

***“If it wasn’t for
you Gran.....”***



A Survey of Grandparents in Wales

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**Children in Wales
Plant yng Nghymru**

CHILDREN IN WALES

Children in Wales is the national umbrella organisation for voluntary, statutory and professional organisations and individuals who work with children and young people in Wales. It aims to promote the interests of children, to improve services in Wales and to put children high on the Welsh agenda.

Children in Wales works closely with its members who come from a variety of backgrounds. It collects and disseminates information about children and promotes good practice in children's services through research, policy and practice development, publications, conferences, seminars and training. Children in Wales co-ordinates a range of forums and networks on issues impacting on children and young people in Wales enabling professionals to come together and exchange information and ideas.

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***“If it wasn’t for you Gran*”**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Childcare provided by grandparents in Wales is currently estimated to be worth £259 million per year
- Grandparents are helping with their grandchildren in a whole range of ways
- Grandparents are having to use their annual leave in order to help out with their grandchildren
- Almost half the grandparents surveyed report that they are making a financial contribution to their children in order to “make ends meet”
- Significant numbers of grandparents report difficulties in retaining contact with their grandchildren following family breakdown
- Children and young people talk to their grandparents about issues which they would find difficult to broach with their parents
- The UK has significantly lower numbers of children looked after in kinship care than other countries
- Grandparents who become kinship carers struggle to get essential information on legal matters, benefits, their grandchild’s behaviour and their relationship with their own child (parent of grandchild)
- Kinship carers felt that they received insufficient and inconsistent support
- Most kinship carers felt that being a kinship carer had had a negative impact on their quality of life and financial

situation except in terms of their relationship with their grandchild

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

1. Grandparents

As the dynamic of family has changed over recent decades, so the role of grandparents within the family has also changed. This is true not only here in Wales, but across the rest of the UK and indeed across much of Europe.

The traditional role of the grandparent, someone who is able to spend quality time with their grandchildren is disappearing and being increasingly replaced by that of a primary care giver.

This can take a variety of forms, ranging from the more traditional occasional childcare provider, through to providing regular support on a daily basis. Research suggests that grandparents provide around 40% of childcare for parents who are either at work or studyingⁱ.

Cases where a Local Authority is involved with a family because of serious concerns about a child or young person’s safety and wellbeing and where an application is made to the Family Court to make a decision about their future has risen dramatically over the last three yearsⁱⁱ. Given that there is also a shortage of foster placements it is likely that more grandparents will be called upon to become the sole care provider.

Despite this significant contribution to family life, government policy tends to view family as being a nuclear or lone parent

family. All too often policy disregards the significant role grandparents play in the modern family and the specific support needs of this group.

Here in Wales, estimates suggest that the childcare provided by grandparents is worth around £259 millionⁱⁱⁱ every year. A not insignificant sum! Despite this significant contribution the Welsh Assembly's latest strategy on childcare^{iv} does not acknowledge this or suggest ways of supporting grandparents with the care they provide.

Although grandparents generally are prepared to contribute in these ways, there is evidence that this can place enormous strain on their own lives. Demographic changes have resulted in people generally living longer with the result that grandparents can find themselves providing care to their own elderly parents as well as helping out with their children's children. This so called sandwich effect is well documented^v and in the most extreme cases can result in grandparents being forced to give up paid employment in order to meet these obligations.

Around one in three children in Wales today will have experienced family breakdown by the time they reach their early teens^{vi}, and this in turn can generate a whole new set of problems for grandparents. At the very least they will find themselves being asked to contribute more in the way of childcare, and in the worst cases may struggle to retain any contact at all with their grandchildren. According to research evidence some grandparents may also help out financially during separation and divorce. Research has also shown that grandparents play an important role as confidantes to grandchildren during divorce and

separation and that closeness to maternal grandparents was related to fewer adjustment problems.^{vii}

Grandparents themselves are also likely to experience separation and remarry. These individuals have less contact with their grandchildren and are less likely to take part in activities with them^{viii}. They also report feeling less close to their grandchildren. This is particularly true in respect of grandfathers and paternal grandparents. As they remarry, individuals of both genders may find themselves being asked to take on the role of a grandparent to children with whom they have no biological connection. Where grandparents do retain a strong relationship with their grandchildren following remarriage, if both partners have sets of grandchildren then the new couple may find their resources being stretched ever thinner as they attempt to meet the needs of more than one set of grandchildren.

The amount of support provided by grandparents also varies according to social class. Managers and other professional mothers are far more likely to use the services of professional childcare providers such as nannies or child minders (64.6%)^{ix}, whereas for unskilled or semi-skilled mothers the figure drops to 6.6%. In these families the extra childcare is taken up by other family members such as fathers and particularly grandparents. Employed lone parents receive more help from grandparents than two-earner couples and that families are more likely to be reliant of grandparents providing childcare in disadvantaged wards compared to advantaged wards^{vii}. It is therefore probably fair to say that in families most at risk of experiencing child poverty, grandparents are far more likely to be called upon to provide childcare support.

One last comment needs to be made in respect of grandparents' increasing involvement in bringing up their grandchildren. The world in which they find themselves doing so can be a very different one from that in which they raised their own children. For instance social networking sites such as Facebook and eBuddy, which play such an important part in the lives of our young people, did not exist twenty or thirty years ago. Cyber bullying is a recent phenomenon along with the dangers of exposure to all sorts of inappropriate individuals in a variety of chatrooms.

2. Kinship Care

Kinship care is an arrangement where a child goes to live with another family member or close friend, where that child is looked after or would otherwise be looked after, if a kinship carer were not able to provide the care arrangement. These arrangements may last anything from a few days through to a long term or permanent arrangement. Generally speaking, if such an arrangement lasts more than 6 weeks Social Services would be involved in order to assess the suitability of the carer.

The level of support, if any, will depend on whether the arrangement has been brought about through a recognised fostering agency, or whether it is a private arrangement between the parent and grandparent. The Children and Young Persons Act 2008 strengthens family and friends placement by making explicit the requirement for local authorities to give preference to a relative or friend who is a foster carer. However, there appears to exist a degree of ambivalence amongst social workers as to the benefits of exploring kinship care. Researchers in one study^x found that in over half of cases (55%) there was no indication that a

kinship option had been sought or considered.

The UK today has a significantly lower proportion of children looked after in kinship care than in other countries with approximately 12%, compared to Belgium with 33% and New Zealand with 75%.

Typically kinship carers are grandparents. The main reasons for their involvement are as follows^{xi}:

- 24% parental inability to care, including abuse, neglect and domestic violence
- 23% parental desertion, a substantial proportion resulting from drug/alcohol abuse
- 16% family breakdown
- 13% parental illness, often mental illness
- 10% parental death, often also involving substance abuse, mental illness or violence

Kinship care is often perceived as offering a number of benefits over a stranger placement.

Kinship care also retains a sense of being part of, and belonging to, a family. This is particularly true when viewed within the context of ethnicity, religion, language, and culture.

There is also an increased likelihood of retaining contact with other members of their extended family. However a note of caution is needed here. Some research suggests^x that the young person is more likely to retain links with carer's side of the family. Indeed many may have lost contact with one parent, typically the father, by the time the care proceedings had ended. Not surprisingly there is an increased likelihood

of the young person retaining contact with siblings when in kinship care.

The picture with regards to the stability of these placements appears to be somewhat complex, and depend on the age of the young person at the point when they ceased to live with their biological parents, and the reasons why they had ceased to do so*.

The Family Rights Group found that in England and Wales more than two thirds (of 83% of local authorities who responded to a freedom of information survey) of local authorities did not have a written approach to family and friends care. Just over half also had no guidance on the assessment of placements with relatives raising a child outside the care system or written statement on support services^{xii}.

Young people themselves were positive about being in kinship care and reported feeling loved, settled and safe.^{xiii} The negative aspects of kinship care reported by young people in another study^{xiv} were feelings of isolation, few friends, little or no treats or material possessions, with worries about the future and how their grandparents will cope. The following quote taken from that research illustrates the point: "My grandparents are too frail to take me on holiday. I end up looking after them^{viii}".

Although there is very little published research about grandparent kinship carers and their housing needs we know from evidence from the Grandparents Association that this is a key issue and a source of stress for the grandparents^{xv} and grandchildren.^{xiii}

* It is worth noting that the research is relatively thin on the ground in relation to

comparative studies of kinship versus other types of care (Ed)

3. Child well-being

Research^{xvi} findings suggest:

- Grandparent's active involvement was significantly associated with better-adjusted adolescents. In particular, taking part in grandchildren's hobbies and interests was associated significantly with fewer emotional, behaviour and peer problems
- Involvement in schooling or education was also related to lower maladjustment and fewer conduct problems
- Talking to grandparents about future plans was also associated with fewer overall emotional, behavioural and peer problems
- A strong theme was the role grandparents played during times of difficulty or crisis. For some young people, it was easier to open-up to grandparents than to parents

POLICY CONTEXT

There is no specific policy in Wales relating to the care grandparents give either as part time or full time kinship carers to their grandchildren. The Welsh Assembly's Strategy for Older People in Walesⁱⁱⁱ while recognising "the significant social and economic contribution" made by grandparents and the associated difficulties faced by carers does not outline any strategic plan for supporting these caring responsibilities.

Within the various strategy documents and policy initiatives for children and young people in Wales there is also very little explicit focus on the role grandparents play. The most recent childcare strategy^{iv} does not give any mention of grandparents or

how they might be supported to ensure the well being of their grandchildren. The Parenting Action Plan^{xvii} covered the period 2005 to 2008 and included some actions relating to grandparents including an initial report by the Beth Johnson Foundation^v and the formation of a Working Group which made a number of recommendations.

The Welsh Assembly's child poverty strategy^{xviii} also does not explore the particular situation of kinship care and the child poverty associated with it. Many of the grandparents looking after their grandchildren will no longer be in a position to enter the labour market and thus will not meet the Welsh Assembly's strategic objective of getting "parents" into full time employment. Similarly grandparents are not acknowledged as a key source of support in helping parents take up employment.

The Welsh Assembly Government's response to the Report of the Children and Young People Committee on Parenting in Wales^{xix} accepts a recommendation that grandparents who take on a substantial caring role are offered parenting support. It is hoped that the guidance for Families First will include an acknowledgement of the role grandparents play (particularly in relation to kinship care), their specific needs and those of their grandchildren.

The Ministry of Justice, the Department for Education, and the Welsh Assembly Government have commissioned a review of the family justice system. It will report initial findings in Spring 2011. The review will look at grandparents access rights in the family court system and make recommendations for reform.

There are large gaps and inconsistencies in the provision of support for grandparents which is largely provided by the voluntary sector on an ad hoc basis.

METHODOLOGY

In the absence of any Wales specific data, Children in Wales undertook its own research into the role of grandparents in Wales today.

Survey

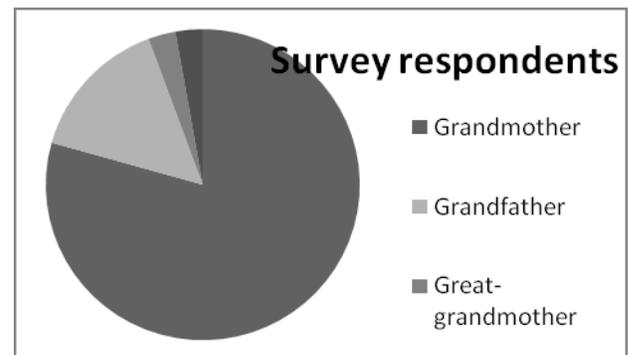
The views of grandparents were canvassed by use of quasi-random survey methods. Views were collected through the use of a questionnaire (Appendix 2) and 49 responses were collected at two "Learn with Grandma" events in South Wales. Responses were also collected online through Survey Monkey (n=57). In all some 106 questionnaires were completed.

ABOUT THE DATA

Respondents

In all, 106 grandparents responded to the survey. Although the hard copy respondents came exclusively from South Wales, the electronic responses came from across the whole of Wales.

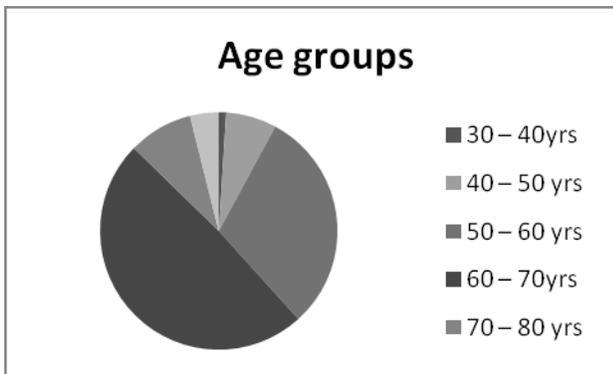
The vast majority of respondents were grandmothers.



Whether this reflects grandfathers' lack of involvement with their grandchildren, or whether it simply reflects their lack of enthusiasm for filling in survey forms was unclear. Although there is little research in this area a recent study has suggested that grandfathers play an increasing role in their grandchildren's lives^{xx}

Slightly over a third (35%) of the grandparents who responded were in paid employment, with a further 10% describing themselves as housewife/househusband. The remainder were all retired.

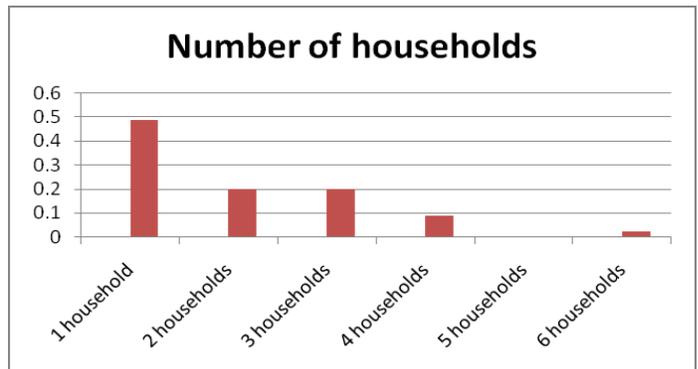
These figures were reflected in the age range of the grandparents. Around 38% were under 60 years of age (working age). The correlation between this figure and the previous number, who reported being in paid employment would suggest that almost all the grandparents who could work, did. This reflects Office for National Statistics data that the percentage of older people in the workforce is increasing. Those over 65 still working has doubled in the last decade.



Family size

Although there was, as expected, roughly equal gender numbers amongst the grandchildren, family size varied enormously. Around a third reported having either one or two grandchildren, with the

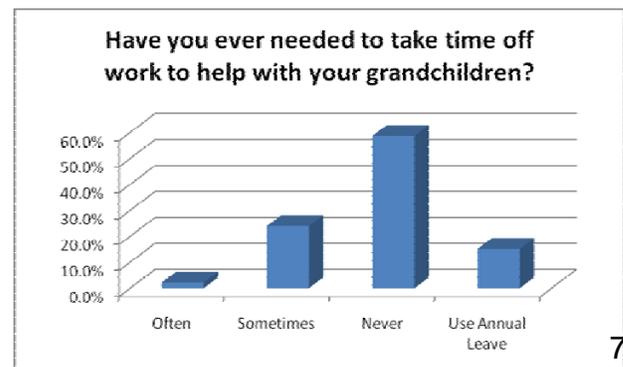
remainder having up to ten grandchildren. It was not clear whether these larger size sets of grandchildren reflected the result of re-constituted family units (grandchildren plus step-grandchildren) or whether they were all biologically related. Further work would be needed to determine which of these was the case. A similar situation revealed itself in relation to the geographic distribution of these grandchildren.



Having established this base line information the survey then went on to ask about both the nature of the contact between grandparents and their grandchildren, along with some of the implications this had for the grandparents.

Childcare

Anecdotal evidence suggests that there is often a tension between work and childcare for many grandparents. Accordingly grandparents were asked (especially those in paid employment) whether this was their experience. The table below clearly demonstrates that for a significant number of grandparents this is the case.



Most revealing was the fact that for many of them, using their annual leave as a means to achieve this was the easiest option. This is likely to have an impact not only on their social and emotional well being, but may even have some impact on their physical health. Of those grandparents who had made a request to their employer for time off work in order to fulfill childcare obligations, around three quarters (73%) reported that their requests were met sympathetically.

Of greater concern was the fact that around 10% of grandparents had actually had to give up paid employment entirely in order to meet these obligations. This had obvious serious financial implications for the grandparents involved. With the increased pressures on older people to work longer and increases to the state pension age this is likely to be continue to be an issue.

Financial Support

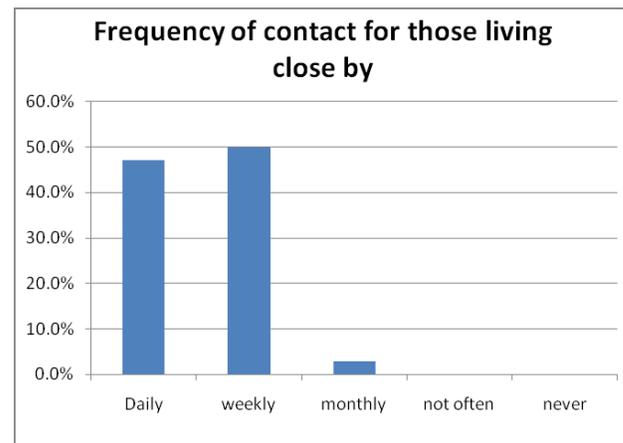
For the vast majority of grandparents (83%), helping out financially with their grandchildren was part of life. Not only were they spending money on little extras and treats, but for almost half of the grandparents their financial contribution was used to enable their children to make ends meet. For almost two out of ten (17%) grandparents this resulted in financial hardship for themselves to a greater or lesser extent. This of course does not take account of the very real financial contribution made by providing free childcare to families.

Contact

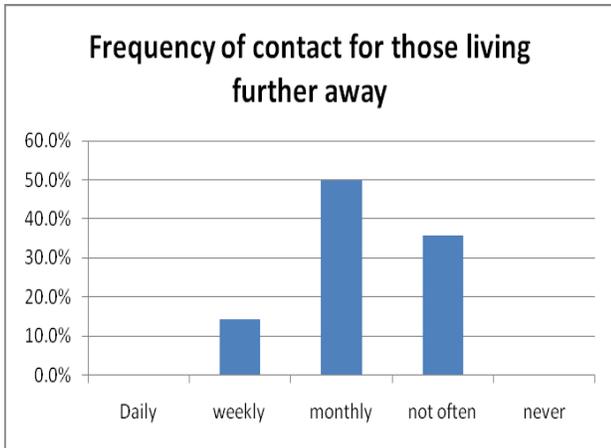
As previously reported grandparents often had multiple 'sets' of grandchildren spread over a number of locations. However, around 8% of grandparents lived under the same roof as their grandchildren. Whether this was by choice or by financial necessity

was unclear and again further work will be needed to ascertain the reasons. It is also unclear from the data whether the parents of the grandchildren were also living there or whether the grandparents had taken on a kinship care role. We know from research that families are more likely to be living with their grandparents in disadvantaged wards compared to advantaged wards. This figure is considerably higher in BME families^{vii}.

Slightly over half of the grandparents questioned had at least one set of grandchildren living close by. Not surprisingly this had a major impact on the frequency with which they contact with their grandchildren. For those living in close proximity to their grandchildren, contact generally took place on either a daily or weekly basis. This also reflects Office for National Statistics that sixty one per cent of all grandparents in Great Britain saw their grandchildren at least once a week (Social Trends 2001).



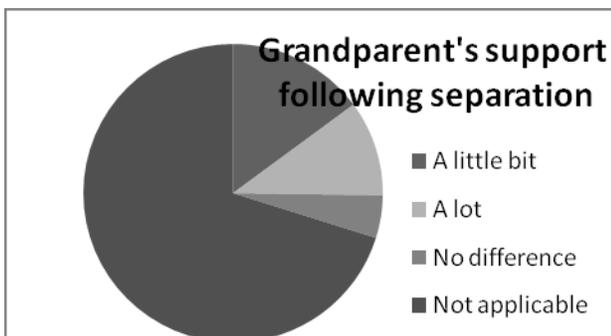
For those living further away, sadly around 36% reported that they did not often have physical contact with their grandchildren.



Family breakdown

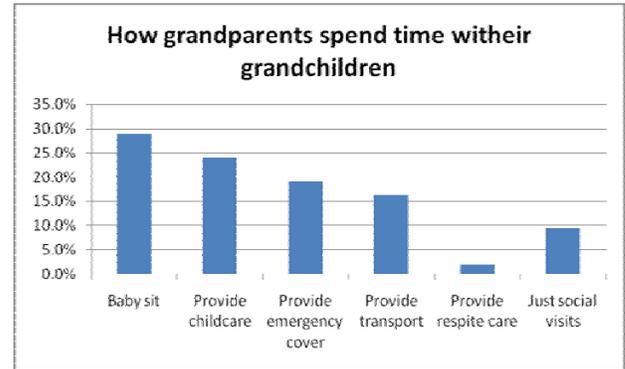
Around one in three children in Wales will have experienced family breakdown by the time they reach their early teens. The issues around contact with non-resident fathers are now well documented; less discussed however are the issues around contact for the paternal grandparents. When families separate and contact is not maintained, the children and young people in these situations can often lose touch with almost their entire extended family on the non-resident parent's side.

Around 10% of the grandparents in the survey reported difficulties with retaining contact with their grandchildren following family breakdown. For many grandparents there is also a second major impact of separation. Of the third of grandparents who reported experiencing the impact of family breakdown, almost half reported their contribution to family childcare increasing somewhat, and another third reported a significant increase in their contribution of caring for their grandchildren. This reflects evidence from research as discussed earlier.



How grandparents spend time with their grandchildren

There was considerable variation about the nature of the support the grandparents offered their children.



* Many of the grandparents reported that they undertook more than one of the categories shown in the chart.

Some of the comments reveal that the childcare provided made a significant contribution to their children's lives as the following quotes reveal:

"Without the childcare we offer our daughter would have been unable to return to work."

"I look after my grandchildren to help my children be able to work, as the cost of childcare is too much. I have 7 grandchildren and look after them all throughout the week."

Not surprisingly this level of input often had a serious impact on grandparent's own social lives and leisure activities. Almost half (49%) of the grandparents surveyed reported this to be the case. The following quotes reveal that for some grandparents the support offered was a strain:

"Both grandchildren and now great-grandson (18 months) spent a lot of early

years at my home. I also look after my wife who has severe problems with rheumatoid arthritis. It is a strain at times, but we will do all we can to help them, because we love them."

"I know a lot of grandparents who are helping with their grand children whilst juggling caring for elderly parents and full time work. It doesn't leave much, if any free time for yourself and can be stressful at times."

One quote also reveals (and it is likely a common experience) that where grandparents are providing full time childcare they feel they miss out on the more "traditional" role of the grandparent:

"With the increasing help in hours needed, such as early mornings and later pickups as well as day care you lose some of the niceness of being a grandparent. You don't want to do the babysitting as much because you've already had them during the day."

The study does suggest (and research reflects this)^{xvi} that from the grandchildren's perspective the contact with a grandparent has important significance in relation to having someone they felt they were able to talk to. Leaving aside those grandchildren who were too young for this to be of relevance, nearly all the grandparents reported that their grandchildren would turn to them when they had concerns or problems in their lives.

Many of the quotes given by grand parents show that they enjoy the time spent with their grandchildren and find the experience very rewarding:

"I find it a great time and you do things you would not normally do and they help keep

you on your toes and you learn new things all the time."

"I love it! Would have had them first if I'd known they would be such good fun!"

However, the following quotes suggest that some grandparents struggle with their own children's parenting styles:

"Grandchildren often take us for granted as these days the parents, our own children, do not teach them please and thank you or to be respectful or grateful for our time or for gifts."

"Discipline is a problem as the parents believe it should be taught at school or will happen automatically when they get older. They also don't seem to have to do anything at all in the home to earn pocket money -it is just given to them to spend on any old rubbish they like as their right."

In around 10% of cases the contribution of the grandparents had moved beyond that of a part time care provider to that of primary care giver. This is discussed in the next section on the focus groups where nearly all the grandparents fell into this category.

FOCUS GROUPS

Focus Groups

In addition, Children in Wales conducted two focus groups with established support groups in Newport and Cardiff. The group in Newport is run by GAVO and the one in Cardiff is run by Action for Children and Age UK. The focus groups took the form of semi-structured interviews where participants were able not only to expand on the straightforward survey questions, but also allowed the interviewers to capture qualitative data. There were six

grandparents in the Newport group, two of which were grandfathers. In the Cardiff group there were five grandparents, one of whom was a grandfather. Many of the grandparents were caring for more than one grandchild and in one case was caring for a great-grandchild as well as for the teenage grandchild. Most were caring for young children (under 10 years of age).

The grandparents had taken the decision to parent again because of love for their grandchild and because of a belief that staying with the family would be the best thing for them. This decision was often at a great cost to the grandparent in terms of their financial situation, health (emotional and physical) and general quality of life.

All the grandparents in the focus groups were kinship carers. Their grandchildren had come to live with them, usually at the request of Social Services because their own parents were unable to care for them due to drugs, learning or other disability or poor mental health. The grandchildren tended to have complex behavioural problems and some of these children also had special/additional needs or disabilities.

A major issue that the grandparents in both groups expressed was with continuity of social workers. Some of the grandparents had had many changes of social worker – for example one grandparent had had nine different social workers in 21 months. This seemed to be a common experience. Where grandparents had had one social worker over an extended period of time this was felt to have been particularly helpful. Grandparents wanted one social worker who would handle their case all the way through and who they could build a relationship with. They would have also appreciated visits from social workers to see how they were getting on. Currently

grandparents felt that social workers were only interested in their case if there was a crisis. Some felt they did not know where to turn to for help and advice.

It was felt that there was a lack of continuity in the response grandparents got from social workers and that procedures were not clear or consistently applied. Grandparents said they would have appreciated having information about what was expected of them and what they could expect from social services. One grandfather said he had asked the same question to the Social Services Department in a two-week period and got two different answers.

Some of the grandparents felt that looking after their grandchildren full time had had an impact on their relationship with their other children. One grandmother still had her young son living at home. Having her younger granddaughter live with her was having an impact on her son who now had to share his house with his “niece” and manage with less money. Some of the grandparents felt guilty that they were not able to give as much attention to their other sets of grandchildren.

Grandparents felt they had better support from the voluntary sector than from social services. Some had done parenting and other courses provided by Genesis, Barnardo’s Cymru, St John’s Ambulance, Action for Children and Citizens Advice. Grandparents were happy to receive generic help but said they would find tailored support useful that was specific to their particular needs.

The grandparents found the grandparents support groups they attended extremely useful. They found it very positive to be able to talk to other grandparents in the

same position as them and understood their situation. The support workers also acted as advocates for the grandparents and made the grandparents more confident in approaching social services. Many of the grandparents felt their existing social life had been curtailed and that they found it hard to relate to their existing friendship circle as they had very different lives now.

Some grandparents had issues with contact between their grandchildren and the child's parents. On the whole the grandparents were expected to manage contact without assistance from Social Services. Sometimes the grand children's parents had complex problems that made them behave erratically or in a way that upset the grandchildren making the situation even more difficult for the grandparents to manage. Some felt they were pressurised by the social workers to provide contact for their grandchildren with their parents but with little support. Grandparents who had used it found Family Group Conferencing very useful in resolving difficulties with their grandchildren's parents especially in terms of visitation rights.

All the grandparents had found having their grandchildren to stay with them resulted in financial hardship. Most of the grandparents were retired or had been forced to give up their job. They were therefore trying to manage on a very modest income which they found inadequate for meeting the needs of their grandchildren in terms of school equipment, trips, clothes, leisure activities and toys. Some had received initial help with buying beds etc but subsequently did not receive further assistance.

Some grandparents financial situation was further disadvantaged by the need to pay

legal fees – some had used their savings to pay for Residency Orders or Special Guardianship. One grandmother had moved to a different property to free up resources to support a grandchild. Few grandparents had been offered any financial support for looking after their grandchild except free school meals. Some felt disappointed that foster carers were given a lot of financial and other support whereas they felt they had to fight for support of any kind. There was a strong sense in both groups that kinship carers should get the same level of financial and other support as foster carers. A few grandparents had teenage grandchildren who had gone into temporary residential care due to behavioural difficulties. The grandparents expressed frustration that while in temporary care the young people had received money for clothes and shoes and pocket money that the grandparents would not be able to match when they returned to their care.

Grandparents found parenting second time around much more challenging and felt out of touch with their grandchildren especially with teenagers and the technology they use. Many of the grandchildren had challenging behaviour which the grandparents found difficult to manage and they were distressed that could not support them better.

The grandparents at the Cardiff Group reported that some of their peers who are caring for their grandchildren full time did not want to attend groups because they were afraid it would further stigmatise them. Some of the grandparents in the group understood this feeling because they felt that they were responsible in some way for their own child's failure to parent their grandchild.

Grandparents expressed frustration with the process around Residence Orders, Special Guardianship etc which they found very complex. They felt that there was insufficient information about entitlements and the legal process and the implications for the grandparents of following a particular course of action. Some felt that some social workers were pressurising them to go down a particular path without giving them sufficient information about the implications. One grandparent said he felt that he had been “thrust” into the court system with judges, lawyers, social workers which could be very scary. He did not feel he knew what his rights were and that there was little information available to support decisions.

CONCLUSIONS

The contribution of grandparents to family life in Wales today cannot be overestimated. They are contributing in a whole range of ways, from being an occasional babysitter through to providing fulltime care for children and young people whose own parents are no longer able to provide it.

In terms of the child poverty agenda grandparents are making a significant contribution in terms of providing childcare so that parents can return to work - one of the key objectives of the Welsh Assembly’s child poverty strategy. This study has shown that as well as providing childcare grandparents are also supporting the child poverty agenda by helping families financially not only for extras but in some cases to help families make ends meet.

Research has shown^{xxi} that parental stress and consistency are the two variables most associated with child outcomes and that the negative effects of low income are

mainly mediated by parenting factors. Researchers^{xxii} who looked at the effect of parenting on children found that parents who had more social support had improved parenting which lead to better outcomes for their children. This study has shown that grandparents play a significant role in supporting their families thus contributing to their grandchildren’s emotional well-being and contributing to their resilience.

Although not explored in detail in this study it is not unreasonable to suppose that where grandparents are spending time with their grandchildren they will also be supporting their grandchildren’s informal and formal learning. Responses to the questionnaire were collected at two “Learn with Grandma” events where grandparents had come with their grandchildren to learn new crafts and partake in other activities. If children are being looked after on a regular basis by their grandparents they have a pivotal role in the development of their grandchildren’s literacy and informal learning.

Grandparents are often supporting their grandchildren at considerable inconvenience to their own lives. In the most extreme cases it can cause financial hardship and bring about relationship breakdown. Despite these facts, grandparents were passionate about what they do for their grandchildren. From both the completed surveys, as well as the focus groups, the love and affection in which these individuals held their grandchildren shone through. At the same time discussions with grandparents within the focus groups revealed that those who are kinships carers are desperate for better information and for practical and emotional support.

Although this is a small-scale study and not conducted with a random, representative sample of grandparents the findings echo much of the research and data available about grandparents and their role in the UK today.

Unfortunately the valuable contribution grandparents make to the lives of children in Wales are often not acknowledged either in the support offered to vulnerable families or in current policy and legislation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The particular role that grandparents play in to the economic and social fabric in Wales should be recognised and there should be a coordinated response at a strategic level by the Welsh Assembly Government so that services are better coordinated to support grandparents and their families
- By definition, children who are being looked after full time by grandparents have suffered some loss or trauma. These children often suffer from emotional and behavioural difficulties. The grandparents themselves may share this loss. The core elements of integrated family support as proposed by Families First should recognise the particular needs of grandparents providing substantial care for grandchildren. Local authorities should therefore provide independently run services (including support groups) to grandparents who are kinship carers that take account of their particular needs. Respite care should also be available
- Children and young people in kinship care should also be offered specialised information, advice and support, including counseling where appropriate
- Local authorities should have a written approach to family and friends care and guidance on the assessment of placements with relatives raising a child outside the care system. There should also be a written statement available to grandparents on the support services available to them. Clear and concise information should also be available to grandparents about their rights and options and this information should be given to them at the outset
- Article 12 of the UNCRC states that children who are capable of forming their own views should have the right to express those views in all matters affecting them and that their views should be given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity. Children and young people should be given a chance to express their views and should be supported to do so
- Statistical data should be gathered to ascertain the number of children being brought up by family and friends, the outcomes for children in these placements and whether their support needs are being met. This should include information about housing needs

APPENDIX 1

SOME OF THE COMMENTS FROM GRANDPARENTS

“Its a joy!”

“I know a lot of grandparents who are helping with their grand children whilst juggling caring for elderly parents and full time work. It doesn't leave much, if any free time for yourself and can be stressful at times.”

“It can be demanding but also very rewarding.”

“Both grandchildren and now great-grandson (18 months) spent a lot of early years at my home. I also look after my wife who has severe problems with rheumatoid arthritis. It is a strain at times, but we will do all we can to help them, because we love them.”

“If we don't see them every day we feel lost.”

“I have the children each morning, give their breakfast, wash dress and get ready for school, and I pick them up from school each day and they stay with us till their parents come home from work.”

“Without the childcare we offer our daughter would have been unable to return to work.”

“This is a time when you enjoy quality time with your grandchildren and not have to worry so much about them - that's the parents job.”

“We feel we have a good balance as we help our children and they in turn have helped us through some very traumatic times.”

“I look after my grandchildren to help my children be able to work, as the cost of childcare is too much. I have 7 grandchildren and look after them all throughout the week.”

“It is a Wonderful experience!”

“Haven't got the hang of it yet!”

“I think that parents should be able to claim the childcare element of the child tax credit when their children are cared for by grandparents.”

“With the increasing help in hours needed, such as early mornings and later pickups as well as day care you lose some of the niceness of being a grandparent. You don't want to do the babysitting as much because you've already had them during the day.”

"I would like to have more rights, especially in the case of grandchildren who are affected by their parents divorcing. I'd like to have access rights worked out in much the same way as parental access is worked out."

"I think it's very different nowadays."

"Grandchildren often take us for granted as these days the parents, our own children, do not teach them please and thank you or to be respectful or grateful for our time or for gifts."

"Discipline is a problem as the parents believe it should be taught at school or will happen automatically when they get older. They also don't seem to have to do anything at all in the home to earn pocket money -it is just given to them to spend on any old rubbish as like their right."

"I find it a great time and you do things you would not normally do and they help keep you on your toes and you learn new things all the time."

"A joy - and hard work."

"It's much better than being a parent."

"Need to watch what you say. Don't get dragged into disagreements with other grandparents."

"It's a harder job than it might have been in my grandparents' day."

"I love it! Would have had them first if I'd known they would be such good fun!"

APPENDIX 2

GRANDPARENT SURVEY

**Grandparents may be biological, step-grandparents or any individual fulfilling that role in a child's life*

1. Are you a (please tick more than one box if applicable)

- Grandmother
- Grandfather
- Great-grandmother
- Great-grandfather

2. Are you

- Working
- Retired
- Housewife/Househusband
- Unemployed

3. Which age group do you fit into?

- 30 – 40yrs 60 – 70yrs
- 40 – 50 yrs 70 – 80 yrs
- 50 – 60 yrs Over 80yrs

4. How many grandchildren do you have? Boys _____ Girls _____

5. From how many households do they come? _____

6. Have you ever needed to take time off work to help with your grandchildren?

- Often
- Sometimes
- Never
- Use Annual Leave

7. Is your employer sympathetic to these requests? Yes No

8. Have you had to give up work in order to help out? Yes No

9. Do you ever help out financially with your grandchildren? Yes No

If yes, is this financial support...

- To help your children make ends meet
- For extras/treats

10. Has this financial support ever caused YOU financial hardship?

Yes No

11. Do you live in the same household as your grandchildren? Yes No

12. We recognise that grandchildren today may be spread over a number of households, some of which live close by, whilst others may be further away and difficult to visit

a) How many households are close to you? _____

b) How many households are further away? _____

13. If you have answered (a) to Q.12, how often do you see these grandchildren?

Daily

Weekly

Monthly

Not often

Never

14. If you have answered (b) to Q.12, how often do you see these grandchildren?

Daily

Weekly

Monthly

Not often

Never

15. Around one in three children in Wales will have experienced family breakdown by the time they reach their early teens. If this applies to your grandchildren's family, have you found it difficult to retain regular contact following divorce or separation?

Yes No Not Applicable

16. As a result of family breakdown, do any of your grandchildren now live in a single parent household? If this is the case, do you now find yourself doing more to help out?

A little bit

A lot

No difference

Not Applicable

17. We would like to find out exactly how you spend time with your grandchildren (please tick more than one box if applicable)

Baby sit (allow their parents free time)

Provide childcare (whilst parents are at work)

Provide emergency cover (when a child is sick)

Provide transport (school run, out of school activities, routine health appointments)

Provide respite care (for a seriously ill or disabled child)

Just social visits (none of the above)

18. Do your grandchildren ever turn to you when they have concerns or problems?

- Yes No Too young

19. Has helping out ever had a negative impact on your own social life or leisure activities?

- Yes No

20. When unforeseen circumstances prevent parents from carrying out their parental duties, grandparents often take on the task of raising their grandchildren. Are you the primary care giver to any of your grandchildren?

- Yes (please answer questions 21, 22 and 23) No (please go to question 24)

21. If yes, has this arrangement been legally formalised or is it informal?

- Formal (eg, Special Guardianship Order, Residence Order, Foster Carer)
Informal

22. Is this arrangement permanent, semi-permanent or temporary?

- Permanent
Semi-permanent
Temporary

23. Have you ever received any financial help for this role?

- Yes No

24. Is there anything else you would like to say about being a grandparent?

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