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family who care for children

** UNDER STRICT EMBARGO UNTIL 00:01 TUESDAY 8 SEPTEMBER 2009 **

NEW GENERATION OF GRANDPARENTS MORE INVOLVED THAN EVER IN LIVES OF TEENS, SAYS UNIQUE STUDY

BONDS WITH GRANDPARENTS LINKED TO KINDER TEENAGERS AND HELP THEM COPE WITH FAMILY TRAUMAS

A new generation of grandparents are closer than ever to their teenage grandchildren playing a critical role throughout their everyday lives, a unique survey published by national charity Grandparents Plus, reveals today.

The study, **My Second Mum and Dad**, the first ever survey of young people about their grandparents, says more grandparents are becoming friends, mentors and confidantes – as well as carers – to their teenage grandchildren as they deal with the stresses of relationships, rebellion and growing up. Grandparents Plus says that many of today's grandparents are 'Baby Boomers' and because they are younger relate better to today's teenagers.

My Second Mum and Dad also reveals that significant involvement from grandparents in teenagers' lives helps to protect them from the adverse impact of family trauma such as parental divorce or separation. Grandparents Plus is today making a series of calls for action to support this and help grandparents play a larger role in the lives of teenagers.

Researchers questioned a representative sample of over 1,500 teenagers on relationships with their grandparents and carried out in-depth interviews with 40 of them. They found that:

- Close involvement with grandparents was strongly linked to kinder teenagers. They become more sensitive, more pro-social and more considerate.
- Grandparents are filling the parenting gap and playing a growing role in supporting the education of their grandchildren by helping with everything from homework to careers advice and parents' evenings. Over half (55%) of maternal grandmothers attend school events.

- Financial, emotional and practical involvement of grandparents at times of family trauma plays a critical role in minimising the impact on children and helping them remain adjusted. This is particularly true for children in single parent families.
- Teenage grandchildren see it as *their right* to maintain contact with grandparents in the event of parental conflict, separation or divorce, and will even go behind their parents' back to do so. Teenagers want grandparents informed – but not directly involved in any court proceedings.

The research also found:

- Teenagers are living troubled lives. Over 1 in 3 (37%) had seen a crime or accident and over 3 out of 4 teenagers in the survey had experienced two or more adverse events, while 1 in 3 had seen 5 or more adversities in the past year. 1 in 10 (10%) said they had a family member with a drug or alcohol problem.
- Almost half (48%) of the teenagers' grandparents were in their 60s, indicating that they became grandparents in their 40s or 50s. The charity argues this shows that it is often grandparents of working age who are playing the biggest role.
- More than two thirds of the grandparents lived locally (ie within 10 miles) of their grandchildren. Many kept in touch via mobile phone and email.
- 1 in 4 (27%) teenagers said they talked to grandparents about problems they couldn't discuss with their parents
- Almost 9 out of 10 (86%) grandparents gave them money
- Over 8 out of 10 (85%) young people said they respected what grandparents said.

Grandparents Plus chief executive Sam Smethers said:

“We know that grandparents play a significant role in the lives of their grandchildren but the debate tends to focus on their childcare role with very young children. This report shows just how critical that role is for teenagers too.

“Baby Boomer grandparents tend to be more comfortable with new technology than previous generations. Keeping in touch and keeping up with their grandchildren is easier for them as a result.

“Teenagers are living troubled lives. Over 1 in 3 in our survey had experienced a crime or an accident. With more homes where both partners work and high rates of parental separation and divorce, grandparents are playing a vital and

growing role supporting parents and young people. We need to do more to recognise and value this relationship because it's good for families and good for society."

My Second Mum and Dad is the first ever survey to question young people on their relationships with grandparents. Based on the research, Grandparents Plus is calling for:

- Schools to do more to involve grandparents in school life
- Flexible working opportunities extended so that working age grandparents can take it up and 2 weeks' granny leave in a child's first year.

And when parents split up:

- 3 free sessions of relationship support, counselling or mediation available to all families.
- A review of the requirement forcing grandparents to apply for leave for a residence or contact order if they want to see their grandchildren
- The Statement of Arrangements form for children (which is completed by divorcing parents) to include a section on what parents will do to support other relationships in the child's life – including grandparents.

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For more information, a copy of the report, information on potential case studies or to speak to Sam Smethers, please contact Melissa Milner

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Notes to Editors

My Second Mum and Dad (ESRC Report Number RES 000 22 2283) was conducted with permission of the Oxford Ethics committee and involved 1566 young people aged 11 – 16 representative of children in England and Wales (checked with the Office of National Statistics).

1. General statistics on grandparents

- 1 in 3 families rely on grandparents for childcare.¹
- Half of single parents depend on grandparents for childcare.²
- The Grandparental childcare contribution has been valued at £3.9 Billion.³
- 4 out of 10 parents that Grandparents Plus surveyed in February 2009 said they were more likely to turn to grandparents for extra help with childcare during the recession.⁴

¹ ONS Social Trends, Apr 2009

² Dex, S and Ward K. Parental Care and Employment in Early Childhood. Analysis of the Millennium Cohort Study (MCS) Sweeps 1 and 2. EOC 2007

³ The Economy and Older People, Age Concern 2004

⁴ Grandparents Plus/YouGov Feb 2009

- 1.5 million grandparents are aged under 50. 7 million are aged under 65.⁵
- Working class women are 4 times more likely than middle-class women to become a grandparent before their 50th birthday. (21.5% vs. 5.3%).⁶
- £4 billion is passed on directly from grandparents to grandchildren each year.⁷
- 200,000 grandparents are caring for children full-time.⁸
- 3 out of 4 of these families experience financial hardship.⁹

2. Grandparents Plus

Grandparents Plus is the national charity which champions the vital role of grandparents and the wider family in caring for children. The charity works with grandparents and other carers who care for their grandchildren full-time. Grandparents Plus has also published a number of influential reports in 2009, calling for grandparents to be paid for childcare through the tax credit system and to be given flexible working, provoking a widespread debate about the role of grandparents. The charity's other reports *Rethinking family life* and *The Poor Relation?* are also available on their website www.grandparentsplus.org.uk. Grandparents Plus also successfully campaigned for the introduction of the grandparents National Insurance Credit which was announced by the Chancellor in the Budget statement in April 2009.

3. Research for My Second Mum and Dad

This research was produced for Grandparents Plus. The original research was undertaken by a team at University of Oxford and supported by the Economic and Social Research Council. This surveyed a nationally representative sample of 1566 young people aged 11-16 in schools around England and Wales in 2007. In addition 40 of these teenagers took part in-depth interviews. This report is based on further analysis, in particular of data on grandparents, which was collected in the original survey and interviews. The research says that more than 3 in 4 teenagers had experienced 5 or more adverse events in the last year. These range from seeing a crime or accident, losing a closing friend, changes in family finances, getting sick or injured, arrest of a family member to a family member having a drug problem. (see page 25 of the PDF for further detail).

4. Methodology

a) There was a very strong relationship between closeness to a specific grandparent (the closest) and 'prosocial' behaviour in young people as indicated on the subscale of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire. The total score on this questionnaire has been widely used in the UK and internationally to measure overall levels of adjustment. Subscales measure different aspects of adjustment. Young people who scored highly on the pro-social subscale would have answered positively to the following statements:

I try to be nice to other people. I care about their feelings
 I usually share with others (food, games, pens etc.)
 I am helpful if someone is hurt, upset or feeling ill
 I am kind to younger children
 I often volunteer to help others (parents, teachers, children)

b) Adverse life events were assessed with Tiet et al.'s Adverse Life Events scale which in this study measured number of adverse life events experienced in the previous year. This

⁵ Broad, B. Being a Grandparent, Grandparents Association, 2007

⁶ The Poor Relation? Grandparents Plus, 2009

⁷ The New Old: why baby boomers won't be pensioned off, Demos, 2003

⁸ Forgotten Families, Adfam 2006

⁹ Farmer and Moyers Fostering Effective Family and Friends Placements, 2008.

scale is composed of 25 possible events for which children had little or no control over (e.g., 'someone in the family died', 'negative change in parents' financial situation'), and is a modification of the Life Events Checklist which has acceptable validity and test-retest reliability. A full list of adversities experienced can be found on page 25 of the report.

Further detailed notes on methodology can be found in the Appendices of the report.