



We champion the wider
family who care for children

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140,000 children across the UK ‘forgotten and let down’

Survey reveals parental alcohol or substance abuse is single biggest reason

why grandparents are raising their grandchildren

140,000 children across the UK are being raised by grandparents and other family and friend carers due to parental alcohol or substance misuse, according to a new survey released today by Grandparents Plus. The charity is joining forces with The Children’s Society, Adfam and Mentor UK to highlight the plight of carers raising children under challenging circumstances – who are saving the taxpayer an estimated £5.5 billion a year in care costs.

The survey reveals that parental drug or alcohol abuse is the single biggest reason why grandparents step in to bring up children, with almost half (46%) stating this was the main reason or one of the main reasons. 1 in 10 children in the UK are affected by parental alcohol abuse while 1 in 25 are affected by parental substance misuse. The rise in heavy drinking, particularly among young women, and the increase in the numbers of problem drug users may lead to even more children living with grandparents or other relatives in future.

Other factors leading to children being brought up by family and friend carers include parental abuse or neglect, imprisonment, illness, disability, bereavement and domestic violence. Many of the carers who are coping with parental alcohol or drug misuse are also dealing with one or more of these other factors.

The survey also shows:

- **Almost half (47%) of family and friend carers raising children due to parental drug or alcohol are likely to be struggling financially.** Only 4 in 10 (37%) receive any financial support from their local authority.
- **They are particularly likely to have a difficult relationship with the child’s parents.** 1 in 3 (32%) describe the relationship with the child’s mother as ‘difficult’ and 1 in 4 (24%) have no contact, while only 22% describe the relationship as ‘good’. Over 4 out of 10 (43%) report no contact with the child’s father.

- **Half (49%) say they are looking after at least one child with a disability or special needs.** Children in this group are particularly likely to experience emotional or behavioural problems, reflecting the often difficult experiences they may have had before they came to live with their grandparents or carers.
- **Over half (53%) of the carers have a chronic health condition or disability themselves.** 52% say they are stressed and a further 11% report feeling depressed. Just 2% receive help from social services with their health condition or disability.
- **7 out of 10 (71%) of carers say they are “dissatisfied” or “very dissatisfied” with their experience of children’s social services.** Of those who requested help from children’s services, only 1 in 4 (25%) said they got the help they needed.

Grandparents Plus is calling for better access to services and support for family and friend carers and protection from the impact of welfare reform and spending cuts.

Sam Smethers, Chief Executive of Grandparents Plus said:

“We know that these carers are struggling in some of the most difficult and challenging circumstances. The children they care for are all too often forgotten and let down by service providers. If they were in the care system it would cost £5.5 billion each year in care costs alone.”

“We want to see their care recognised, valued and supported. But cuts to local authority budgets combined with welfare reform will penalise them and risk more children going into care. That makes no sense for the children, our overburdened care system or the taxpayer.”

The new findings will be launched at a seminar in the **House of Lords on Wednesday 2nd February**, hosted by Baroness Massey of Darwen. The seminar will explore the evidence and look at how they and their carers should be better supported, as despite the many issues they are facing they are frequently overlooked by service providers and policy makers.

The stigma often attached to drug and alcohol problems means families can feel excluded from their communities. Services to support friend and family carers such as peer to peer support groups are invaluable and help to ease feelings of isolation. However local authority budget cuts mean these services are under threat.

Joanna Manning, Programme Manager of The Children's Society's STARS National Initiative - a hub of information, support and guidance for practitioners on parental substance misuse - said:

"Children have expressed to us the importance of grandparents in their lives. They have spoken of grandparents' kindness, help and constant availability. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that so many grandparents care for their grandchildren because of parental drugs or alcohol misuse.

Practitioners and services must be confident and competent to adopt an approach that considers the whole family."

Andrew Brown for Mentor UK added:

"Children whose parents have drug or alcohol problems are extremely vulnerable, with one recent report suggesting that children of alcoholics are two to four times more likely than other children to become addicted to alcohol themselves.

"Our work across seven European countries has been focused on trying to understand the needs of family and friend carers, and has confirmed that these placements, properly supported, can reduce the likelihood of future drug problems. But all too often family and friend carers find they're treated as second class citizens."

Vivienne Evans OBE, Adfam Chief Executive said:

"The parents of drug and alcohol users routinely experience guilt, shame and isolation, and this can be made even worse by the struggles of effectively becoming a parent all over again.

"Grandparent carers help to keep families together and improve outcomes for children in very vulnerable situations. Currently there are too many relationships of mutual suspicion between grandparents, social workers and other professionals in the public sector, and organisations like Adfam and Grandparents Plus are really working hard to correct this lack of understanding"

ENDS.

If you would like to speak to Sam Smethers, Joanna Manning, representatives from Adfam or Mentor UK please contact Melissa Milner at DHA Communications on:

020 7793 4035 or 07976 636228. Melissa@dhacommunications.co.uk

Case studies are available on request.

Notes to editors:

1. Speakers at the launch event on Wednesday 2nd February will include Joanne Manning, Programme Manager at **The Children's Society**, Andrew Brown, Director of Programmes at **Mentor UK**, Vivienne Evans, Chief Executive of **Adfam**, Pam Carnegie, a grandmother bringing up four grandchildren, and Sam Smethers, Chief Executive of **Grandparents Plus**.

In October 2010 Grandparents Plus launched a new campaign '*What if we said no?*', to highlight the needs of grandparents and other family and friend carers. The survey was conducted during August and September 2010 and is available on their website.

<http://www.grandparentsplus.org.uk/reports.php>

There were 255 responses. The data released today is a further analysis of the 117 responses from those raising children because of parental alcohol or substance misuse.

The survey also shows:

- 6 out of 10 either gave up work (28%) or reduced their paid hours (28%) when they took on the caring role.
 - Over 9 in 10 (93%) of the carers in the survey are under the age of 65 and 4 out of 10 (40%) are raising a child alone.
 - Over 7 out of 10 (73%) have bringing up the child or children for at least two years and over 1 in 3 (36%) for over five years. 7 out of 10 (69%) say they provided intensive support to the family before the child came to live with them.
2. There are thought to be at least 200,000 family and friend carers raising 300,000 children across the UK. But no official data is collected on families in this situation. The majority of these carers are grandparents but others may be aunts, uncles, siblings or great grandparents. The charity has calculated it would cost £12 billion each year if these children were in the care system. The figure of £5.5 billion quoted above refers to the cost of 46% of the children to reflect the proportion affected by parental alcohol or substance misuse.
 3. Grandparents Plus is the national charity which champions the vital role of grandparents and the wider family in children's lives. The charity publishes research evidence and campaigns for greater recognition for the contribution of grandparents and the wider family to children's lives. They also run a peer-to-peer support network for family and friend carers who are raising children in the absence of parents.