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GRANDPARENTS REVEAL STRUGGLES OF RAISING YOUNGSTERS AT CHRISTMAS

Thousands of grandparents are facing a tough Christmas this year as they battle the emotional, physical and financial strain of bringing festive cheer to some of the UK's most vulnerable youngsters, a leading charity warns today.

Cash strapped grandparents who are raising their grandchildren today reveal the reality of Christmas as they struggle to make up for the absence of parents who may be dead, in prison or banned from contacting their offspring, often while coping with their own health problems and the needs of their own elderly partners.

The charity Grandparents Plus says that rising prices, benefit cuts and squeezed family budgets are putting extra strain on kinship carers this Christmas, with many forking out for other grandchildren as well as the ones they are bringing up because their parents cannot – or will not - contribute.

Denise Murphy, interim Chief Executive at Grandparents Plus said:

“Grandparent carers face a real struggle all year often with no support from local authorities. Some kinship carers will reach breaking point at Christmas because that's when all the biggest issues – lack of money, difficult relationships with parents and children's feelings of rejection are really heaped on them.

“We know from talking to a great many of them that the economic situation is making things even harder. We can offer support through an advice service and by putting grandparents and other carers in touch with others in their situation.”

The following comments from grandparent carers around England reveal the extent of the challenges faced by many this Christmas:

- “Christmas is a very difficult time of the year. It's normally a time when families get together but my granddaughter is only allowed supervised contact with her mum. We always manage but this year is going to be especially hard.”
- “This year Christmas is particularly bad with the recession. Several of our children are out of work and we've had to help them out financially and make sure their children get presents.”

- "It's difficult to manage around Christmas. My daughter is only allowed to see the children for a couple of hours. Her current boyfriend has been described by social services as someone who is dangerous towards young girls."
- "I can't afford to buy presents for the children at Christmas. Every aspect of my life has changed since I took on care of my grandchildren, but it is a choice we make to prevent our children going into care."
- "At Christmas nobody gets a lot, but everybody gets something. My wife goes round the charity shops and second hand shops."
- "At Christmas we aren't able to go and visit family because my husband is ill. We've not had a holiday or been on away anywhere since we took custody of our grandson."

Around 300,000 children are raised by their grandparents or other family members because their parents cannot look after them – with London, Birmingham and northern cities like Manchester, Liverpool, Middlesbrough and Nottingham among those with the highest rates of children cared for by the grandparents.

Denise Murphy added: "At Christmas, more than ever, kinship carers are trying to keep the family together for the sake of the children. We want to see kinship carers entitled to a national allowance, like foster carers and carers for disabled adults. They are doing a great job keeping children out of care but they need more support."

Ends

GRANDPARENTS PLUS STAFF WILL BE AVAILABLE FOR INTERVIEW FROM TUESDAY 20th DECEMBER. INTERVIEWS WITH THE CHARITY AND CASE STUDIES CARERS CAN BE ARRANGED BY CONTACTING JON FLINN ON 0151 709 0505.