

Grandparents First

Grandparents
plus

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Help make sure your contribution is recognised, valued and supported. Get involved with the campaign by emailing your MP – just follow the “What if we said no?” link from the home page of our website – www.grandparentsplus.org.uk. Alternatively, for those who receive their newsletter by post, a letter is enclosed ready for you to sign and send to your MP. Please don't forget to let us know how you get on!

“What if we said no?”

History repeated itself in Westminster on Thursday 28 October – exactly one year after the first lobby day, another sea of red t-shirts made their way into Portcullis House to question MPs and launch the “What if we said no?” campaign. Organised by Grandparents Plus, the campaign calls for the protection of all family and friends carers from the impact of welfare reform and spending cuts.

Continued overleaf...

We champion the wider family who care for children

The view from Westminster

Host MP Stephen Twigg reveals why he wanted to support the event.

“It was great privilege to be able to host Grandparents Plus’ event in Parliament. Grandparents are often forgotten heroes in society. This was backed up by the recent “*What if we said no?*” report by Grandparent Plus which showed that without the dedicated work of many grandparents the cost to the UK care system would be £12 billion.

“I first became involved with Grandparents Plus through a group called Kinship Carers in my constituency. I was inspired by their devotion and have continued to work with them since becoming an MP. I brought Ed Miliband to visit them and have also previously introduced them to Cherie Blair, who is now a Patron of the group.

“It is crucial that MPs hear about the role grandparents often play in raising children.”

“The event in Parliament attracted over 120 carers from across the country and it was fantastic to meet so many of them and hear the stories they had to tell. The meeting was also addressed by several MPs and representatives from Grandparents Plus, the Grandparents’ Association and Family Rights Group.

“It is crucial that MPs hear about the role grandparents often play in raising children. On the back of the fantastic work by Grandparents Plus many MPs have been able to officially recognise the work of grandparents by either signing an Early Day Motion or by attending the recent event.”

Stephen Twigg is the MP for Liverpool West Derby and can be contacted on 0151 230 0853 or email Stephen.Twigg.MP@parliament.uk



Continued from cover ...

The parliamentary event was hosted by Stephen Twigg MP and took place after everyone had enjoyed lunch at the nearby Abbey Centre. Leaving the children at the Abbey Centre, grandparents and kinship carers from across the country made their way to Portcullis House. Speakers included Minister for Pensions Steve Webb MP and Anne Begg MP as well as Sam Smethers from Grandparents Plus, Lynne Chesterman from the Grandparents’ Association, Cathy Ashley from the Family Rights Group and solicitor Nigel Priestley from Ridley and Hall, who spoke about the legal perspective.

The meeting was also addressed by grandparents Sue Stewart and Jim Newell, who shared their experiences before a question and answer session. The event closed with an opportunity for MPs to meet their constituents.

“We’ve adopted a challenging tone for the campaign,” said Sam Smethers. “We want people to stop and think – what would happen if you said no, or actually what would happen if you couldn’t say yes. Welfare reform and spending cuts will mean it will be much more difficult for you to continue to provide care and more difficult for family and friends carers to come forward in future.”

Media coverage of the event included ITV Daybreak, ITN Lunchtime News, the Daily Telegraph and radio programmes including BBC Radio Devon, BBC Radio Solent, Heart 106, BBC Radio West Midlands, BBC Radio Tees, BBC Radio Wales, Talk Sport and BBC Radio Newcastle.

At the time of the Westminster event family and friends carers in Scotland also gathered to campaign for change. Thirty grandparent carers held their weekly support group in Holyrood where they sat with more than 20 MSPs and in Glasgow more than 40 kinship carers and family members demonstrated with placards and banners. Co-ordinated by the Poverty Truth Commission, co-chair Maureen McGinn said: “Grandparents and other carers are calling for justice for their children. To achieve that justice, administrations in Westminster, Holyrood and in local authorities must work together with kinship carers to solve these longstanding problems.”

Thank you to *Yours* magazine for supporting the Westminster event for the second year running, providing lunch and contributing to the children’s party.

Family and friends' voices

Survey Findings Report / October 2010

Grandparents
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We champion the wider
family who care for children

Family and Friends Care

“What if we
said no?”

By Sarah Willard and Benjamin Whorley

More than 250 Network members took part in our survey this year, which was launched at the Westminster lobby day.

Over nine out of 10 members who responded to the survey are grandparents, with the majority aged between 45 and 64. 57% gave up work or reduced their hours to take on the care of a child and two out of every three respondents say they have a household income of under £300 a week. 7% of respondents do not receive any kind of benefit or allowance for looking after the child, not even child benefit.

“Our research shows that before they took on this caring role our members were like any other grandparents,” said Grandparents Plus Chief Executive Sam Smethers. “But then a family crisis means they have to step in. It could happen to anyone.”

“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.”

The research shows that children living in family and friends care are a particularly vulnerable group, having experienced parental alcohol or drug misuse, abuse, neglect, domestic violence or the long-term illness of a parent. Around four in 10 carers say one or more of the children they are looking after have difficulties at school with the most common problem being difficulties making friends with other children. Around 7% say the child they look after has experienced bullying.

47% of carers say the reason for taking on the care of a child or children is parental drug or alcohol misuse. Nearly four in ten have been looking after the children for more than five years, with eight in ten having a court order. Almost half are looking after a child with special needs or a disability.

“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.”

Thank you to everyone who took part in the survey.

Thanks also for your feedback about the GRG Network. 59% of respondents said they felt less isolated due to being a member of the Network, with a third describing *Grandparents First* as “very helpful” and 50% finding it “quite helpful”.

Some members said they would like to get in touch with others in their area so we will be in contact soon with everyone individually, provided you included your contact details. Unfortunately we don't have details for some members who completed the SurveyMonkey version online so if you don't hear from us we may not have your contact details so please do get in touch again.

For a full copy of the survey report, *What if we said no?*, visit our website at www.grandparentsplus.org.uk or call 020 8981 8001.

News & resources...

New project to tackle crime

The Grandparents' Association has set up a new project to support and inform grandparents in the London area whose grandchildren have been the victims, witnesses or perpetrators of crime.

The project will cover issues including theft, gang culture, ASBOs, vandalism and domestic violence. Services include a dedicated project telephone line, access to literature, signposting to other services, forums and seminars.

For more information contact Natalie by email at natalie.londonproject@grandparents-association.org.uk or call on 0843 289 0166.



Day of advice for carers

Grandparents and professionals gathered at an event to celebrate Adfam's London Grandparent Carer's Project and Grandparents Plus' GRG Network.

Held in September, the day featured workshops for grandparents on welfare and benefits presented by the Grandparents' Association. Nigel Priestley from leading solicitors Ridley and Hall spoke about the legal perspective, and the Family Rights Group held a workshop focussing on family group conferences. Vicky Brooks, Adfam's Grandparent Carers Project Co-ordinator, presented a good practice guide for professionals working with grandparents raising grandchildren due to parental substance misuse. Visit www.adfam.org.uk for more information on Adfam's publications.



Congratulations to Nigel Priestley for winning Solicitor of the Year at the Law Society Excellence Awards.

Nigel used his acceptance speech to speak out against legal aid cuts and praise the success of Huddersfield Law Society's twinning project with Uganda.

Comic Relief project on older grandparent carers

Fancy the chance to take part in a short film about older grandparent carers?

Grandparents Plus has been awarded funding by Comic Relief for a project looking at the experiences and challenges faced by older kinship carers. We are looking for older grandparents or other family and friends carers who are willing to be interviewed confidentially over the phone or to be filmed. The film will be used to launch a new kinship care campaign next year.

We are also looking to recruit someone on a part-time basis to work with us as interviewer for the film. This will be a paid role, involving travel, and we are looking for someone who is available for a fixed number of days between Jan and March 2011. If you are over the age of 65 and interested in being interviewed or want to apply for the interviewer role please contact us by Monday 20th December.

You can email our Policy and Research Manager, Sarah Wellard at sarah.wellard@grandparentsplus.org.uk or phone her on 020 8981 8001 to have a chat about the project.

Grandparents Plus at the party conferences

Grandparents Plus teamed up with other family charities in a series of events funded by Mothercare at the party conferences.

Policy and Research Manager Sarah Wellard attended the Conservative conference in Birmingham, and shared a platform at a packed fringe event alongside Baroness Shireen Ritchie from the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea and Katherine Rake, Chief Executive of the Family and Parenting Institute. Sarah commented, "It was a useful opportunity to raise the profile of grandparents raising their grandchildren with Conservative activists and councillors who may be completely unaware of the vital role they play. We were able to get across our message that kinship carers are making a huge contribution to children and to society and need to be protected from cuts to welfare and social services spending."

Chief Executive Sam Smethers attended both Labour and Liberal Democrat party conferences, speaking at events alongside other family charities about our campaign, and meeting with sympathetic MPs, councillors and party activists. "It's important to get our message out to all the main political parties but also to other charities and organisations we work with. The party conferences are a good way of doing that, but they don't come cheap so we are grateful to Mothercare for their support," said Sam.

New Association for Kinship Carers

Kinship carers across the country have joined forces to set up the National Association of Kinship Carers.

The NAKC is an independent association whose purpose is to campaign for better rights and entitlements for kinship carers and their children. "NAKC is unique because it is led by kinship carers for kinship carers," said Sandy Chamberlain, who is a member of the steering group. "We set our own agenda but we also aim to work alongside other kinship carer and grandparent organisations to further support our mutual campaigns."

The Association has been formed by kinship carers Julian Wootton, Jeff Bowler, Robert Gilbert, Pamela Carnegie, Sandy Chamberlain, Sue Robson and Tulip Rippingale. For more information please visit <http://grou.ps/nakc>, email nakinshipcarers@gmail.com, join at www.surveymonkey.com/s/QYW6WBT or call 01623 842551 between 10am and 2pm weekdays.

See pages 6-7 to read Sue's story.

Are you raising a disabled grandchild?



Lord Brian Rix is hosting a lunchtime reception at the House of Lords on 18 January 2011 on behalf of The Family Fund. The event will launch a new report and will focus on the challenges faced by grandparents raising disabled grandchildren.

If you are in this situation and are interested in attending please contact ben.wheatley@grandparentsplus.org.uk

Success story

Grandparents Plus staff member Oonagh Murphy-Jack celebrated the publication of her first novel, *Waiting For Erin*, by signing copies for Network members at the October national day.

Waiting for Erin is the story of a divided family who are reunited following the birth of Erin. Struggling to cope with motherhood, Erin's mother is drawn into the drug-fuelled world of her boyfriend, leaving Erin to be raised by her grandparents. Although separated, grandparents Seamus and Dympna have to pull together to take care of Erin, while their daughter Orghlaith battles drug addiction and a violent relationship that she can't leave. Seamus and Dympna embark on a journey neither one of them expected, fighting for their daughter and granddaughter and facing a past they thought they had left behind.

Oonagh, who is pictured below (second left) with her family, said: "I wrote *Waiting For Erin* as I was raised by my extended family which included my grandparents and then my aunt and uncle, who eventually adopted me. My experiences inspired me to write *Waiting For Erin* and, although loosely based on certain real-life events, it is a fiction story."



Waiting For Erin by Oonagh Murphy-Jack is currently available online at waterstones.com and amazon.co.uk and costs £7.99.

Helplines & groups

National

The Grandparents' Association

Tel: 0845 434 9585

www.grandparents-association.org.uk

Family Rights Group

Tel: 0808 801 0366

(10am—3.30pm)

www.frg.org.uk

North West

Sanctuary Family Support

Support group based in the Merseyside area for anyone affected by substance misuse. Meets every week. Contact Maddie Vaz on 0151 735 0747 or email sanctuaryfsprrt@yahoo.co.uk

South East

Milton Keynes Grandparents Group

Group for grandparents who are the main carers of their grandchildren or who are experiencing court proceedings for residence orders. Contact Karon on 01525 753 422 or email grandparent.sg@ntlworld.com

East Midlands

Hetty's, Nottinghamshire

Hetty's supports families and friends who are concerned about someone else's drug or alcohol use. Visit www.hettys.org.uk or call 08000 850 941 for confidential support and advice.

A full listing of support groups can be found on our website – www.grandparentsplus.org.uk

Include your details...

If you run a group and would like to include your details please email info@grandparentsplus.org.uk

A grandparent's story: From carer to campaigner

“When I was told to get an emergency residency order I didn’t question it. In fact, I did anything social services asked me to because I was frightened of them.”



The traumatic experience of taking on her grandson from birth has made Sue committed to improving the rights of other kinship carers.

When Sue’s grandson was born two years ago he was already on social services’ ‘At Risk’ register. His mum was involved with alcohol and drugs, which fuelled episodes of domestic violence. “Social services were threatening to remove him into foster care from leaving the hospital,” says Sue. “I would have agreed to anything to stop that happening.”

Sue was able to bring her daughter and new grandson home but after five weeks her daughter walked out. “I was petrified my grandson would be taken away,” says Sue. “When I was told to get an emergency residence order I didn’t question it. In fact, I did anything social services asked me to because I was frightened of them. So when they asked me to drive a 50 mile trip on a dark winter evening, in a blizzard, with my fragile newborn grandson so his father could have supervised contact with him – I didn’t question it even though I was certain it was not good for my grandson or for me.”

Sue also had to cope with concerns about baby Vinnie's health, being told that he might be severely disabled. "For the first three months we didn't know if he would be able to see," says Sue. "He was a content baby but didn't really start moving until he was about nine to 12 months old."

At this stage, Sue didn't know where to turn. "Luckily, I found my local carers centre and there was one grandparent carer there who was able to provide mentoring support. Then my frantic internet searches led me to find Grandparents Plus and later Family Rights Group and Grandparents' Association. Through these agencies, I found a whole world of other kinship carers who I did not know existed. At last I was not isolated and felt supported."

Sue started to get involved by attending events, such as last year's lobby day at Westminster, where she met other grandparents in the same situation. "As I began to listen to other kinship carers' traumatic circumstances the outrageous injustices of our situations began to dawn on me," says Sue. "Why, when you are caring for babies and children who have been through such traumatic circumstances and might have associated physical and emotional problems, is practical and financial support not readily available? Why do so many kinship carers' stories say that the authorities are making life much, much harder for them, instead of supporting them?"

Despite a busy life looking after Vinnie plus two older children still at home, working part-time and working towards a PhD, Sue felt she had to do something. "Compared to others, mine is an 'easy' situation," says Sue. "My daughter is an addict but she's alive. We've got a roof over our head and adequate housing. I'm usually a confident person but when I was fighting to keep my grandson I felt frightened to speak up. People shouldn't have to fight."

Starting locally initially, Sue made contact with other kinship carers and set up a support group. She then moved on to join others nationally to form a new Association. "We felt that we needed a collective voice for kinship carers to speak to government. That's no criticism whatsoever of agencies like Grandparents Plus, the Grandparents' Association and Family Rights Group. But we felt the need to do something led by kinship carers themselves," she says.

"I helped to form the National Association of Kinship Carers because I want to stop anyone being in the same position as I was when my grandson was born," says Sue. "I also want to be sure that my grandson, along with all other kinship children, can grow up with the support around them that they need to tackle their own difficulties. I want an end to the postcode lottery that means there are huge variations in the practical and financial support available. And I want to be part of making sure that the next generation of kinship carers don't have to fight and struggle for these rights and entitlements as much as we have had to."

For more information on the National Association of Kinship Carers see the news story on page five.

"I want to be part of making sure that the next generation of kinship carers don't have to fight and struggle."

Would you like to share your story with other grandparents?

If you are interested in sharing your experiences please call Alison for a chat on 020 8981 8001.

Circus skills and street dance

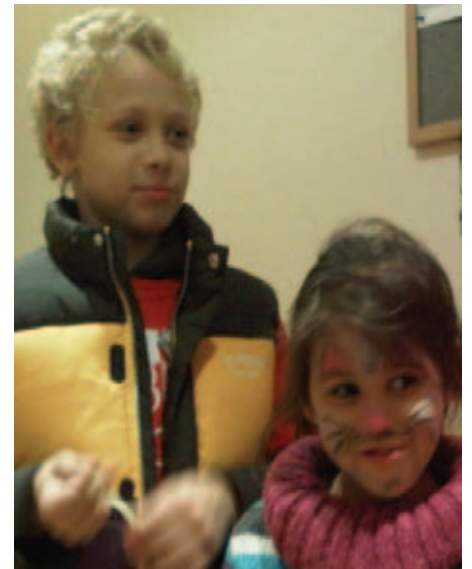
While the trip to Westminster had a serious side for the grown ups, the children had the chance to party, make friends and have fun.



The children were left in the capable hands of professionals from Nipperbout Active Childcare, who organised fun activities ranging from arts and crafts to street dance, with groups divided up by ages. The party ended with a special magic show for everyone.

“The children all thoroughly enjoyed their activities, and it had obviously taken a lot of planning and thought to ensure that the children were entertained and cared for,” said Chris from the Second Generation Group. Gordon from Plymouth agreed, saying: “The play afternoon was enjoyed by all the children because it was a great release after the journey.”

“The childcare was excellent – both my kids thoroughly enjoyed themselves,” said Laura from Kent. “My four-year-old granddaughter, who calls me mum, said ‘I am going to a party for special children and you have to have two mummies or live with your nanny and grandad to be able to go!’ She is now the envy of a couple of her classmates who wanted an invite but only have one mum!”



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