



Grandparents Raising
Grandchildren Trust
New Zealand CC2020S

It was tough at the start...
Scars on her body
and scars on her heart ...
Safe now...with Gran...
an abundance of love...
and with help, she can...
fix the hurt that she feels
from the trauma of early
years...

www.grg.org.nz

GRG Awareness & Appeal Week 27 October to 2 November 2015

Throughout the country local GRG Support Coordinators and support group members have various initiatives planned to raise awareness in their local communities. For more information on some of the initiatives please go to our website at www.grg.org.nz and click on the [Events](#) tab.

The GRG Trust's objective is to raise the general awareness of the grandparent care phenomenon in NZ and to appeal to the public for its support for GRG, its work and the support services it provides to thousands of full-time grandparent and whanau caregivers who are raising some of New Zealand's most vulnerable and at-risk children.

In particular we wish to raise awareness of the fact that:

- ♥ In the last 10 years the number of grandparent caregivers in NZ has more than doubled to over 9,500 grandparent caregivers raising potentially around 17,000 children¹.
- ♥ GRG Trust has nearly 6000 members caring for over 10,000 children.
- ♥ In most cases these children would be in state/foster care if it wasn't for the grandparents taking them on.
- ♥ In 95% of cases the children are in grandparent or whanau care as a result of a traumatic incident or family breakdown; being circumstances where they can't be cared for by their parents.

- ♥ Most caregivers in these circumstances are eligible for the Unsupported Child Benefit, but most don't receive it because they either don't know about it, haven't been told by Work and Income or they've been given the wrong information by Work and Income. This means many caregivers are missing out on financial support they should be getting.
- ♥ The parents' substance abuse, mental illness, violence and neglect are often factors which continue to adversely affect the children and their caregivers for a long time - sometimes even for life.
- ♥ Around 90% of children in grandparent and whanau care are not under the care or supervision of CYF although they are doing the same caregiving job a foster carer would do. Yet they cannot access the same financial and support services available to foster carers.
- ♥ Grandparent and whanau caregivers need but struggle to get adequate access to, and assistance from, specialists and professionals to help them deal with the short and long term adverse consequences of the abuse the children have suffered before coming into their care.
- ♥ Over half of the children in grandparent and whanau care have physical and/or psychological disabilities, problems² with higher rates of special needs and greater challenges for their caregivers than is the case in the general population.

¹ The number of children in grandparent care is an estimate based on GRG research and membership data which reveals that each grandparent caregiver family is raising an average of 1.8 children per family. Extrapolated out against the number of grandparent caregivers recorded in the 2013 Census this equates to around 17,000 children. The MSD figures for 2013 reveal there were over 8,614 grandparent and whanau caregivers in receipt of the Unsupported Child/Orphan's Benefit supporting 12,069 children. GRG Trust has around 6000 members, the majority of whom are grandparents who do not receive the UCB. GRG

therefore estimates the total number of children in grandparent and whanau care in NZ is likely to be over 20,000.

² GRG Research Study 2005: "Grandparents and other Relatives Raising Kin Children in Aotearoa/New Zealand" and Research Study 2009: Grandparents and Whanau/Extended Families Raising Kin Children in Aotearoa/New Zealand – A View Over Time; by Jill Worrall



About the GRG Trust NZ

Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Trust NZ is a not for profit organisation that was established in 1999 by Diane Vivian and set up as a charitable trust in 2001 in response to an identified need within the community to support a growing number of grandparents who had to take on the full-time care of their grandchildren.

GRG supports around 6000 grandparent and whanau caregivers nationwide representing around 3300 families and over 10,000 children with its grass-roots organisation of local volunteer Support Group Coordinators in 35 centres throughout the country, 4 Field Officers and managed by the Trust's Head Office in Auckland. The Trust is governed by six trustees, all with varying backgrounds and professional experience; two of whom are actively raising their grandchildren.

The Grandparent and Whanau Care Phenomenon in New Zealand

Most full-time grandparent and whanau caregivers are raising their grandchildren or whanau children because of a traumatic event or family breakdown. Sadly, this is the reality for thousands of grandparents, whanau caregivers and children in New Zealand.

The parents' substance abuse, mental illness, violence and neglect are often factors which continue to adversely affect the children and their caregivers for a long time - sometimes even for life.

Life for these families is not the warm and idyllic vision of what some believe it is like for grandparents and grandchildren living together. By contrast these caregivers and the children live daily on "struggle-street" in extremely difficult and challenging circumstances.

At their age and stage in life grandparent caregivers struggle with the legal and financial challenges as well as the economic, psychological and physical strain of raising these children on limited resources. While many of the caregivers are themselves affected by their own health issues and age-related conditions, over half of the vulnerable and at-risk children in their care also have physical or psychological/disabilities and problems³ with higher rates of special needs and greater challenges for their caregivers than is the case in the general population⁴. Yet in spite of these circumstances, international research shows that children have better long term outcomes raised by family than children raised by non-family.⁵

3 GRG Research Study 2005: "Grandparents and other Relatives Raising Kin Children in Aotearoa/New Zealand." [<http://www.grg.org.nz/What+we+do/Publications/Research/Research+Report+2005.html>] and Research Study 2009: Grandparents and Whanau/Extended Families Raising Kin Children in Aotearoa/New Zealand – A View Over Time; by Jill Worrall [<http://www.grg.org.nz/What+we+do/Publications/Research/Research+Report+2009+-+A+view+over+time.html>]

⁴ Ibid note 1. Physical and psychological conditions commonly include, asthma, eczema, wheel-chair dependency, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, anxiety and attachment disorders, delayed physical and emotional development, Foetal Alcohol Syndrome, ADHD, ADD, Autism and Asperger Spectrum Disorders.

⁵ Ibid...note 3

Pathway to Grandparent / Whanau Care

In many of the cases where there has been a family crisis that has resulted in the child having to be cared for by someone other than their parents, there has been a notification (or several) to Child Youth and Family or the family has taken steps through the Family Court of their own volition to resolve the care of the child. In all of these cases the child would end up in foster care if it wasn't for the grandparent or kin/whanau carers stepping in.

We know from our experience over the past 15 years working with these grandparent-care families that where there has been a notification to Child Youth and Family, in the vast majority of cases a statutory intervention does not occur and the children are not classed as being under "state care."

This is because in most cases the social worker conducting the initial assessment (as to whether care and protection issues exist) determines that because the family (usually the grandparents) have resolved the care of the children and they are now "safe," they are no longer "in need of care and protection" as defined in the Children Young Persons and their Families Act 1989 (CYPF Act).

We are also aware of many cases where the social workers involved have encouraged (and even pressured) the grandparents to take the children into their care and to seek orders resolving their care with applications for parenting orders under the Care of Children Act 2004 (COCA). In some cases Child Youth and Family have even contributed towards the legal costs of seeking these parenting orders.

What this means is that these families are not eligible for further state support for the kind of specialised services that many of these children need (such as counselling/psychotherapy and mental health treatment) to help them overcome the trauma they have suffered before coming into grandparent/whanau care.

We call this pathway the "Sideward Shuffle". Effectively it keeps these families and these children out of the CYF system.

We have suspected for some time that the reason for this is to:

1. Keep the numbers of children under state care down; and
2. To reduce the costs to the state.

The Ministry for Social Development's Expert Review Panel's Interim Report into Modernising Child Youth and Family released in September 2015 confirms this at page 64 of the report where it states:

"The numbers of children in care each year have remained fairly steady. This may, in part, be related to the fact that funding for State care is capped and there is therefore an incentive to restrict volumes (regardless of the needs of families and children)."

It concerns us that in 2013 there were 63,000 notifications to Child Youth and Family yet 70%⁶ of them were assessed as not needing statutory intervention. (In our experience this is often when children are referred to grandparent care and the Sideward Shuffle approach has been employed). In 2014 there were 61,000 notifications and yet 64% of them were re-notifications⁷. i.e. the child was already subject to a prior notification at some point in the child's life.

⁶ Modernising Child Youth and Family – Expert Review Panel Interim Report 31 July 2015 – Appendix H

⁷ Ibid note 7 at page 64.

This effectively means that for most of these families they are struggling to get financial support and access to support services to help them raise these vulnerable and at-risk children. Yet the problems haven't gone away and these children still need support.

Financial Support for Grandparent and Whanau Caregivers

For the majority of the full-time grandparent caregivers we work with their circumstances are such that they ought to be eligible for the Unsupported Child Benefit (UCB)⁸ to assist them with the financial cost of raising their grandchildren. In all cases where the UCB is payable, there has been a "family breakdown"⁹ that is: "the failure or collapse of the normal family dynamic which results in both parents being unable to fulfil the role of parent to their child."¹⁰

The problem is that most are not getting the UCB and are either not getting any financial support for the care of the children at all or they are in receipt of a benefit where the child has been included as a dependent. This means that:

1. There are no accurate figures available to ascertain how many children in New Zealand are being raised by someone other than their parents¹¹;
2. Children in grandparent and whanau/kin care who are included on their caregivers benefit or are not in receipt of the UCB or OB are missing out on extra supports available for recipients of those benefits such as the Establishment Grant¹², School Year Start-Up Payments¹³ and eligibility to apply to the Extraordinary Care Fund¹⁴. In April 2018 they will be eligible for the Clothing Allowance at the same rate as foster carers.

Why is this happening?

In our experience Work and Income frontline staff dealing with the grandparent/whanau caregiver either:

1. Lack an awareness or understanding of the fact that the UCB exists as a benefit support for these children; or
2. Do not understand the eligibility criteria or the law as it applies to the UCB; or
3. Give incorrect advice as to eligibility for particular benefits including the UCB; or
4. Make incorrect decisions declining applications for the UCB which are later overturned on review of decision or appeal.

GRG employs a full-time Field Officer who specialises in assisting grandparent caregivers through the Benefit Review Committee Hearing and Appeals process. Her involvement has resulted in hundreds of decisions by front-line Work and Income staff and BRC decisions being overturned on appeal over the past four years.

⁸ Or the Orphan's Benefit in cases where the parents have died.

⁹ Section 29 Social Security Act 1964

¹⁰ Social Security Appeals Authority, refer to: An appeal against a decision of the Benefits Review Committee [2012] NZSSAA 103 (20 December 2012)

¹¹ Figures obtained from the MSD for 2013 show that at 31 March 2013 there were 8614 carers in receipt of the UCB and OB for the support of 12,069 children. Approximately 50% of whom are grandparents. Yet the 2013 Census shows that there are just over 9,500 grandparents raising grandchildren in New Zealand but no figures are available as to the number of children in their care.

¹² <http://www.workandincome.govt.nz/individuals/a-z-benefits/establishment-grant.html> (\$350 per child at commencement of care)

¹³ <http://www.workandincome.govt.nz/individuals/a-z-benefits/school-and-year-start-up-payment.html> (\$400-\$550 per child dependent upon age, payable at the start of each school year)

¹⁴ <http://www.workandincome.govt.nz/individuals/how-we-can-help-you/caring-for-someone-elses-child/index.html> (is a grant of up to \$2,000, designed to support children who are experiencing difficulties that are significantly impacting on their development or showing promise in a particular area.)

Need for Specialised Support Services for Children in Grandparent / Whanau Care

As a result of the Sideward Shuffle outlined above, thousands of children in grandparent or whanau care struggle to get or are denied the kind of specialised help and support services they need to help them overcome the trauma of the abuse they have suffered before coming into care.

In about half of the referrals that are made to a Child and Adolescent Mental Health Agency the children have Reactive Attachment Disorder exhibiting trauma responses when suffering overwhelming anxiety.¹⁵ In our experience a significant proportion of the children in grandparent care who have suffered trauma as a result of abuse or neglect while in their parents care suffer from ongoing anxiety and serious attachment problems. This can manifest in their early childhood years and without treatment cause significant problems in their teens.

These families struggle to cope with children affected by mental and physical health illnesses such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, anxiety and attachment disorders, delayed physical and emotional development and other physical and psychological problems (e.g. Foetal Alcohol Syndrome, ADHD, ADD, Autism and Asperger Spectrum Disorders) and there has been no inter-Agency/NGO support referral offered.

Downstream we are experiencing an increase in the number of grandparents who are reporting that their grandchildren are physically violent towards them as they reach their teenage years – despite being in “safe” and nurturing homes for many years.

These children are angry, many are depressed, self-mutilating and suicidal and all have a history of early childhood abuse and neglect from their parents.

Experts suggest that it is these children who need “skilful nurturing and strategic management of behavioural problems and perhaps also individual psychotherapy – and these elements need to be brought together in an integrated treatment programme.”¹⁶

The reality is that they are not getting this help. The difficulty for grandparent/whanau caregivers is that the rate at which the UCB is paid is insufficient to meet the actual costs incurred or required to adequately support these children and particularly to cover the costs of medical treatment and/or the professional therapy. Yet if the children were in foster care, these costs would be covered by the State.

In our view, this Sideward Shuffle approach and the lack of adequate financial support fails these vulnerable children and sets their caregivers up for failure. The lack of early intervention to provide effective wrap-around support for these families from CYF and NGOs –then leads to downstream negative consequences for the children, higher churn rates and notifications and more complex problems.

¹⁵ Judith Morris: *Understanding attachment issues in children affected by breakdown of primary parent relationships, abuse and neglect*. [2009]

¹⁶ Ibid at note 15

How GRG Can Help

GRG's **vision** and **purpose** is to provide support services and a community where full-time grandparent and whanau kin caregivers are empowered to provide a safe, secure and nurturing home that protects and promotes the well-being and development of the children in their care.

GRG's **objectives** are to:

- ♥ Support and empower caregivers to achieve better life-long outcomes for these vulnerable and at-risk children;
- ♥ Heighten awareness of the caregivers' and children's need for support;
- ♥ Facilitate support from other organisations in the community that can help them;
- ♥ Facilitate necessary changes in law and policy to ensure that they receive appropriate support and are enabled to act in the best interests and welfare of the children in their care.

GRG has adopted an integrated approach to meeting the three key areas of need: **Adapting** to the new situation, **Updating** caregivers on parenting in today's world and **Restoring** the family and preparing for the challenges that lie ahead.

GRG's support services are designed to support and empower caregivers through its **Grandparents Roadmap – the 6Rs**, from the:

1. **First Response** - providing crisis support for grandparents who have suddenly had to take care of their grandchildren; to
2. **Rights and Responsibilities** - helping you to understand the legal situation, your rights and responsibilities as a full-time caregiver; to
3. **Relating** to and understanding your grandchildren's needs and the world they live in which is different to how you remember it was at their age; to
4. **Rebuilding** - your lives which have changed so much that you need strategies to rebuild and stabilise your family and their wellbeing; to
5. **Resolution** - living a life beyond trauma and learning to deal with the consequences of what has happened—both for you and your grandchildren; to
6. **Resilience** and being prepared for the life stages ahead and feeling equipped to handle the future and the challenges that come with it.

GRG Services

GRG Services are available **free of charge** to all full-time grandparent and whanau caregivers who become members of GRG.

Becoming a member is simple and can be done either via our website at www.grg.org.nz or by calling 0800 GRANDS (0800 472 637) or 09 480 6530.

Members are entitled to:

- ♥ **0800 GRANDS** helpline, clothing and care packages (when available), guidance, advice and agency referrals;

- ♥ **Advice and Advocacy** - from our Field Officers including advice on financial support, dealing with Work and Income, ACC, CYF, Family Court, Youth Justice matters;
- ♥ **Caregiver Education and Training Workshops and Summits** on the key issues affecting caregivers themselves and raising children in today's world;
- ♥ **Support Groups** providing a nationwide network of grass-roots local member support;
- ♥ **Key Information Resources** through our monthly newsletters (email and postal), caregiver handbooks and our website.

Advocacy and Research

As the landscape for family life changes, it is important the regulatory and legal environment responds and remains relevant to their changing needs. We endeavour to keep abreast of best practice and we are committed to continuing our research into grandparent and whanau caring and the influence it has on our children.

Research Publications

- ♥ Research Report, March 2005: "Grandparents and other Relatives Raising Kin Children in Aotearoa/New Zealand."
- ♥ Research Report, 2009: "Grandparents and Whanau/Extended Families Raising Kin Children in Aotearoa/New Zealand—A view over time."

For more information about GRG please go to: www.grg.org.nz or contact Kate Bundle (Communications & Business Development Manager) on 027 2446763 or kate@grg.org.nz