



We champion the wider family who care for children

## Grandparents Plus *Survey Findings*

March 2009

In February 2009 Grandparents Plus conducted a survey<sup>1</sup> of both the general public and of parents to establish how much they value the contribution that grandparents make, how highly they believe government values the grandparental contribution and what more could be done to give grandparents greater recognition. We also asked parents whether during the recession, they were more likely to turn to grandparents for help with childcare, financial help and other advice and support. Finally we also asked who they would want to care for their child if they were no longer able to do so.

The results suggest:

- **as a society we believe that grandparents are both important for the wellbeing of their grandchildren but also undervalued by government as they fulfil this important role.**
- **there is significant support both for some form of recognition for childcare and for the proposal for a grandparent credit towards the basic state pension. A majority also back extending the right to request flexible working to grandparents.**
- **recognition of the grandparental role where parents split up and the legitimacy of their voice is strong amongst the general public. The majority also back a grandparent's right to say "no" to providing childcare.**
- **a significant proportion of parents are likely to turn to grandparents for extra help during the recession. An even greater number rely on grandparents more than other sources of support when they have a new baby. Grandparents provide advice and support on child health issues.**

- **a substantial majority of people believe children should be placed with friends or family rather than placing them into non-relative foster care. A similar number want to see a national allowance for kinship carers. Almost all parents would prefer a grandparent, friend or other family member to care for their child rather than placing them into the care of children's services, if they were unable to care for their child themselves.**
- **grandparents will step in to provide care if parents are unable to do so, but relying on them for childcare in the future may be more risky as work and other activity in retirement begins to take over.**

### ***Valuing the grandparents' contribution***

Almost 9 out of 10 (87%) of the general public believe that grandparents are **important in ensuring the wellbeing of their children**. Mothers rated them even higher at 92%.

8 out of 10 (79%) people believe the **Government does not value the role** grandparents play in caring for children.

6 out of 10 (61%) people, including 7 out of 10 (70%) mothers agree that grandparents should receive some kind of **reward or payment from the state for providing childcare**.

3 out of 4 (75%) people and 8 out of 10 (82%) mothers, agree that working age grandparents who provide substantial periods of childcare should receive a **credit towards their basic state pension** in the same way as parents of children under 12 and carers of disabled children and adults.

Over half (55%) of people and 6 out of 10 (60%) mothers agree that grandparents should have the right to request **flexible working** in the same way as carers and parents of children under 6.

**There is considerable agreement that grandparents are very important for child wellbeing and that their contribution is not valued by government. There is significant support for some form of recognition for childcare, substantial backing for a grandparent credit towards the basic state pension and, at a time when there is pressure from employers to row back on flexibility at work, a majority wanting to see grandparents have the right to request flexible working.**

### ***The grandparent's perspective***

7 out of 10 (69%) support a **grandparent's right to say "no"** to providing childcare as they disagree that parents should expect grandparent to provide childcare when they are in good health and live nearby.

The public strongly supports **grandparental contact with grandchildren if parents split up** with 9 out of 10 (88%) agreeing that grandparents should have a right to contact their grandchildren if parents split up.

**Recognition of the grandparental role where parents split up and the legitimacy of their voice is strong amongst the general public. The majority back a grandparent's right to say "no" to providing childcare.**

### ***Supporting families during recession***

We asked parents<sup>ii</sup>, in the current financial situation, how likely is it that you will turn to your own mum or dad for:

**extra help with childcare.** 4 out of 10 (44%) said this was likely, rising to over half (55%) of parents aged 18-34 likely to seek more grandparental help with childcare.

**practical advice and emotional support.** Over half (57%) said this was likely but there was a gender gap as almost 7 out of 10 (68%) mothers were likely to turn to grandparents in this way, while less than half (47%) of fathers said there were likely to do so.

**financial help.** 3 out of 10 (30%) parents said they were likely to seek financial help from their mum or dad. This rose to 4 out of 10 (39%) for Scottish parents and parents in London (39%). Parents in the Midlands were less likely to turn to their own mum or dad for financial help with only 1 in 5 (21%) saying this was likely.

**These findings indicate that during the recession grandparents are likely to be cushioning families from some of the negative effects because they are likely to be the ones that parents will turn to for additional childcare, advice and support or financial help.**

### ***When parents are unable to care***

Over 8 out of 10 (86%) people agreed that local authorities should always try to **place a child with another member of their own family first** before placing them into non-relative foster care.

8 out of 10 (80%) people agree that where grandparents step in to **care for a child for over 28 days they should be entitled to financial help** from the state with the cost.

Parents were asked if they were ever unable to care for their own child **who would they most trust** to look after the welfare of their child. Choosing up to three options<sup>iii</sup>, almost two thirds (65%) said their own mum or dad. Over half (56%) identified other family while 1 in 4 (27%) chose friends. Only 1% chose children's services.

**The preference for placing a child with immediate family is understandably overwhelming but almost as strong is the agreement that where grandparents step in to care for a child they should receive some financial help from the state. This suggests that paying kinship carers an allowance chimes with the general public's sense of fairness.**

### ***Grandparents as influencers***

Parents were asked to identify up to three people or organisations<sup>iv</sup> who were important in helping **support them and their immediate family when they had a baby**. Their own mum or dad rated top at 63% with the doctor (36%), other health care professionals (34%) and friends (35%) and family (33%) rated at a third each. At 70%, younger parents (18-34) were more likely to rate their own mum or dad as important to them.

When asked who they would go to for **advice about their child's health<sup>v</sup>** and fitness after the doctor (79%) or other health care professional (51%), one third (32%) of parents identified their own mum or dad as the main port of call for advice, ahead of the internet, friends, school, magazines or television. Again younger parents rated grandparental advice more highly at 38%. At 35% compared to 29%, women were more likely than men to turn to grandparents for medical advice about their children.

**It is clear from this survey that grandparents are the major source of advice and support for parents when a new baby is born. After doctors and other healthcare professionals, grandparents remain an important source of advice and information on child health issues. Targeting grandparents is therefore an important and effective way of influencing parental behaviour and decisions relating to child health.**

## ***Grandparents of the future***

Thinking about what kind of grandparent they might be, parents were asked to consider how likely it was that they would be:

**working beyond retirement age** with less family time than they would like. 4 out of 10 (39%) thought this was likely but just over half 54% thought this unlikely.

**providing regular childcare** on either a full-time or part-time basis for their grandchildren. 6 out of 10 thought this was likely but 1 in 5 (22%) said this was unlikely. Significantly, the baby boomer over 55s were far less likely to see themselves in this role with 4 out of 10 (40%) saying it was unlikely. This suggests that as the choice becomes more of a reality they find that they have other calls on their time. Men were slightly less likely to think they would be providing childcare with 1 in 4 men (25%) and less than 1 in 5 (18%) women agreeing that this was either fairly or very unlikely.

**spending their retirement doing other things** instead of caring for grandchildren. One third (34%) thought this was likely but there were significant gender differences with 4 out of 10 (40%) fathers agreeing while only 3 out of 10 (27%) mothers did so. At 43%, Londoners were far more likely than parents in Scotland to have other plans for their retirement. 6 out of 10 (61%) Scottish parents said they thought it unlikely that they would be doing anything other than caring for their grandchildren in their retirement.

**willing to bring up their grandchild** in the absence of the child's parents. 3 out of 4 (76%) parents, including 3 out of 4 over 55s said they would be prepared to step in in these circumstances, rising to 8 out of 10 (80%) in Scotland. Mothers were more likely to agree with this than fathers at 8 out of 10 (80%) and 7 out of 10 (71%) respectively.

**These findings suggest that when it comes to it, grandparents will step in to provide care if parents are unable to do so, but relying on them for childcare may be more risky as work and other activity in retirement begins to take over.**

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<sup>i</sup> All poll figures are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 2,270 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 10th - 12th February 2009. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+).

<sup>ii</sup> Parents for whom these questions were not applicable have been excluded from the calculation.

<sup>iii</sup> The options were: own mum/dad, other family, friends, other healthcare professional, doctor, children's services, other, none of them, don't know.

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<sup>iv</sup> The options were: own mum/dad, doctor, friends, other health care professional, other family, websites, magazines/newspapers, television programmes, children's services, other, none of them, don't know.

<sup>v</sup>The options were: the doctor, other healthcare professional, own mum/dad, websites, friends, other family, child's school, magazines/newspapers, television programmes, other, none of them, don't know.

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