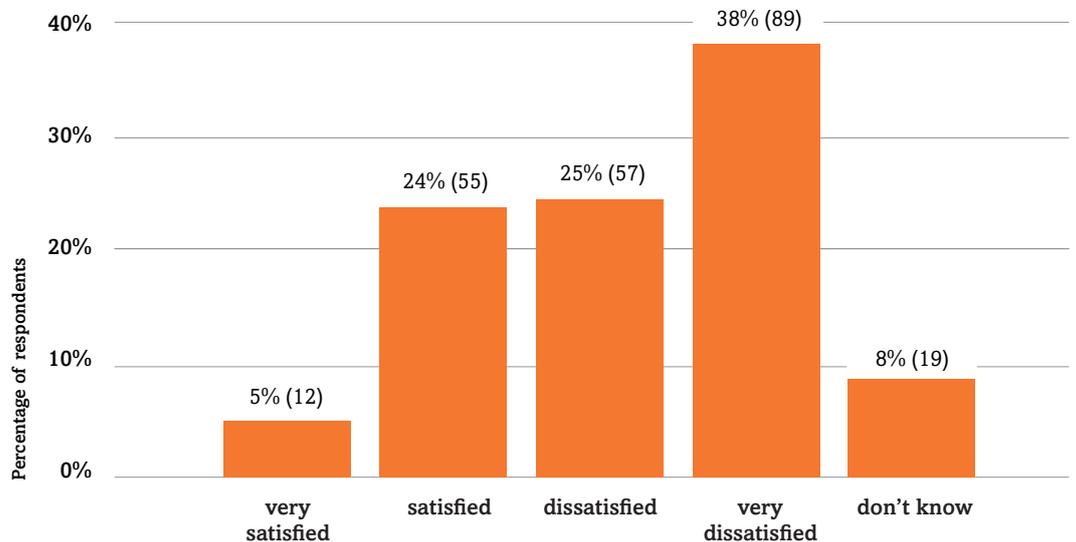
A third of family and friends carers who responded to the survey say they are currently in touch with children's social services, while a further 50% say they have been in contact in the past but are not currently in contact.

Generally, the carers report a high level of dissatisfaction with children's social services. Of the 163 carers who say they have requested help or support, less than a third (32%) say they received the help or support they needed while 68% said they did not. Almost one in four (38%) describe themselves as "very dissatisfied" with social services or social workers, and a further 25% say they are "dissatisfied", while less than one in three (29%) said they were either "satisfied" or "very satisfied".

"Although satisfied with children's services because my social worker was excellent, I do feel more help should be given at the beginning, particularly financial." Grandmother raising her teenage granddaughter.

"We were blackmailed and bullied by social services. We would now think twice before advising others to look after grandchildren." Grandmother raising her grandson.

Graph 23: How satisfied are you with your experience of social workers and children's services?



Note: Response rate 91%.

Family group conferencing

133 respondents said they had taken part in a family group conference about the child or children they are looking after, whilst 114 said they had not. A family group conference is a family-led planning meeting involving the child and extended family. It addresses child welfare concerns identified by the local authority and family members. The plan should be agreed by the local authority as long as it addresses their key concerns.

5. Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Network

59%

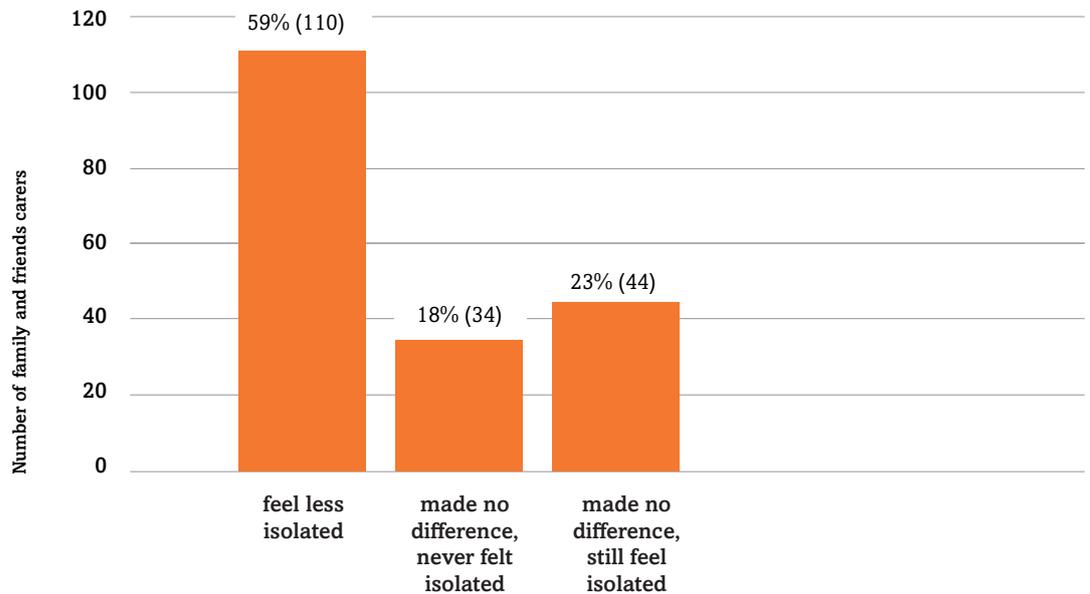
of respondents said they felt less isolated due to being a member of the Network

Of the 212 survey respondents who answered the question, a third described the Network newsletter *Grandparents First* as “very helpful”, and a further 50% described it as “quite helpful”. 17% said the newsletter was “neither helpful not unhelpful”.

189 respondents answered the question about whether they found being members of the Network made them feel less isolated, of whom 59% said they felt less isolated. 23% said that being a member of the Network made no difference and they still felt isolated, whilst 18% said they had never felt isolated.

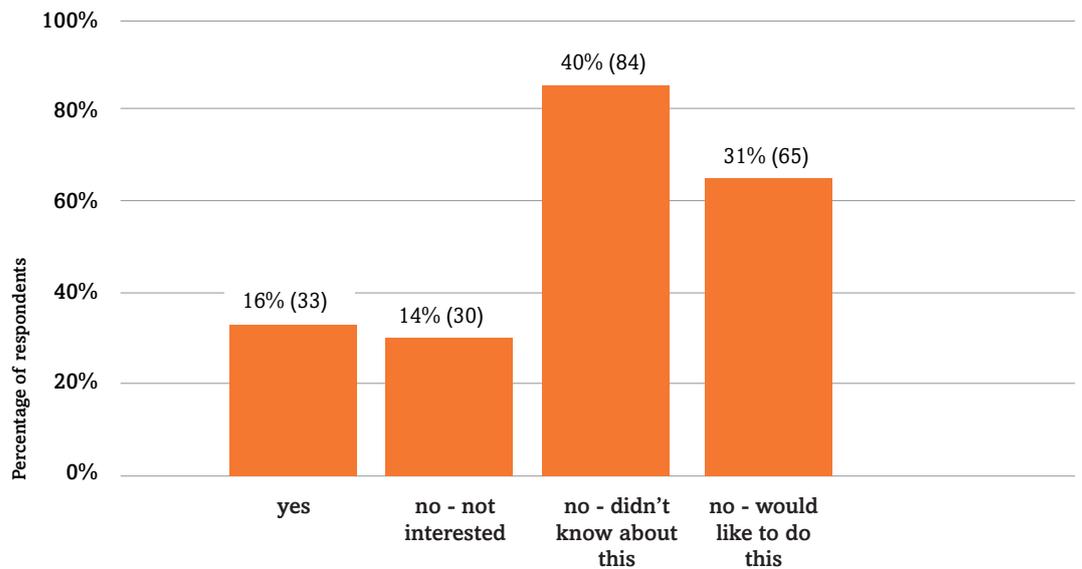
“Social Services do not want to know as soon as you ask for financial support. We have been through some very difficult times. The newsletter has been a lifeline, and I have received a lot of help over the telephone.” Grandmother raising her teenage granddaughter.

Graph 24: Impact of membership of the Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Network on carers’ feelings of isolation



Note: Response rate 74%.

Graph 25: Have you used the Network to make contact with other grandparents in your area?



Note: Response rate 83%.

Only a small number of respondents (33) said they had used the Network to make contact with other grandparents in their area, but a higher proportion, three in 10 (31%) of those who answered the question, said they would like to do this.

There appeared to be some confusion about what being a member of the Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Network involves, since only members are emailed or posted the Grandparents First newsletter, yet some people who said they were in receipt of the newsletter said they were not members of the Network.

What family and friends carers say they want

Survey respondents were given the opportunity to say in free text what they would find helpful.

Family and friends carers said that they wanted more financial support for the children they are looking after. They also said they wanted access to free legal advice, and access to other sources of information and help with the children they looking after.

77 respondents said they would like respite care (short breaks) for the children they are looking after. 52 said they would like help from a volunteer, for example to assist with shopping and babysitting.

“I go to a grandparents group [for people] with custody of a grandchild run by Family Action based in Kent. This group gives us a chance to meet other grandparents in similar situations. We laugh, we cry and we go out as a group.” Grandmother raising her grandson.

6. Conclusions

A large, hand-drawn style number '57%' in red, indicating the percentage of carers who gave up work or reduced their hours.

gave up work or reduced their hours to take on care of a child

Grandparents' financial situation and health suffers when they take on care of a child

A large, hand-drawn style number '4 in 10' in red, indicating the proportion of carers looking after more than one child.

are looking after more than one child

The most common reason for taking on the care of a child is parental drug and alcohol abuse

The study provides an important contribution to the field of knowledge about grandparents and family and friends care. As well as confirming previous research, it provides a range of new findings. It is based on a survey of 255 mostly grandparent carers who are raising their grandchildren.

Impact on family and friends carers' health, well-being and financial situation

The research finds that most of the family and friends carers are on lower incomes than other groups of similar ages in the population, despite being broadly comparable in terms of their employment and occupational status before taking on the care of a child. 57% gave up work or reduced their hours to take on care of a child. A high proportion (60%) of carers have a chronic health condition or disability. Three in 10 (30%) are also providing care for a disabled or elderly partner, friend or relative. Three out of four report a lack of personal well-being, describing themselves as “stressed”, “depressed” or “isolated”. Almost three quarters have been looking after the child or children for at least two years, and 38% for more than five years. This confirms the findings from other research that grandparents' financial situation and health suffers when they take on care of a child.

Family and friends carers are likely to be disproportionately affected by welfare reforms

Whilst over half of the family and friends carers are in work or have a working partner, over a third identify welfare benefits as a main source of income. A higher proportion are single (41%) than others in the population of a similar age. Higher than average proportions of grandparent carers receive means tested benefits such as housing benefit and council tax benefit, and are therefore likely to be disproportionately affected by proposed changes to housing benefit and other welfare benefit changes. They are often living in large households: 80% live in households of three or more people compared with the average household size of 2.4. Many still have older children of their own living at home, and four in 10 are looking after more than one child who is not their own. They are likely to be disproportionately affected by welfare benefit changes which will impact most on larger households. Single family and friends carers will be hit particularly hard, as they are more likely to be in receipt of welfare benefits including housing benefit.

Children in family and friends care have often experienced multiple difficulties

The most common reason for taking on the care of a child is parental drug and alcohol abuse. Other common reasons are abuse and neglect, parental illness or disability, parental death or domestic violence. 65% of carers say they provided intensive support to the family in the years before the child came to live with them, and where there is still contact with a parent, many report that the relationship is difficult. These findings indicate that many family and friends and the children they are looking after have experienced multiple difficulties within their families, often for a number of years.

Children in family and friends care are more likely to have a disability or special needs

The children looked after by family and friends carers represent a highly vulnerable group. They range in age from 0 to 18, but two thirds are aged between three and 11. 48% of carers say they are looking after at least one child with a disability or special needs, and a high proportion have emotional and behavioural problems, as studies of children living in family and friends foster care have found. The children are also more likely to have a learning disability or autistic spectrum disorder (including Asperger's) than others in the population. A high proportion of the children have problems at school such as difficulties making friends or being bullied, but few have faced sanctions such as exclusions.



have no legal order for the child or children they are looking after

The majority of family and friends carers are either “dissatisfied” or “very dissatisfied” with their experience with social services

Carers say they would like to receive more support to help them with looking after the child

Family and friends carers are likely to be involved in legal proceedings but most do not get legal aid

80% of the carers have a legal order for the children they are looking after, usually a Residence Order or less commonly a Special Guardianship Order. Only 4% say they are foster carers. 20% have no legal order for the child or children they are looking after. Around two thirds do not receive any allowances from the local authority for the children they are looking after. Three quarters of carers have been involved in legal proceedings in relation to the children they are looking after, of whom less than half received legal aid. One in ten have paid legal fees of £5,000 or more.

Family and friends carers report low satisfaction in their experience of social services

80% of the family and friends carers have been in contact with children’s social services at some time, with a third currently in contact. The low proportion who are currently in contact is a reflection of the relatively long period of time most of the carers have been looking after the children, and indicates a lack of ongoing support provided for most family and friends placements (unless they are foster carers) by local authorities. Whilst around three in 10 carers are “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with their experience of social services, around twice as many are either “dissatisfied” or “very dissatisfied”.

Family and friends carers experience loss of income and/or financial hardship but most do not receive any allowances

Carers say they would like to receive more support to help them with looking after the child. 67% do not get any financial support or allowances from local authorities for the children they are looking after other than benefits which would be available to their parents if they still lived with them. Yet many are experiencing loss of income and/or financial hardship and feel they should be entitled to a family friends carers allowance. Those receiving discretionary local authority allowances are vulnerable to cuts in children’s services as local authorities may have to focus resources on meeting their statutory obligations, rather than making discretionary payments.

Family and friends carers want more support with the children they are looking after

Many carers would like to access respite care, and the opportunity to meet with other carers, for example through peer support groups. Some would like to have a volunteer working with their family to help with day to day tasks such as shopping and babysitting.

Family and friends carers play a vital role in bringing up children who might otherwise be in the care system, often at considerable cost to their own personal and financial well-being. Without their contribution, these costs would be borne directly by the state and society as a whole. Because of their low visibility, the needs of family and friends carers and the children they are bringing up tend to be overlooked by local and national government. As a result they are vulnerable to unintended consequences of policy changes, such as cuts to welfare benefits and children’s social services. Family and friends carers deserve greater recognition and support for the vital role they play.

“Social services wanted me to take all three children. There’s no way I would have let them go into care. I’ve got Special Guardianship Orders for the older two, but nothing for the younger one. I’m not able to work [because of taking on care of the children] and anyway I wouldn’t want anyone else looking after them after what they’ve been through. But what if we did say no? I’m saving the state thousands of pounds a year, but I really worry about what the impact of the benefit changes will mean for me. I don’t receive enough housing benefit to cover the rent at the moment. What if we all end up homeless?” Single grandmother looking after grandchildren aged seven, five and two, with 18-year-old son still at home.

Notes

- 1 Around 300 paper copies of the survey were posted to network members who receive a paper copy of the newsletter Grandparents First, with a prepaid reply envelope. Network members who receive an electronic version of the newsletter were asked to complete the survey online via Survey Monkey and the survey was also publicised on Grandparents Plus' Facebook site.
- 2 The findings of the previous survey Family and Friends Care: Recognition Respect Reward of 100 Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Network members can be viewed online at www.grandparentsplus.org.uk (see bibliography).
- 3 A further seven responses were not used because they were incomplete or because the respondent did not meet one of the following criteria: they are family and friends carers resident in the UK and bringing up a child who is not their own up to age 18.
- 4 Estimate from the Family Rights Group cited in Saunders, H. and Selwyn, J, 2008. Evaluation of an informal kinship care team, *Adoption and Fostering*, Summer, Vol 32:2, pp31-42, 2008.
- 5 Although the numbers of children in family and friends foster care increased by 6% between 2009 and 2010, this increase has not kept pace with the increase in numbers of looked after children. *Children Looked After in England (including adoption and care leavers) year ending 31st March 2010*, DfE 2010.
- 6 Comparing the population of carers in the survey with the age profile from Bob Broad's (2007) analysis which indicates that 7.4% of adults aged 37 to 44 are grandparents, 29% of 45 to 54 year olds, and 60% of 55 to 64 year olds. The comparison for older grandparents (aged over 55) is less useful as Broad's analysis includes all grandparents, not just those with grandchildren under 18, while the survey is based only on kinship carers with grandchildren under 18. As grandparents become older they are proportionately more likely to have adult grandchildren.
- 7 *Social Trends 40*, Office for National Statistics, ch 2, 2010.
- 8 Employment rates for women aged 50-59 for the period January to March 2010 were 71.1% and 75.7% for women aged 35 to 49. The rates for men were 71.2% for 50 to 64 year olds and 86% for 35-49 year olds, *Labour Force Survey, Labour Market Statistics May 2010*, ONS Statistical Bulletin, pg 22.
- 9 The National Readership Survey (NRS) method of assigning social grade is based on a range of questions including occupation job title/rank/grade, job actually done and organisation he w or she works for. In this survey chief income earner's social grade is based solely on occupation, and so is a rough approximation of the NRS method. The NRS 2008 survey found that 27% of the population fell into the higher group (AB), 50% into the intermediate group (C1 and C2) and 23% into the lower group. Source: NRS, <http://www.nrs.co.uk/lifestyle.html>
- 10 ONS data for 2008/2009 places the middle quintile of the population on an average final household income of around £26 K, or £500 a week. Source: Andrew Barnard, Office for National Statistics, *The effects of taxes and benefits on household income, 2008/09*, p. 4. http://www.statistics.gov.uk/articles/nojournal/Taxes_Benefits_0809.pdf
- 11 21.7% of GB Households are in receipt of council tax benefit, derived from 5.428 million recipients, and total number of households 25.023 million. Source: Single Housing Benefit Extract for November 2008 and May 2009, Table 2. http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd1/hb_ctb/HBCT19082009.xls
- 12 21.6% of households in Great Britain receive Housing Benefit. Source: Single Housing Benefit Extract for November 2008 and May 2009, Table 2. http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd1/hb_ctb/HBCT19082009.xls
- 13 The proportion of family and friends carers in receipt of means tested benefits e.g. council tax benefit and housing benefit may be a better indicator of those on very low incomes than the household income figures, as self-reports of household income tend to be unreliable, particularly among benefit recipients and older people.
- 14 Table 2.1 in *Social Trends*, no. 39, 2009.
- 15 Green, H. et al, 2005, *Mental health of children and young people in Great Britain, 2004*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. As cited by the National Autistic Society. Available to download at www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=14116
- 16 Statistics on learning disabilities from the Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities, <http://www.learningdisabilities.org.uk/information/learning-disabilities-statistics/#many>
- 17 Note that percentages add up to more than 100% as some carers have different types of orders for looking after different children.

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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. We are campaigning for a better deal for family and friends carers.

Family and friends carers tell us they want:

- 1. Recognition for the vital role they play in looking after vulnerable children and keeping them out of the care system. As a minimum they deserve to be counted – we need official data on the number of families in this situation.**
- 2. Respect and support from service providers, including legal advice when needed and information about financial and other support they may be able to access.**
- 3. Protection from the impact of welfare reform and cuts to local authority children's services, which may hit family and friends carers and the children they are looking after (especially those who are outside the care system) particularly hard. We also want to see the introduction of a national allowance for family and friends carers who look after a child for more than 28 days.**
- 4. Better access to services for them and for the children they care for including respite care, peer support groups and family group conferencing.**
- 5. A period of paid leave equivalent to adoption leave when they take on the care of a child. This would give them time to manage the upheaval in their lives whilst keeping their job and would reduce the number who feel they have to give up work.**

**Grandparents
plus**

We champion the wider
family who care for children

Grandparents Plus
18 Victoria Park Square
Bethnal Green
London E2 9PF
Telephone: 020 8981 8001
Email: info@grandparentsplus.org.uk

www.grandparentsplus.org.uk