

**** Under embargo until 17:00 hours, Tuesday 2 March ****

Grandparents in low-income families risk financial hardship to provide free childcare

New report from Grandparents Plus and the Equality and Human Rights Commission

Grandparents who are filling the ‘care gap’ in some of Britain’s most vulnerable families are risking hardship themselves, a new report from Grandparents Plus and the Equality and Human Rights Commission reveals.

The report “*Protect, Support, Provide*” highlights that grandparents in families most at risk of poverty are under increasing pressure to take on a caring role. It shows that working age, working class grandmothers on low incomes are most likely to be providing childcare and to have given up work or reduced their hours to care for grandchildren. This has an impact on household income and may have an effect on a grandparent’s pension rights as well as their health.

The report warns that two of the government’s aims are working in conflict with each other – increasing the numbers of lone parents in work and increasing the employment rate of older people as they approach retirement – as grandparents are providing free childcare instead of being at work themselves. This in turn could be undermining government attempts to both reduce child poverty and older people’s poverty.

Both organisations are calling for the financial, emotional and practical support given by grandparents in low-income families to be factored into public policy. The

families most at risk of poverty include single parent families, families where a child or parent has a disability, black and ethnic minority families and children who cannot live with their parents so are looked after by family or friends.

The wide range of research into the role of grandparents in low-income families in Britain that was gathered for the report shows that:

- **One in three families** relies on grandparental childcare each weekⁱ, rising to one in two for single parent familiesⁱⁱ.
- **One in three carers** who are family or friends give up paid work when they take on the care of a childⁱⁱⁱ, and a further three in 10 (30 per cent) reduce their paid working hours^{iv}.
- **Three out of four carers** who are family or friends experience financial hardship when they take on the care of a child^v. (Approximately 200,000 families in Britain^{vi}). More than one in three of these carers (35 per cent) are single parent grandparents^{vii}.
- **More than half of families with a disabled child** live in or near the margins of poverty^{viii}. Grandparents in these families play a considerable role in providing emotional, practical and financial support, particularly in times of crisis^{ix}.
- **Ethnic minority households** are more likely to include a grandparent, parent and child living in under the same roof^x. This often leads to the expectation that grandparents will take on high levels of childcare^{xi}.

Mrs Cliffe, a grandmother from Doncaster said:

“My granddaughter has been with me since she was 5 years old and I have been her sole carer ever since. It has been a struggle both financially and emotionally, and at times, I question if I have done the right things for her. I have had to give up full-time paid work to care for her and now only receive basic single parent income, which is menial.

“But despite these difficulties and lack of support, I could never give her up. She is doing so much better and is really thriving at school, and that makes all the personal sacrifices I have had to make worth it.”

Sam Smethers, Chief Executive of Grandparents Plus, said:

“Very often families experience multiple risk factors which increase their chances of living in poverty – they may be single parents with a disabled child for example. It in these circumstances that grandparents’ role is significant, but often little understood.

“Until very recently we’ve seen a failure to consider the importance of grandparents in family life. This has made them invisible to government, so it’s not surprising that targets on child poverty and older people’s poverty are working against each other.

“It’s time the government recognised that grandparents provide the last line of defence between millions of children and that poverty line. They need recognition and better emotional, financial and practical support.”

Kay Carberry, Commissioner at the Equality and Human Rights Commission, said:

“The contribution of grandparents cannot be ignored. Without the free child care they give, many parents would not be able to work. This is particularly important in low income families that may find it difficult to pay for childcare.

“We’re making a number of recommendations to government, based on the findings of this report. These include extending the right to request flexible working to all employees so that it is easier for grandparents to balance their work and care commitments, abolishing the default retirement age and looking in more detail at the economic contribution of grandparents.

“We also want to work with Jobcentre Plus advisors to accommodate the needs of the wider family and ensure the forthcoming Child Poverty Commission considers the role of grandparents in their work.”

Ends.

For further information, to talk to Sam Smethers of Grandparents Plus or case studies and to receive a **copy of the Grandparents Plus policy response and key calls to action**, please contact Melissa Milner melissa@dhacommunications.co.uk 020 7793 4035 or 07976 636 228

To set up a press interview with Commissioner Kay Carberry, please contact the Equality and Human Rights Commission media office on 020 3117 0255 or email media@equalityhumanrights.com.

Notes to editors

The report “Protect, Support, Provide: Examining the role played by grandparents in families at risk of poverty” can be downloaded from www.grandparentsplus.org.uk The report contains detailed analysis of the following groups and the link between grandparental care and poverty:

- Single parent families
- Families where a child or parent has a disability
- Black and ethnic minority families
- Children looked after by family and friends carers.

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. They do this by:

- **Campaigning for change** so that their contribution to children's wellbeing and care is valued and understood
- **Providing evidence, policy solutions and training** so that they get the services and support they need to help children thrive
- **Building alliances and networks** so that they can have a voice and support each other, especially when they become children's full-time carers.

www.grandparentsplus.org.uk

The **Equality and Human Rights Commission** is a statutory body established under the Equality Act 2006, which took over the responsibilities of Commission for Racial Equality, Disability Rights Commission and Equal Opportunities Commission. It is the independent advocate for equality and human rights in Britain. It aims to reduce inequality, eliminate discrimination, strengthen good relations between people, and promote and protect human rights. The Commission enforces equality legislation on age, disability, gender, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation or transgender status, and encourages compliance with the Human Rights Act. It also gives advice and guidance to businesses, the voluntary and public sectors, and to individuals. www.equalityhumanrights.com

ⁱ Office for National Statistics (2009) Social Trends 39.

ⁱⁱ Dex, S. and Ward, K. (2007) Parental care and employment in early childhood, EOC.

ⁱⁱⁱ Richards, 2001 in Hunt, J. (2001) Family and Friends Carers, Scoping paper prepared for the Department of Health; Grandparents Plus (2009) Family and friends care: Recognition, respect, reward.

^{iv} Grandparents Plus (2009) Family and friends care: Recognition, respect, reward.

^v Farmer, E. and Moyers, S. (2008) Fostering effective family and friends placements.

^{vi} Estimate from the Family Rights Group cited in Saunders and Selwyn, 'Supporting informal kinship care', Adoption and fostering journal, 32(2): 31-42, 2008.

^{vii} Grandparents Plus (2009) Recognition, respect, reward:

^{viii} Gordon, D., Parker, R., Loughran, F. and Heslop, P. (2000) Disabled children in Britain: a reanalysis of the OPCS disability surveys. London: Stationery Office.

^{ix} Hastings, R. (1997) 'Grandparents of children with severe disabilities', International Journal of Disability, Development and Education, 44(4): 329-340.

^x Data from the Millennium Cohort Study (2004) in Broad, B. (2007) Being a Grandparent: Research evidence: Key themes and policy recommendations, Grandparents Association.

^{xi} Goodman, C. and Silverstein, M. (2002) 'Grandmothers Raising Grandchildren: Family Structure and Well-Being in Culturally Diverse Families', The Gerontologist, 42(5): 676-689.