

<http://researchcommons.waikato.ac.nz/>

## **Research Commons at the University of Waikato**

### **Copyright Statement:**

The digital copy of this thesis is protected by the Copyright Act 1994 (New Zealand).

The thesis may be consulted by you, provided you comply with the provisions of the Act and the following conditions of use:

- Any use you make of these documents or images must be for research or private study purposes only, and you may not make them available to any other person.
- Authors control the copyright of their thesis. You will recognise the author's right to be identified as the author of the thesis, and due acknowledgement will be made to the author where appropriate.
- You will obtain the author's permission before publishing any material from the thesis.

**Parented by Grandparents:  
Grandchildren Reflect on Their Lives**

A thesis  
submitted in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree

of

**Master of Education**

at

**The University of Waikato**

by

**Sharon Lee**



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**WAIKATO**  
*Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato*

2016

# Abstract

---

The number of grandchildren being parented by their grandparents has grown significantly over the previous few decades. However, there is a lack of research focused on the lived experience of grandchildren parented by their grandparents in comparison to the volumes to date on the experience and impact on grandparents who are parenting their grandchildren.

The purpose of this study was to invite grandchildren, who have been parented by their grandparent(s) to speak about their experience and in this way, to make a contribution to the fledgling body of knowledge beginning to be gathered. What, in particular, do they want others to know about their experience? What suggestions do they want to make to inform and influence our practice as counsellors, teachers, social workers, policy makers and grandparents involved in a parenting role?

These questions formed the basis for this research. Seven young people aged between seventeen and twenty-four, five females and two males, were interviewed. As far as it has been possible to establish, this is the first research on this topic based in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Through the individual and group interview process, the young adults showed insight, maturity and demonstrated the ability to articulate their thoughts and feelings with a capacity beyond their years. Contrary to the dominant discourse in the published literature on this topic, which highlights emotional and behavioural difficulties, these young people were clearly thriving, going forward strongly in their lives and giving a lot of the credit for this to their grandparents. Many of the participants firmly believe they owe their existence to their grandparents' willingness to take them on and see them through.

They demonstrated a keen awareness and appreciation for the implications of their situation for their grandparents, including the politics of inequity and the struggle to provide on a limited budget. They have strongly recommended government funding for grandparents/kin raising grandchildren is the same as for foster carers.

Most wondered what life might have been like, had they grown up in the idealized nuclear family construct, however, they also highlighted the wisdom their respective grandparents offered and would not want to have missed out on the opportunity to have developed the close connection that being raised by their grandparents provided.

# Preface

---

I began working with the Grandparents Raising Grandchildren (GRG) Charitable Trust as a field officer five years ago. Through this involvement and in pursuit of furthering my own knowledge in relation to my role, I became aware of the comparative lack of research providing an insight into the lived experience of grandchildren being parented by their grandparent(s). The limited research that has been done on this topic has been through representation – from the perspectives of grandparents, social workers, researchers and others involved in these children’s lives. Having worked as a family therapist for many years in not for profit Non Government Organisations (NGO’s), I have cultivated a considered interest in the value and practice of children and young people representing themselves in consultative conversations and participation in decisions affecting their lives.

In conversation with a colleague who shares a similar interest, I also became excited about the idea of involving the young people in the process of the research in the role of co-researchers. This possibility fit closely with the theories and ideas that inform my practice as a counsellor/family therapist – in this particular circumstance, to centre the participant’s knowledge in the research process, in contrast to becoming the subjects of research (Gaddis, 2004; Smith, 2012; Tootell, 2004).

As the interviews progressed, I also became interested in one of the emergent consistencies - how this particular group of young people have managed to create alternative stories of positive outcomes for themselves in opposition to the often published descriptions of dysfunctional and troubled children who end up being parented by their grandparent(s) (Edwards & Mumford, 2005). I could not have predicted that this would be the case prior to the individual interviews and the group sessions offered the opportunity for the participants to offer any ideas they had on what might have contributed to this difference in their lives.

Although I have found a few studies that at least centre children/young people in the research on their lived experience of being parented by their grandparent(s), they are primarily from the United States and Britain. I am not aware of any such study located in a New Zealand context.

As far as I'm aware, there isn't any research in this area that has the young people participating in and influencing the design of the research. Although they were not involved from the point of conceiving the area of research and composing the questions for the initial interviews, their responses and the discussion that ensued certainly shaped the body of the research and generated strong recommendations for the ways in which grandchildren parented by grandparents could be better supported in education, support services and government policy.

In the original concept, this thesis is positioned to become a guide for a potential future study, involving research with a greater number of young adults who had been parented by their grandparents, based on the areas indicated by the participants in this study as those which are important to be represented and for others to be informed about. This would offer the participants the opportunity to take up the role of co-researcher in the design, development and process of that research project. Their co-authorship in the writing up of this secondary project would make a significant contribution in the area of the sharing of power in research practice as well as increasing knowledge from an insider perspective.

Another highly significant outcome of the interviews, in particular with the two participants who are of Māori heritage, was to locate the study with reference to the Treaty of Waitangi and the biculturalism of Aotearoa/New Zealand. Their interviews and especially our conversations involving the acknowledgement and respect for cultural influence opened my eyes to the importance of and necessity for this inclusion. Researching this further in relation to other indigenous peoples and the strong links among them where grandchildren are parented by their grandparents revealed an important additional area for cultural consideration and education.

# Acknowledgements

---

First and foremost, my heartfelt thanks to my supervisor, Dr Wendy Drewery – the long suffering midwife to what has been the prolonged labour of my thesis, including extended periods where little progress was discernible. She coached, admonished where needed and encouraged me onward. Her support and guidance has made the completion of this project possible.

Also, a huge amount of appreciation for my darling husband Tom, who cheered me on, made meals and cups of tea/coffee and saved me from the technical vagaries of the computer and in so many ways put up with a partner who was distracted by a thesis for an extended period of time. He also believed in me throughout when, at times, I was challenged to believe in myself.

I am indebted to the fantastic group of participant/co-researchers who volunteered to engage with me in this project and contribute to the awareness and knowledge of the lived experience of grandchildren parented by grandparents in Aotearoa/New Zealand. You are all so inspiring to me and were open and willing to thoughtfully reflect on the queries at the core of this study. A huge thank-you to you all, you are truly awesome – this project was only possible through your generous involvement.

My extended family, friends and colleagues who have been listening to me talk about and refer to this thesis, no doubt wondering if it would ever come to fruition – thank-you for understanding and being interested in the topic and also for being supportive in word and kind.

To my Mother, I am grateful for the faith she has always had in my ability. Despite the progressive effects of the dementia/Alzheimer's disease she lives with, she is now, as ever, so proud of me and although I am a woman of mature years, I am still deeply touched by this practice of honouring me.

Last, but certainly not least, my own dear Grandparents – I dedicate this thesis to your memory. You were always my go-to people – full of unconditional love, totally reliable and amazing role models for my own grandparenting. You are forever in my heart and, like many of the participants, I really don't know where I would be in this life, had I not had your wonderful love and support.

Ehara taku toa, he takitahi, he toa takitini.

(My success should not be bestowed onto me alone, as it was not individual success but success of a collective.)

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|                                                               |    |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Acknowledgements.....                                         | v  |
| CHAPTER 1.                                                    |    |
| INTRODUCTION.....                                             | 1  |
| CHAPTER 2.                                                    |    |
| LITERATURE REVIEW.....                                        | 3  |
| The Rapid Rise of Grandchildren Parented by Grandparents..... | 3  |
| The Shift Toward Kin-Care Placement.....                      | 4  |
| Legislative Changes In Aotearoa/New Zealand.....              | 5  |
| Influence of Attachment Theory.....                           | 5  |
| Research Focus on Grandparents.....                           | 6  |
| Growth of Research Focus on Grandchildren.....                | 7  |
| The Grandchildren’s Voice.....                                | 8  |
| CHAPTER 3.                                                    |    |
| METHODOLOGY.....                                              | 10 |
| Design.....                                                   | 10 |
| Sampling.....                                                 | 11 |
| Data Gathering.....                                           | 11 |
| Format.....                                                   | 12 |
| Data Analysis.....                                            | 13 |
| PARTICIPANTS.....                                             | 13 |
| CHAPTER 4.                                                    |    |
| FINDINGS.....                                                 | 16 |

|                                                    |    |
|----------------------------------------------------|----|
| Gratitude/Appreciation.....                        | 16 |
| Acknowledgement/Respect for Grandparents.....      | 21 |
| Our Grandparents Are Our Parents.....              | 24 |
| Grandparents Wisdom.....                           | 27 |
| Am I a Burden?.....                                | 29 |
| Grandparents Age, Health and Vulnerability.....    | 31 |
| Financial Awareness.....                           | 34 |
| The Lament.....                                    | 37 |
| Relationship With Extended Whanau/Family.....      | 41 |
| Support – What Helped.....                         | 44 |
| Support – What’s Needed.....                       | 46 |
| THE VOICE OF THE GRANDCHILDREN – “LISTEN UP” ..... | 49 |
| Counselling.....                                   | 49 |
| Teachers.....                                      | 49 |
| CYFS (Children, Youth & Family Service).....       | 50 |
| WINZ (Work & Income New Zealand).....              | 50 |
| Politicians, Policy Makers & Government.....       | 51 |
| Our Own Club.....                                  | 52 |
| THE GROUPS.....                                    | 53 |
| Participants reflect on their experience .....     | 53 |
| Connection, Visibility & Belonging.....            | 54 |
| Pieces of the Puzzle.....                          | 55 |
| Alternative Story of Success.....                  | 56 |
| First & Second Tier Parents.....                   | 58 |



|                                                           |    |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Life Cycle Disruption.....                                | 59 |
| Dealing With the Challenges.....                          | 59 |
| Taking a Stand for Self.....                              | 60 |
| Relationship Between Age of Placement & Adjustment.....   | 61 |
| Closeness With Grandparents.....                          | 61 |
| How to be & how not to be a Parent.....                   | 62 |
| Parenting Wisdom from the Grandchildren.....              | 63 |
| Being in the Gaze of Others-the Stigma of Difference..... | 64 |
| Housing – Competing Needs.....                            | 65 |
| Funding & Dealing With Government Departments.....        | 65 |
| Parentification & Becoming a Kid Again.....               | 66 |
| CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS.....                              | 69 |
| CHAPTER 5.                                                |    |
| DISCUSSION.....                                           | 74 |
| LIMITATIONS.....                                          | 77 |
| FURTHER RESEARCH.....                                     | 77 |
| APPENDIX A. – INFORMATION LETTER.....                     | 79 |
| APPENDIX B. – INFORMED CONSENT (INDIVIDUAL).....          | 81 |
| APPENDIX C. – INFORMED CONSENT (GROUPS).....              | 82 |
| APPENDIX D – INTERVIEW QUESTIONS.....                     | 83 |
| GLOSSARY.....                                             | 84 |
| WHAKATAUKĪ .....                                          | 85 |
| REFERENCES.....                                           | 86 |

# CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

---

The number of children parented by grandparents has grown exponentially in recent years. Although extensive research has been conducted on the impact of this phenomenon on the grandparent care-givers, little has been done regarding the effect for grandchildren, and in particular, even fewer studies exist which invite the voice of the grandchildren through relating their lived experience directly.

Previous literature has focussed on the negative outcomes for grandchildren in these situations, and neglecting to point out that these difficulties are more likely to be the result of what had been occurring in their situation previously that led to their coming into the care of their grandparent(s). Another area that has been under-researched is the successful outcomes of children in the care of their grandparents and how this has been achieved.

The purpose of this study was to assist the voice of the grandchildren to be heard in terms of what they place importance on, particularly in ways that bring attention to addressing the stigma and shame they experience in the context of our society. This project also privileges the voice of their lived experience in an attempt to visibilize them in the belief that this will contribute to a less stigmatized experience for grandchildren raised by grandparents over time.

There are implications for all those who interact with grandchildren and their grandparents and thoughtful suggestions regarding what professionals and government bodies can do to improve their situations.

In terms of the research being located in Aotearoa/New Zealand, it is important to acknowledge the significance of the Treaty of Waitangi as the founding document of Aotearoa/New Zealand and the principles of partnership and sharing that are implicit in this. This study includes an important representation of the additional cultural significance in the consideration of children in the care of grandparents and the Māori practice of Whāngai. The connections with other indigenous cultures are illustrated.

In an attempt to deal with what I perceived as a tension between producing a research project that meets the standard of a master's thesis and also left room for the participants to put their insider knowledge on the page, I worked to develop questions which opened up the topic and also gave the narrative scope to grow. A co-researcher is a participant who collaborates with an investigator to better

understand a subject. The key principle is collaboration. I could not have predicted the themes that emerged, although most fit with other related research studies. I also would not have known that these themes would be so consistent for all of the participants. They also put forth their own ideas around what others could do to improve the experience of grandchildren raised by grandparents. Their suggestions to professionals as well as family and friends have been authored by them and put into this text by the researcher. In this power sharing way, the young people involved in this research project have constructed their own meaning rather than having had a researcher take on an expert position and imposed an analysis of the results of the research.

Together, we have collaborated on a body of research that is a first of its kind, certainly in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Although not actually writing the thesis, this group of young people, who happen to constitute the co-researching element in this study, have found a published voice through their participation. It is proposed that this study is an example of an alternative form of research, perhaps not a bottom-up approach, but rather a more level playing field.

“Some of the prevailing practice ideologies in relation to children are similar to those constructed on “top – down” medical models of organizing care or treatment for people who are “vulnerable.” This paternalistic model is based on the assumption that adults know what is best for children, especially if those adults are trained professionals, and those children are classified as “at risk”, “dependent” or even “dangerous”. These assumptions have the effect of undermining concepts of children’s strengths, abilities and rights.” (Nixon, 2007(b), pg. 24)

This study set out to discover what young people in Aotearoa/New Zealand thought is important for others to be aware of regarding their experience of being parented by grandparents, and which locates their experience in a cultural and societal context. The aim was to provide an open yet structured framework which would assist the participants to reflect on their lived experience in this regard and therefore co-author the results by privileging their knowledge.

Our collective hope is that this information will contribute to the advent of a body of knowledge regarding children/young people being parented by their grandparents in this country and elsewhere and assist those who interact and respond, both professionally and on a personal level, to be better informed, which will in turn improve the experience, visibility and potential for these young people.

## CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

---

### The Rapid Rise of Grandchildren Parented by Grandparents

In numerous Western countries, the incidence of grandchildren being parented by their grandparents has risen significantly over the last ten - twenty years (Brown, Campbell, Carthron & Miles, 2012). Grandparents involved in raising their grandchildren is not a new phenomenon, however the dramatic increase and the reasons for children coming into the care of their grandparents are the areas of notable difference. The U.S. Census data reported that in 2010, 16% of children lived with their grandparents. This was a 30% increase over the previous decade and over the previous 30 years, the increase was 50% (Gosche, 2009). The Australian Bureau of Statistics estimated in 2009 that 31,100 children, 0 – 17 years were in the care of their grandparents in that country (Downie, Hay, Horner, Wichmann & Hislop, 2009, p.9). Statistics in Aotearoa/New Zealand follow a similar trend, with the last Census reporting the number of grandparents parenting grandchildren doubling over the previous decade – now over 9,500 grandparents raising an estimated 17,000 children (Grandparents Raising Grandchildren press release, 22 October 2015, pg. 1). In all of these countries, and also in the United Kingdom, where little information exists regarding the number of grandchildren in these skipped generation families, predictions are that the reporting does not reflect the true number of grandchildren in the sole care of their grandparents. Often informal arrangements are made within families and are not reported to those collecting data (Nixon, 2007(a); Scarella, Ehrle, & Geen, 2003). Another factor which influences the challenge in achieving accurate statistics is that the surveys which collect the information are not designed to specifically record grandparents' responsibility for grandchildren (Brennan & Cass, 2014). There appears to be a unanimous agreement that the figures are at best under-representing the actual numbers of children being parented by grandparents.

In their analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data (Livingston & Parker, 2010), Gretchen Livingston and Kim Parker noted the Great Recession, identified by them as beginning in the year 2007-2008, was a significantly contributing factor. Although they note that there had been a steady rise in the previous ten years, the number of grandchildren living with grandparents as their primary caregiver increased dramatically by 6% in that single year. Livingston and Parker also points out that of the identified groups being recorded in the census (white, black, Hispanic, Asian - including Pacific Islanders) the highest increase occurred in those grandparents identifying as white (19%) and also in those who have incomes at least three times

the poverty level (12%). In that country, however, the number of grandparents raising grandchildren who are black and Hispanic are disproportionately higher.

This comparison is also reflected in New Zealand data, which shows a higher proportion of Māori and Pacific grandparents parenting their grandchildren, reported as being five to six times as likely to be doing so (Families Commission – Komihana a Whanau, 2009). In this same report, of the 700,000 grandparents in New Zealand, the number raising their grandchildren was estimated to be around 12,000, based on their main survey.

The collected information on the indicators for children moving to their grandparents' full-time care is showing a sharp increase in the areas of drug addiction, mental illness, child abuse/neglect, family violence, incarceration and parental death (Goodman, 2011; Kelley, Whitley & Campos, 2011). In particular, parental substance abuse (over 66%) is proving to be the predominant reason for children moving to the care of their grandparents/kin (Brennan & Cass, 2014).

#### The Shift Toward Kin-Care Placement

There has been a move in recent years to place children in kin care arrangements in preference to stranger/foster care. In the UK, the Children Act (1989) reflected the growing realisation that removing children from their families and placing them in stranger based foster care was not showing good results (Nixon, 2007(a)). The Department of Health in that country was clear that in the event a child was not able to remain safely in the care of their parent(s), then being placed with relatives should be the first option, before other avenues are explored.

Aotearoa/New Zealand led the way in relation to legislation which supports children and young people being positioned at the centre of care and concern and also having participation in this process.

The Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act (1989) was regarded as groundbreaking legislation at the time it was presented. This act introduced major changes to the way decisions were made about children and young people who were victims of abuse and neglect, or who had broken the law. It also was the advent of the Family Group Conference as the primary process for decision making in legal actions relating to the care and/or protection of children (Pakura, 2005).

This shift was powerfully influenced by Māori, the *tangata whenua*, indigenous people of Aotearoa/New Zealand who were dissatisfied with the way professionals, such as social workers, lawyers and the court system, were making decisions about

their children's lives without taking into account Māori customs, values and beliefs, or *Tikanga*.

### Legislative Changes in Aotearoa/New Zealand

Within the practice of Family Group Conferences (FGCs), children and their families/whanau were able to become more involved in planning for positive outcomes, having first been given the full information from those professionals who had come to be involved through their, or others concern. Families responded positively to being involved in this decision making process and within a few years, the incidence of children being separated from their whanau/family had diminished significantly (Thornton, 1993 in Nixon, 2007(a)).

Further, in 2004 the Care of Children Act was introduced and came into effect in July 2005. The stated purpose of the Act is to:

“(a) promote children’s welfare and best interests, and facilitate their development, by helping to ensure that appropriate arrangements are in place for their guardianship and care; and

(b) recognise certain rights of children.” (Care of Children Act, 2004, pg. 9)

Again, this legislation located the child’s welfare and best interests as paramount. It also positioned the importance of the *child’s voice* in that it stated in the subsection 6 titled **Child’s views**, under (2) ( pg. 12):

(a) “a child must be given reasonable opportunities to express views on matters affecting the child; and

(b) Any views the child expresses (either directly or through a representative) must be taken into account.”

These statutory events have significantly supported the move to not only reposition the best placement for children in need of care and protection to be with whanau/family, they also acknowledge the importance of a child/young person having a voice in matters which affect them, especially in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

### Influence of Attachment Theory

Another contributing factor informing the preference for children to be raised by a grandparent or kin member is the increasing knowledge on the importance of attachment theory and how this contributes to a more positive outcome for children. Grandparents are frequently well positioned to offer the least disruption in children’s

lives (Poehlmann, 2003; Goldberg-Glen, Sands & Shin, 2009). This theory, which developed from the research of Bowlby in 1982, indicated that the healthy development of children is dependent on their secure bonds with their primary caregivers. Grandparents are most often already known to the grandchild(ren) and are involved in their lives as part of their core network; they often live nearby, which means children are able to continue to attend the same school and maintain their current friend/social/sport and cultural groups, thus minimizing the stress in the disruption of their primary caregiver(s) and households changing. The relationship between grandparent/ parent/ child positions caregiving as a “behavioural system” which supports the basis for attachment (Goodman, 2012).

In her paper presented at the International Bar Association Conference in 2004 – **Grandparents and Grandchildren Rights and Responsibility: A New Zealand Perspective**, Marie Dyhrberg, Barrister highlighted another flow on effect for those grandchildren who have been raised by their grandparent(s):

“Research has indicated that adults who have had strong relationships with grandparents tend to be much more positive to the value and importance of older citizens.” (Dyhrberg, pg. 4)

This is certainly echoed in the remarks from a number of the participants, made from their own personal perspective and observation.

#### Research Focus on Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

In response to the burgeoning phenomenon of children parented by their grandparents, the research community has produced volumes on the impact on grandparents such as increased health problems, truncated retirement, isolation, and broken relationships to name a few. In example, a search on google scholar for “grandchildren parented by grandparents” (as opposed to “grandparents raising grandchildren”) returns in excess of 16,800 results, all focusing on the grandparents. Another search, entering the heading “grandparents raising/parenting grandchildren” produces over 28,700 articles.

Studies have highlighted a number of risks to grandparents taking on the care of their grandchildren, such as depression (Letiecq, Bailey & Kurtz, 2008; Minkler, Fuller-Thompson, Miller & Driver, 1997), poor health (Grinstead, Leder, Jensen & Bond, 2003; Musil & Ahmad, 2002) and stress (Ross & Aday, 2006).

Financial hardship and often poverty are also indicated as major challenges for grandparents, and those with minority cultural identity showing the most significant economic vulnerability (Hayslip & Kaminski, 2005; Kelly, Whitley & Campos, 2011).

Grandmothers who are raising grandchildren are shown to have a significant risk of psychological distress in a great body of research (Fuller-Thompson & Minkler, 2000; Kelly, Whitley & Campos, 2011; Scarella, Ehrle & Geen, 2003).

### The Growth of Research Focus on Grandchildren

However, until more recently, the studies have neglected to explore how the grandchildren are affected in these situations. The research community has also begun to investigate an alternative story of strength and success in skipped generation families and what supports this (Sands, Goldberg-Glen & Shin, 2009).

“Most of the research in this area emphasizes the impact on the well-being of grandparents, rather than the well-being of grandchildren” (Edwards & Mumford, 2005, p. 20).

“Researchers have continued to focus more on grandparents than on their grandchildren. When grandchildren have been considered, the emphasis has been on how their behaviour problems impact grandparents’ well-being” (Dolbin-MacNab, 2009, p.162).

Interviewing grandparents has been the predominant method of collecting information. This is also true in studies concerning the grandchildren, where gathering data is done via the grandparents’ representation of grandchildren and/or along with their grandchildren. Previously, research involving children’s perspectives has been minimal and enquiring as to the adult perceptions of children’s experience and needs has been the dominant practice in these studies (Morgan, 2006).

“The reluctance to involve children as active participants in the research process may say more about adult anxieties than it does about children’s ability to take part and contribute” (Nixon, 2007(a), p. 42).

Children are often represented as a result of others’ observations or interpretations, but not interviewed in their own right. In example, as stated in The Care of the Aged (COTA) National Report, Australia (2003), both agencies and grandparents felt that children had been exposed to enough trauma and disruption in their lives and in this way, are positioned as gatekeepers to any representation the grandchildren might make in their own words, and from their personal perspective. In example, a child



under the age of 17 years in New Zealand/Aotearoa, is not able to give their own consent for participation in research, without their caregivers consenting to their involvement.

### The Grandchildren's Voice

What is under-researched is the grandchildren's own perceptions. Whether this is as a result of well-intentioned gate keeping or through research neglect, gaining an insight and understanding of grandchildren's experience of being parented by grandparents is even more important because the body of knowledge indicates these children to be at greater risk for emotional and behavioral problems and also potentially compromised emotional well-being in adulthood (Carpenter & Clyman, 2004).

"Little research has described the distinct needs of grandchildren living in grandparent households, or explored how these children are coping. What is known about these children is largely based on information extrapolated from general research on traumatized children, or is derived from health and social data about grandparent caregivers and inferences about how grandparent caregiving impacts the well-being of grandchildren."  
(Whitley & Kelley 2007, p. 7).

There is a gradual rise in the interest and call for research to be undertaken which centres the grandchildren.

"This study is one of only a few where the voices of children living with grandparents have been heard; its importance should not be underestimated."  
(Downie, Hay, Hislop, Horner, & Wichmann, 2009, p. 21)

"Previous research on grandparent-headed families has concentrated largely on the perspectives of the grandparent caregivers. In this analysis we moved the grandchildren to the center and listened to their voices." (Goldberg-Glen, Sands, & Shin, 2009, p. 41)

I found one New Zealand based study that interviewed ninety eight eleven -thirteen year old students in the South Island about the grandparent and grandchild relationship from the child's perspective. The media release "Let's ask the grandchildren" (1 August 2008) highlighted the study as being one of the first in New Zealand to ask children "what they think about their relationships with their grandparents".

The study, Grandparents in Rural Families, was financed through the Families Commission's Blue Skies Fund and the research conducted by Kathy Glasgow, Sally Keeling and Carolyn Morris.

However, it was not focussed on the relationships of grandchildren being parented by their grandparents, it was looking into the links and activities that these young people shared with their grandparents and inquired about their experience of their relationship with their grandparents. The study revealed that over forty per cent of the young people interviewed have regular contact with their grandparents (between daily and weekly) and that twenty per cent described the relationship as special. Fewer than one in ten said they had a grandparent they didn't really know. The young people also discussed the support given and received, the fun they had with their grandparents and their sadness when they weren't able to have regular contact with them. It also points out that there is much more to know regarding the relationship between grandchildren and grandparents.

There is a more recent project which was announced in the Spring (UK) of 2014 by an organization called Grandparents Plus. The two year project, funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation (one of the UK's largest independent grant-giving organizations) will interview young people and kinship carers about their experience. They are looking to discover how well the young people who have grown up in kinship care are doing as young adults and what assistance might be helpful for those in similar situations. The research came about in response to the knowledge that many of the kinship carers are supporting their grandchildren beyond the age of eighteen and that the carers find the teenage years particularly challenging and also difficult to get assistance from local authorities at that time. The study is looking to find out how well the young people are doing and what support would assist both carers and young people as they transition into adulthood. It is also envisaged the research will assist in lobbying for better recognition of kinship care and how support for those in such situations can be improved.

Despite conducting an extensive search, I was not able to find a study that not only positioned young people in the centre of the research and invited their voice, but also included their collaborating influence in the outcome of the interviews and group conversations.

## CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

---

### Design

In considering the design and development of this research project, it was imperative to find a way to do so that reflected the values and beliefs which already inform my counselling, family therapy and professional supervision practice of over thirty years.

Narrative therapy is a strong influence in my work and this incorporates “an ethic of collaboration and equity” (Tootell, 2004, pg. 54). Although this research study is not investigating therapeutic practice, centring the voice of those participating in the research was a guiding principle. Questions were formulated as open-ended and qualitative, allowing for participants representations of their lived experience in preference to the way that “traditional research practices privilege professionals’ interpretations and understanding over those of clients” (Gaddis, 2004, pg. 1).

The significant purpose was to *assist* a published voice of grandchildren parented by grandparents, an area of research that has been virtually non-existent and therefore called upon from a number of sources (Griggs, Tan, Buchanan, Attar-Schwartz & Flouri, 2010; Nixon, 2007(b); Poehlmann, 2003; Tolan, 2005; Whittenberg, 2012). Their participation was also engaged as co-researchers, in that they were invited to contribute from their insider perspective to the growth of knowledge and awareness on this subject and to make suggestions that might inform the practice of professionals involved, (in particular teachers, counsellors and social workers) and those in positions of influence regarding social policy.

“Such insights can only be achieved effectively by putting young people at the centre of the research process” (Smith, Monaghan & Broad, 2002, pg. 205).

I obtained permission from the University of Waikato Faculty of Education Ethics Committee, whose view was that a young person aged 17 did not require parental consent for an interview, as at this age they are able to leave school and embark on

their own lives. They suggested care to be taken around anonymity, which has been done by not using the participants names or obvious identifying factors.

### **Sampling**

Most of the participants were identified by word of mouth invitation via the Grandparents Raising Grandchildren (GRG) network in New Zealand. When the founder of GRG, Diane Vivian, learned about this research project, she invited me to write a brief description of the study to include in the online GRG newsletter, published each month, and to invite participation of young adults through this medium. The researcher also contacted a few young adults known to have been parented by their grandparents and through professional networks, any young people raised by grandparents were also invited to participate.

When a potential participant was identified, either through response to the article in the GRG newsletter, via mutual contacts in the professional community or those already known to the researcher, they were asked by the person known to them if I might send an email to establish a direct link of communication. They were then sent a brief, generic email to ask their permission to be contacted by phone to have an initial conversation to discuss their involvement and interest and so that I might answer any initial questions they may have at that point. Their inclusion was dependent on being of age to give their own consent and having been raised by a grandparent. I began with a sample size of eight , but this was reduced to seven when one person was seconded overseas by his employer.

### **Data Gathering**

An information letter (Appendix A) was then sent to each possible participant, setting out the purpose and process of the research for consideration, including participation in an optional discussion group with the other participants following the individual interviews. They were also sent consent forms (Appendix B & C) at this time to sign at the beginning of the interview, after they had time to ask me any questions; one for the individual interview and another for the group if they chose to participate in this.

Consent was gained before the interviews took place. All individual interviews and the group discussions were digitally recorded, as agreed on by the participants.

### **Format**

The researcher conducted all of the interviews. The individual interviews were semi-structured, using the list of interview questions composed by the researcher (Appendix D). The interviewees and those participating in the groups were all asked the same questions from this guide. The first four questions were devised to locate the participant in the topic and included the origins of coming into the care of their grandparents, age and circumstance. The participants were also invited to speak about what was significant about this experience and what they considered to be important to know about this.

In the next section, the six questions were more specific to the topic and invited their responses to what they think is important for others to know about grandchildren being parented by their grandparents; how children/young people are affected by this experience and who, in particular, would they want to be better informed about this topic. They were also asked about their opinions on what they have found supportive/not supportive in responding to the challenges in relation to growing up in the care of grandparents. The participants were invited to make suggestions that might influence and improve the response by professionals, communities and social networks to the needs of grandparented grandchildren. They were finally asked if there was anything else that they wanted to include that hadn't already been covered.

The participants reviewed their own interview transcripts and affirmed it was a true account of their experience.

The three questions for the focus group invited the participants to reflect on the effect of participating in the research; asked for their responses to the summary of the themes emerging from the individual interviews and also offered them the

opportunity to include anything else that they had thought of in the interim and hadn't already been covered.

The individual interviews were conducted in one of two locations where the researcher had professional counselling rooms available for use. They are comfortable, private spaces which are easily accessible, including using public transport. For those who either drove or were driven to the interviews, petrol vouchers were provided to cover this cost. Light refreshment was provided by the researcher.

The groups took place in a small hired hall, in a private location next door to a café which was paid to provide pizza and juice during this session.

### **Data Analysis**

The individual and group interviews were all transcribed verbatim by the researcher. Following this, the researcher was able to identify the themes that came to light. These were then organized under the headings that emerged and direct quotes were used to illustrate the areas of importance put forward by the participants.

### **PARTICIPANTS**

In all, there were seven participant-consultants to this research project, five female and two male.

They are an ethnically diverse group, incorporating Māori, European, Turkish, Malaysian, Tongan and Cook Island heritage.

Five were parented by their Mother's Parents and two by their Father's Parents. In two of these situations, the Grandmother was the sole caregiver. Five of the participants began life with both of their Grandparents parenting them. For two, their Grandmothers became the sole caregiver; one through the death of her spouse and the other Grandfather became incapacitated following a series of strokes. Another Grandchild was parented by both Grandparents separately.

Only one of the participants did not have a Grandparent with either a serious and/or life threatening illness at some stage while in the care of their Grandparent.

The majority were taken into their Grandparents' care at birth. One was a three year old toddler. The remaining two were young teens, age 12 and 13. Interestingly, both of these adolescents negotiated their own "escape" from their living situation with their parents and also the arrangements for residing with their respective Grandparents.

The situations causing the participants to be taken into their Grandparents care reflect the extensively researched information on Grandchildren being parented by their Grandparents elsewhere in Euro-western culture (Dolbin-MacNab & Keiley, 2009, pg. 162; Grinwis, Smith & Dannison, 2004, pg. 3; Hislop, Horner, Downie & Hay, 2004, pg. 5; Nixon (a), 2007, pg. 13; Tolan, 2005, pg. 5; Whittenberg, 2012, pg.1). In one situation, the Mother committed suicide and the father is unknown. In another, both Mother and Father were deemed too young and irresponsible to raise a child. Mental illness, including psychosis and schizophrenia were factors in two of the grandchildren's placement with their Grandparents. Some of the participants' parent(s) are, or were in jail and therefore unable to care for their children.; For one of the participants in particular, there was prolonged and significant neglect which resulted in the move to being cared for by grandparents. Physical, mental, emotional abuse and substance abuse were also contributors requiring intervention in many of the participants' lives with their parents.

All seven began living with their Grandparents as the sole child. For two of the participants, this changed when they were older. These young women happened to be the two in the group who identify as Māori. Both of their Grandmothers ended up taking a number of other grandchildren into their care and their granddaughters assisted with the responsibilities of caring for their younger siblings and/or cousins.

Five of the participants have gone to university. Two have already graduated with Bachelor's degrees. The majors have some consistency: two in music; one in social work; one in psychology and a conjoint degree in psychology/music. The other two are following a non-tertiary study/career path at this time.

They currently range in age from eighteen to twenty-four years.

“Children are the living messages we send to a time we will not see.”

John F. Kennedy – 35<sup>th</sup> President of the U.S.A.



## CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS

---

The individual interviews produced themes that were remarkably consistent and were able to be organized under the nine headings which follow. In this section, I have aimed to represent their voices with as little interference as possible.

### GRATITUDE/APPRECIATION

“I wouldn’t be who I am today without my Grandparents – nothing would be the same. I wouldn’t even be here, I’d probably be dead.”

Above and beyond any other theme that emerged from the interviewees was their dominant message of appreciation for all that their respective grandparents had done, including an awareness of what had been sacrificed to take on the responsibility of parenting them:

“They gave up everything so selflessly, all their retired life – they’ve given me the very best that they can and they still support me!”

“I put heaps of stress on them.”

“He’s adjusted his life to mine and I haven’t had to fit in to his old person routine.”

When I inquired as to how her Grandfather had done this, the participant gave the following examples:

“Waking up when I do for school; he makes sure I have breakfast, lunch and dinner – even if he’s busy. He takes me places and lets me borrow the car. He funds things that I want to do. If I’m busy – have homework to do, he might say “You don’t have to do the dishes tonight”.”

There was a clear appreciation expressed by all for their grandparents embarking on round two of raising children:

“The fact that they said yes (my Mum’s Mum said no) is pretty huge – they had already raised four kids.”

“...how much they care, how much of their spirit they put into us, especially after having their own children already. I think this is at least the same, or beyond a lot of other (first-time around) parents.”

“...any grandparents that decide to take on looking after a young person, after already having raised their own children, are a specific sort of grandparent and are a bit more adventurous and not, perhaps, as fuddy-duddy as your typical gran and granpa might be.”

For those that went to live with their grandparents as children, rather than as newborns/infants, the contrast in their lives was often highly significant. However, a number of their examples were of a life that many would take for granted:

“I got such a better quality of life living with my grandparents; they taught me right from wrong; they gave me shelter/a good roof over my head; they gave me singing lessons – all the extras.”

“My life has changed, only for the better – an upgrade of every single way I used to live. In example – FOOD! I’ve never been hungry since staying with my Grandparents. With my Mum, there was never any food. One meal a day was a nicety. From the age of five she would leave me at home by myself until eleven o’clock at night.”

(This young man had been severely neglected by his Mother - he continues:)

“...now, I attend a better school, I am better clothed and the environment at home is much friendlier.”

These comments, showing appreciation for having the basic necessities in life provided by grandparents and the significant difference being in a protective environment made to the grandchildren's sense of wellbeing are very similar to those found in other studies (see Sands, Goldberg-Glen, Shin, 2009).

Most would say that their grandparents had pushed them to stay on track, in particular with their education, and assisted them to develop discipline in order to achieve:

"Without my Nan pushing me, I reckon I wouldn't have done any of it."

"She would say, "come on, you can do it" – she's my motivation."

For some, this has meant steering them away from drugs, gangs and a criminal lifestyle:

"I had been on the wrong path, hanging with the wrong crowd and Nan opened my eyes."

"She keeps us in direction, she is the inspiration."

"She's always the one that will make us focus on the right path."

All of the participants are involved in some form of ongoing education; two have just achieved a university degree, three others are at various stages in their university programs and the remaining two are involved in other training and /or apprentice opportunities:

"They pushed me really hard, which is good, and created a career path for me."

For one young person, who had left school due to being bullied in extremely aggressive ways on numerous occasions, her Grandmother encouraged her to persevere with alternative forms of training in order to be job ready:

“Nan supported me and pushed me to keep going, to not give up. So, I did courses; went on the Spirit of Adventure; computer/IT training; and pre-service training with the Army and Navy.”

Their appreciation often highlighted the way their grandparents had parented them:

“My grandparents would go that extra mile, to doing things that were more...real – you didn’t need money for it. Like, teaching me to ride my bike. My Mum would come for visits, and would buy me heaps of awesome toys that my friends all loved – but I wouldn’t take to them. She wouldn’t take the time to do things like teach me to ride my bike. The things that my grandparents did for me were just very loving – they taught me a lot.”

“They were stricter and this is a good thing! They would follow through, like with consequences and confiscating things. There were no empty threats (like with my Mother).”

“She’s a good ‘rock’ kind of character – it’s hard to move her at all, once she’s made her mind up/set a limit.”

“It’s important for the grandparent(s) to be the authority, rather than the child/young person being in control. There are some parents and grandparents who don’t set boundaries/rules for fear of losing the child/grandchild – this does not help a young person to learn to live in society.”

There was appreciation for grandparents’ directness in more than one situation:

“I really appreciate that they weren’t covering – like some people: “oh, her Dad’s not here, he’s at work”, but then we would see my friend’s Dad at the pub when we went to pick up my Mum from there with my Nana and Pop.”

“It was a good experience, a privilege – I appreciate that my grandparents were open and honest about our situation. Like, “no, you can’t see your Mum

– she’s on drugs (or) she’s been drinking”. I knew these were real reasons, not fake excuses.”

“They were much more straightforward, no beating around the bush, like some people who thought if they told me the truth, I might get hurt and then be mentally disabled when I’m older. I think that’s what I loved about how they raised me from “back in the days” – I’m just happy to be raised the way I was by my Grandparents.”

There were numerous expressions of gratitude which contrasted the difference they experienced in being parented by their grandparents:

“I am just grateful that I was raised by my grandparents and neither of my parents.”

“I think I am able to appreciate my Grandparents more, having lived with them, than if I had just lived with my parents.”

“I just think Nan and Koro were a good option for me. ‘Cause if I was with my parents, I don’t know where I would actually be. I’ve seen my brothers and sisters go into CYFS homes and that was sad to see – I wasn’t allowed to visit and I didn’t get to see my siblings. So, Nan took all of them in, so that we could all be together.”

Finally, the participants expressed appreciation for their Grandparents dedication and unconditional love:

“My Grandmother is the person who’s been there for me all my life - the only one there for me. I’ve never talked to my Grandmother with disrespect, ever!”

(Your grandparent is) “the only person that’s going to take you in and love you for who you are and not for what you’ve got.”

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT/RESPECT FOR GRANDPARENTS

The participants are keen practitioners of respect for their grandparents. They share a collective indignation in relation to anyone, or any system that does not acknowledge the effort of grandparents caring for their grandchildren. The participants are all absolutely clear that, although there is definitely work in taking on the raising of a grandchild, they also know that their grandparents are inspired by their love and care:

‘Grandparents need to be given credit for what they’re doing. People say that raising their grandchildren is their job – it’s NOT!’

For one, this exasperation was expressed with violence and resulted in suspension from school, after a classmate had been speaking disrespectfully about her Grandmother:

“Others need to be respectful and not ‘gossip’. This group of girls wouldn’t stop badmouthing my Nan, so I beat up the ringleader. I felt I had to defend Nan’s honour – of course, she wasn’t very happy about the way I did that.”

The young people were aware of their unique perspective on grandparents. As referenced in relation to the quote in the introduction (Dyhrberg, 2004) the lived experience of being parented by grandparents and the close relationship that evolves as a result, contributes to the valuing of their elders:

“We’d almost have a bit more respect for grandparents and people of that age. My peer’s attitude was that older people are basically useless. Whereas, those of us who’ve been raised by our grandparents don’t just write them off with an “older person – what do they know?” kind of attitude. We have the respect for and knowledge of their lives.”

“(We) have a perspective that includes consideration of older people. On our debating team, I would take the affirmative on topics such as superannuation

and retirement homes, due to my exposure, appreciation and awareness of the issues.”

Their views often included socio-political contexts:

“There is a need for grandparents parenting their grandchildren to be acknowledged more – it’s out there and it’s possible. It’s not because they’re old that they can’t look after us - it’s that, because they’re old, they’re not getting enough support to look after us.” (This comment is in relation to the lack of parity between grandparents/kin-carers and foster parents, who are provided for much more extensively, both financially and in terms of support services offered.)

Once again, the sentiment is expressed appreciating the challenging opportunity for a grandparent parenting their grandchild and acknowledging the best effort made by those grandparents who do take it on:

“I do believe that when grandparents are given that chance to raise their grandchildren, they do their best – it’s not for everyone – it’s not easy.”

From an early age, most of those interviewed appear to have been aware of, and had respect for the endeavour of their grandparents to care and provide for them.

However, one young person, in what appears to be a call to other grandchildren to acknowledge and respond positively to their grandparents efforts, is also reflecting on her own experience, having gone through a period of rebellion, including truancy, substance abuse and sexual promiscuity at a young age. With maturity, she was able to reflect on the impact of her behaviour as well as the scope of her grandparents care:

“...for the kids to be more understanding and supportive of their grandparents, to put less stress on them. The grandparents are doing it for their grandchildren, to provide them with a better life.”

Another speaks of being inspired by her Grandmother's hard work and perseverance and the desire to follow in her footsteps. Dedicating her efforts to her Grandmother, she is hopeful that her Nan will be able to witness her Granddaughter's success in life as a testament to her input, before she passes on:

"I said to my Nan, that when I do die, I want to make sure that I've made it to where she has – when it comes to the time when she passes, I want to make something successful for her, not for myself, but for her - just to know that she does have acknowledgement from someone."



## OUR GRANDPARENTS ARE OUR PARENTS

The participants' loyalty and insight formed the foundation for their clarity around the role their grandparents have in their lives, having transitioned from a traditional grandparent role to grandparent-as-parent role (Backhouse, 2009). They all affirmed and asserted their grandparents are their parents. They are also quick to point out the difference between having the title of parent and the action of parenting:

“People need to know – grandparenting in this type of situation is just parenting – parenting by people maybe older.”

“Just because your parent has the name ‘parent’ doesn’t mean they’re parenting!”

It may be that being clear about this role of parent, even though a grandparent, is helpful for anyone interacting with grandchildren or grandparents in these situations. This is particularly so in school settings, (both students and staff) and with funding bodies:

“Grandparents should have full recognition for their role as parents/grandparents raising grandchildren. Even though they are your grandparents – they actually are your parents.”

The following quote encapsulates discussion that occurred around any role confusion that might occur – the consensus was that it is helpful if a grandparent is functioning in the full role as parent, guarding against any potential role confusion. Although, this also has an element of loss – as I have heard grandparents express their sadness in losing the experience of being a grandparent in becoming the parent to a grandchild. This is also true for grandchildren, who have essentially lost their grandparent when they take on the responsibility/role of parent:

“It works well if your grandparents are basically just taking a parental role.”

It appeared that the young people had an awareness of being in the gaze of others, and also of being positioned as different/other. One response they have to this is defiance, taking a stand against people's assumptions about their experience of being parented by elder grandparents. Ironically, they are well aware of their 'difference' and some have experienced some stigma/shame and secrecy around their situation. As is reported in other studies (Downie et al., 2009) this is often more likely to be in relation to the reasons their parents weren't able to care for them, rather than the fact they were being raised by grandparents :

"It hasn't been difficult at all – a lot easier than anyone could have guessed, given that there was a bigger generational gap. It's just been easy, you just kind of do it and you get used to it and it's not a big deal at the time and it isn't for me at the moment!"

"It works so well for me, not as strange as they may think – some people think it's a bit odd, they think that I'm being done some injustice because I've been put with the oldest male in the family...(this young person is a female and was originally in her Grandmother's care)...as opposed to some aunty or just living with my parents. It's not an injustice to live with your grandparents!"

Most of the participants have also had to respond to the presumption that their life is somehow dull or lacking as a result of being parented by a grandparent. As insiders to this experience, they know the paradox of the reality of limitation for their grandparents who may have physical impediments due to aging bodies, however, they also know the richness that life with grandparent caregivers provides:

"Living with your grandparents doesn't equal a life of dreariness!"

As has been stated previously, with reference to attachment theory and the behavioural system of caregiving in relation to grandparent-parent-child, there is a benefit in the connectedness of a family system and continued care as opposed to, in example, stranger/foster-care:

“These are the people who raised my Mum, so it just kind of makes sense.”

In response to the dominant thinking that young people in situations where they are being parented by their grandparent(s) have been through enough already and shouldn't be poked and prodded (such as being involved in research), one of the participants had this to say:

“I might be a more open person than some – I don't worry about talking about these sorts of things. I met someone the other day who was asking – ‘so what about your parents’, sort of thing. I had two thoughts, I could tell them and then they were going to be all very compassionate and I thought, it doesn't worry me, talking about what's happened – it happened. Or, I could not tell them and it would be awkward and it would be like “oops, there's something he doesn't want to talk about.” So, I generally just tell people, and then they're like “oh no, I'm so sorry” and I don't actually need that compassion. It's not the sort of thing I go telling people, that I don't have parents, but if someone asks me, for a genuine reason, I'll tell them!”

The above comments reflect another paradox – having a practice of openness and honesty and yet also possessing that sense of protection due to the knowledge that no matter whether the truth is told or not, awkwardness is hard to avoid. It is, again, presumptive to think that the only source of discomfort in response to others enquiry originates from the practice of research. As this participant reflects, through experience, well intentioned ‘compassion’ can still be burdensome and uncomfortable and prompting the development of a process of internal dialogue, through being positioned as different/other and pitiable.

## GRANDPARENTS' WISDOM

The young people taking part in this study were in accord in their valuing of their grandparents life experience and how this was beneficially imparted to them. One of the participants had developed a theoretical perspective on how her Grandparents mixed race marriage informed their lives:

“I think their way of raising me was a very special one – I really value the knowledge that I got from my grandparents – they are very accepting and I think their inter-racial marriage has contributed to that.”

The participants were all very quick to comment on the contribution their grandparents' knowledge and experience made to their lives and also to the experience of feeling special:

“My grandparents were/are very hard working people, they set this example. They also did a lot to provide for me – they even got an entire set of playground equipment – just for me!”

Diligent work also featured as a theme with most of the young people in relation to their grandparents and there was speculation about the generational origins of this by some:

“The values I've learned from my Nan, like strong work ethics, have been so useful for me already in my life. I think this has been passed down from our ancestors.”

In this context, there was again the mention of the benefit of being raised by grandparents in contrast to parents and both the advantage and challenge that longevity provides:

“They've got the life experience and wisdom – you learn so much about life that you couldn't get from your parents.”

“She’s told me a lot of stories about her experience, like when she was back at school – it makes you think about things, further back than you would if you just had parents 30 years older than you.”

“She opened my eyes to the real world. Your parents/grandparents can’t do everything for you. You have to grow up sometime in your life. Living with Nan has been a better opportunity – she was older and wiser and has been through it all!”

The participants were clear in their consistent cherishing of what their grandparents offered them, having lived lives incorporating a double generation. The value of hard work appears to have taken hold for most of the young people and is already serving them well. In our modern society, the practice of reverence for elder’s wisdom may be sidelined by most, however, these young adults have found this to be relevant and beneficial in preparation for their independent lives.

## AM I A BURDEN?

One of the themes that was not surprising, yet tinged with a melancholic quality, was the participants disturbing thoughts around being an encumbrance to their grandparents. Somehow, it seems that they have taken on the weight of responsibility for the impact on their grandparents' lives:

"I kinda used to feel bad...I feel like a bit of a burden, sometimes."

"I have always had an awareness of the burden and stress for my grandparents through taking on the parenting of me."

For some, this was expressed as guilt and shame, especially in relation to their grandparents' forfeiture of their retirement years:

"Due to the lack of support and funding, retiring is not an option for my Nan. I'm just kind of ashamed about this – it's not like I've got two younger parents earning incomes."

"We do need to take into consideration today that grandparents do give up their retirement for their grandchildren – it's very common in New Zealand."

This theme was also expressed in relation to their disappointment and anger with their parents:

"My parents should get their act together and be responsible so my Nan wouldn't have to suffer."

This particular group of young people also have an acute awareness of the impact on their grandparents, who are taking them on at a later and potentially more vulnerable stage in life:

“The worst thing for me is my guilt towards how I treated them and that I caused them heaps of health issues and stress...it was so unnecessary. Even if it was ‘normal’ teenage rebellion, it doesn’t make it right!”

It is so unfortunate that so many of the young people have taken on the responsibility for the impact on their grandparents lives in relation to raising their grandchildren (Dolbin-MacNab & Keiley, 2009; Downie, Hay, Horner, Wichman & Hislop, 2009; Hislop, Horner, Downie & Hay, 2004). This is another consistent outcome of many of the research studies that have enquired into the lived experience of grandchildren parented by grandparents. This is one of the issues that can be addressed in therapeutic conversation. They need assistance to be able to throw off the weight of being burdened about being a burden.

## GRANDPARENTS AGE, HEALTH & VULNERABILITY

The interviewees were very cognizant, again from an early age, of their respective grandparents' frailty, mortality and at times, failing health. They also respectfully hinted at how this in turn had an impact on activities that are curtailed by physical limitations:

"Even though the grandparents care so much, there are a whole bracket of things that are very different in terms of the capabilities of the grandparents and what they can physically bring you along to do. For example, outdoor activities other kids might do with their parents, those never happened – you know, short walks are ok, but longer than that and it's too challenging for a number of reasons."

"A lot of the time I find Gran can't do quite as active things – she was 55 when I was born and no spring chicken!"

"When you're older, you're tired and your bones ache."

A number of the participants spoke about the effect of living with a grandparent-as-parent who suffers from ill health. This awareness can contribute to the realisation that their support and care might disappear and result in becoming withdrawn and self-reliant early in life:

"It only works living with grandparents if they're in a position where they don't have to be looked after themselves."

"With my Nana, I was always scared that she was going to die. But, we always knew that my Papa was going to die because when I was born, he was given five years – but he lived thirteen years! So, I always knew he was going to die younger because he had a heart condition. However, you know, no one's prepared for death."



“It shapes you out to be the person you become...’cause you feel you can’t always lean on them in the same way.”

“So, last year when my Nana got sick, I came back from Aussie to help – she was very ill.”

For some, the ill health of a grandparent (or, great-grandparent) meant that they would contribute to their care. The following quotes are from the two Māori participants and illustrate their appreciation for these senior members of their whanau, and how they find value and connection in caring for them in their time of need, something that is perhaps not as common in Euro-western culture:

“My Grandfather was a lovely man and he did everything for me. When he had a stroke, he lost his speech and got paralyzed, so it was a bit hard. Everyone goes – “Oh! How can you understand him, he doesn’t make sense?” And I go – “Oh, I just do” – I was the only one who could understand my Grandfather at the time. You just have to be patient with him.”

“My Nan’s Mum just passed away last year. She lived with us and I looked after her since I was twelve. She had a stroke and she could sort of walk but you just had to give her support. It was great, I loved every bit of it because I got that time, that one on one time with her before she passed. And that’s why I’m sort of glad that I do get time with my Grandparents, because most of my friends I know, they never knew their grandparents.”

Witnessing the ability of a grandparent to keep persevering, despite the challenges of age and health, is yet another avenue for appreciation:

“Since I’ve grown up and gotten over myself a bit, it’s WOW!, she’s a strong lady. She does all this as a daily routine. No grandparent should go through what my Nan has gone through and does go through. For her to keep pushing on every day, the way she lives and the way everything is – is truly amazing. She is God’s gift, that’s as simple as I can put it.”

There is also the expressed desire to make the most of the time available with grandparents:

“Well, some people they have their differences with their grandparents and stuff, but like, my journey with my Grandparents – I wouldn’t give that up for the world. That’s as simple as it can go. It was the best ever and I never want to lose them, but I know I’m going to. The time I have with them, I just grab onto.”

## FINANCIAL AWARENESS

For many grandparents, grandchildren come into their care when their sole income source is the pension. They may or may not know about the funding available to them, even if just the Unsupported Child Benefit (or UCB). Grandparents have their own stories of difficulty and challenge in trying to raise a child with limited finances. Without exception, each participant had grown up from an early age being aware of monetary matters and the juggle of resources:

“Knowing as a child “Oh no, we can’t afford this, we can’t do this because of our circumstances” – I really noticed the difference in relation to a lot of other children.”

“I was thinking about day-day finances a lot more, I didn’t want to ask for things because I knew we couldn’t afford them.”

“Nan tries to teach me good money sense. You do have to make money to make your way in the world. It’s sad, like the opportunities available are kind of limited by how much you earn and/or funds that can help you and shows that someone else cares as well.”

(Finances) – “it’s one of the biggest barriers – not even barriers...worries.”

For some, there was also the knowledge of the effect this had on their grandparents:

“I know the incredible stress of budgeting down to the last five dollars and being aware of how much there’s the mental pressure on my Gran knowing that – about what other children my age have because of the availability of money, and what I don’t have because of the lack of money.”

“I was aware of the financial limitations due to the circumstance of being raised by my Grandmother – I learned not to ask for much or have expectations in this way.”

“I think that financial restraints also put a lot of pressure on my Grandmother in terms of accommodation. It was stressful for her and there was a tension around having the right kind of accommodation for both of us, an elderly woman and a young child, which was affordable. Subsequently, we moved around a lot and I know this was stressful for my Grandmother.”

For most of the participants, this financial awareness informed their practices around managing money and resources and was also influenced by their noticing of difference in relation to their peers:

“...what it’s like at school, when kids talk and things like that – I was aware of such a huge difference at times – I learned through this to ‘make do’.”

“I learned not to ask for much.”

“Making do with what you have – I had to appreciate when something was ‘good enough’, rather than upgrading/replacing/buying new all the time, like my peers seemed to do.”

“At times in my childhood, I thought – damn, wouldn’t it be just great if I had a bit more of this or a bit more of that, but then I knew there wasn’t a limitless money tree out the back.”

One of the participants was fortunate to have been awarded a scholarship to a well reputed boarding school:

“I went to boarding school from the age of 8, 5 days a week. This eased the pressure on my Grandmother, knowing I was getting a fantastic education with everything funded, so that she didn’t have to worry about money to support me during that time. Although, I can only imagine what it was like for her, leaving me with a bunch of strangers after all we’d been through.”

Once again, the participants exhibit their early maturity and their focus not only on self, but also in relation to how their grandparents are impacted and are provided yet

another opportunity to notice their 'difference'. In this instance they speak of managing finances, the politics of inequity and yet another situation where they are self-monitoring. They highlight the vicious cycle of needing financial backing to create opportunity and how opportunity can facilitate the ability to create funds.

## THE LAMENT – WHAT WOULD LIFE HAVE BEEN LIKE TO LIVE IN A MOTHER/FATHER/SIBLING FAMILY CONSTRUCT?

This theme, while never expressed by any of the participants as a complaint or against their grandparents in any way, nevertheless permeated throughout the interviews. The influence of nuclear family romanticism is powerfully present in their reflections and also their melancholy in relation to not fitting this dominant discourse:

“Sometimes you have little patches where you feel like you’re missing out on the full kind of family experience - I don’t know, like the idealized nuclear family. I don’t know – it has some pros and cons.”

“It would be great if I had a Mum and Dad to stay with – but I don’t.”

“It’s not so nice when you feel like you’re missing out” (in comparison to others living with their parents and siblings).

“I can get a bit touchy sometimes around the subject of mums and fathers kinda thing...”

“I would have loved to be with my Mum and Dad, and to have that family bond.”

A few of the participants have been developing their awareness of the romanticism of the nuclear family:

“It took me a long time to realize that I kind of idealized the mum, dad and child kind of family situation and once I got the notion that that was something I longed for, it was kinda hard to deal with at first – and then I realized it just wouldn’t be the same. Things would just be different, not necessarily better.”

The following account is from a young person whose thinking had been shaped by the context in which he had previously lived, where he was one of many living in

different combinations of 'family'. However, in moving to live with grandparents, the experience of being positioned as different was in much sharper contrast:

"This is something I get really annoyed about with my friends – I tell them that I live with my Grandparents and they say "you stay with your Grandparents?!!! What???" Oh, well, if I had a mum and dad to stay with, well, definitely I would stay with them – but – I can't. So, I stay with my Grandparents and people's minds just explode!"

There was the shared idea that this difference somehow contributed to the absence of a sense of belonging, as though to have this, one must comply with the construct of the nuclear family:

"Probably one of the main things that I notice affects me is a lack of a sense of belonging."

"Maybe like a sense of belonging...and it's like when my friends talk about their dads and how they're quite protective and the big man/father figure king of thing...I wonder what that's like." (female participant)

This idea of the importance of a sense of belonging is evident in a number of the studies on grandchildren parented by grandparents (Hislop, Horner, Downie & Hay, 2004; Nixon, 2007 (a)). However, in this study and others which have involved indigenous peoples, the sense of belonging is strengthened by their connection to their culture and a wider body of extended family, rather than limited to immediate family:

"It's like, people I know and their families – I don't know – normal families kind of, not normal, but like just the mum and the dad and the kids - they kind of have their own little space where their belonging is. And, a lot of the time, I don't know, it might just be me, but I don't really feel that way and – I don't know – it's tricky to explain."

They were aware of existing in a socio-political context that has been promoting the nuclear family as the bedrock in Euro-western culture since the industrial revolution and more recently since the second world war where women and mothers free labour supported men to go out and 'earn the bacon'. Many of the participants have begun to question these dominant influences:

"The idealized image of the nuclear family – where do we get the ideas that make us feel like we're missing out on things that would be gained from living in a Mum, Dad and the kids situation? It's seen as the norm. Often, there can be lots of different situations, like there might be a single mum, or separated parents, or one grandparent or two grandparents – might be adopted."

"The nuclear family is put up like the perfect image...it might not necessarily be as good as it's painted out to be all the time."

"We are not very well represented in popular culture and the media. Even though examples of separated families and/or sole parenting are becoming more prominent – you don't see many images/movies/sitcoms or whatever, representing children being raised by their grandparents."

"It's like our situation is invisible in today's society."

"My friends think everyone is parented by their parents, and that's not the case. Here on Auckland's North Shore, it seems being parented by your parents is the norm. Whereas, in the town I used to live in, being parented by your parents isn't necessarily the norm – sometimes you stay with your sister, sometimes with your aunty because your mum and dad are in jail and their grandparents are dead. Much worse off than I was – I mean, I had it good, neglect and mental abuse is nothing compared to what they went through."

Some of the participants offered strategies for combating this sense of isolation in the context of our society:



“It is kind of a different experience – but it’s the only thing you ever really know (being raised by a grandparent). Sometimes, you’ll find yourself comparing yourself to other situations that could have been, if circumstances were different, but – maybe just showing that it is ok, that you can get the most out of the grandparent situation. Try to get the most out of it all the time, because there are still opportunities.”

They all exhibit a well developed ability to be creatively resilient, one of the qualities cited in more recent studies as supporting young people who have experienced challenging life events.

“Shape your own way of seeing it...that’s how you can make the most of your situation.”

One participant offered a counter to the lament the others had expressed:

“The amount of love and care I got – I felt that friends, other family members, cousins, etc., living with their nuclear family didn’t get as much (love and care) as I did.”

Most of the participants shared a commentary on their sense of invisibility in today’s society. There is a lack of awareness and representation of young people parented by grandparents. Even though their own awareness of the influence of the dominance of the romanticism around the nuclear family is growing, they wonder what life might have been like, had they been raised by their parents. The idea of a sense of belonging, and how important this is for children’s well-being appeared in a number of the references as well as coming from the participants themselves (see Ministry of Social Development, (2012); Downie et al, (2009)). Once again, there was a distinction of difference for the participants of Māori heritage – they were the only ones who did not comment on or lament not having the experience of living in a romanticized nuclear family construct. Their sense of belonging appeared to be located in the wider family group.

## RELATIONSHIP WITH EXTENDED WHANAU/FAMILY

Another area that all of the participants have had to navigate in one form or another, is their relationship with the rest of their family, including their parents. Being parented by their grandparents can contribute to an additional raft of family complexity:

“I was spoiled and ‘out-casted’. I was the youngest of the youngest child and her siblings, my aunts and uncles, perceived me as a threat. They were like my brothers and sisters. They were jealous of me because they thought I got everything and they got nothing.”

“When I was first with my Nan and Koro, it was just me. My brothers and sisters were taken into care and lived in CYFS homes. This was sad – I couldn’t visit them. Then, Nan took them all in so that we could be together (nine children) and it got very overcrowded!”

“My Dad lives in England. I went to visit him, he’s cool, we get along really well. However, my step-mum, she doesn’t like me. She still hasn’t told her parents about me yet. They don’t know I exist – when they do find out, there will be questions. I really don’t care, I really don’t like her either – she took my Dad away.”

“I’ve only had facebook contact with my Father, he doesn’t want to know me.”

“I see her (Mother) every now and then. We have an interesting relationship. She likes to be, like, the cool one – that’s how she likes to see herself, but she can’t really see things from anyone else’s point of view because of her illness.”

“We moved out of Auckland to put some distance between us and my Mum, due to her mental health. My Dad didn’t know how to find us. He spent a wee bout of time in prison and it was difficult to find him. I met up with him for

the first time in eight years after I made contact, and we met up once again after that, but I haven't seen him since last year. It was nice seeing him those couple of times – he's an interesting character."

The particular challenge of having multiple 'parents' was cited not only by the participants in this study, but also in a number of other references (see Dolbin-MacNab & Keiley, 2009, pg. 169). Where parents are attempting to take on a parental role, or discipline their children, the effect can be distressing, confusing and frustrating. Conversely, a grandchild being parented by an isolated grandparent may not be providing the most balanced care, and many grandparents in these situations express their own concern for parenting on their own and not up to date with current parenting information and practices:

"If your parents are still around, it can be tricky and demanding dealing with, like, four parents as opposed to two. Who has the authority where there are differences of opinion? But then, others have only one grandparent parenting (and no parental involvement) and that person has complete say. That might not be the best thing to just have that one person's opinion."

Knowledge of events that have impacted on their parents' lives and contributed to the reason(s) their parent is unable to care for them can have a profound effect:

"My Mum was raped by her Dad for all those years and he got off scot free – I'm really angry about this. I rang him to confront him and tell him how what he did affected my life as well as my Mum's." (Her Mother has struggled with drug-induced psychosis and has been diagnosed and treated for schizophrenia since before her pregnancy) "It was good to get it off my chest. I'm not such an angry person now and I have more understanding and compassion for my Mum."

Some of the participants have found ways to nurture and appreciate the relationships within their families:

“I didn’t have contact with my parents for many years – I couldn’t trust them, their respective mental illness combined with their drug use was too unpredictable. These days, however, they have massively cleaned up their act. I am rebuilding a relationship with them and including my young child in this as well. They are much more stable and I have been testing them in caring for my child for short periods of time. It’s going well.”

“There are aspects of the culture of my family which are really great – I have always been asked how I feel about things – I feel I always have a voice. There is a lot of co-operation.”

“If I want to be consoled or confide in someone about something, I have my Auntie, my Mum’s older sister. I get on with her quite well and I talk with her about a lot of things.”

“I have such a close relationship to members of my family and I know that other people aren’t as close (with their grandparents).”

“It’s really nice to have family members who can look after you – this is significant to me because it works so well.”

The participants have had to negotiate challenging territory in the context of their relationships with their extended family, including their parents. At times, the changing roles are confusing for all involved and can lead to disruption in the family relationships. Some of the participants have had to deal with jealousy and being ostracized by other members of the family. They have also had to find their own way to work with parents who range from virtually non-existent to those who endeavour to rebuild a relationship with their child. There certainly seems to be a case for the grandparents as parents clearly having the authority as regards the raising of their grandchildren. The grandparents consistency, and in some situations, the extended family provide the support to assist the grandchild to weather the fluctuating relationships with others in the family system.

## SUPPORT - WHAT HELPED

The organization Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Trust was cited numerous times by the participants as not only providing support and benefit for grandparents, but also either directly or indirectly for the grandchildren themselves through various initiatives.

"GRG was the only service that helped us, apart from family."

During each holiday period, GRG funds a number of grandchildren to attend different camps around New Zealand. As well as providing a well deserved and much needed respite for the Grandparents, the grandchildren also valued their experience:

"I lived for those camps - I went there every holiday break and they were awesome! The outdoor activities were really great."

"The camps! They were wonderful - getting to be with lots of kids your own age, doing team building, meeting supportive friends there - it makes you bloom as a person."

"You didn't know a lot of them, so you don't have to be who everyone at school thinks you are."

"There were also counsellors at camp that were really supportive and seemed to understand my situation" (as a child being parented by a grandparent).

Again, in this different context, there appears the theme of difference and the camps appear to have offered the opportunity to connect with others who had a similar experience while at the same time being able to have an element of anonymity.

GRG also had funds designated for supporting grandchildren's cultural activities, which would be outside of most grandparents financial capabilities:

"GRG gave me a scholarship for music lesson fees. Opportunities like that are a big lift in our situation a lot of the time".

There were other organizations mentioned as being particularly supportive. One of those mentioned specifically was Bethany, the (previous) Salvation Army Home for Teen Mothers. One of the participants was a resident there and had this to say:

"I became pregnant at the end of my 'naughtiness' stage. The Social Workers at Bethany were very helpful, both for me and my Grandparents. I continued

attending school while I was there and they taught me mothering skills for raising my child."

Organizations such as Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Trust exist in most other Euro Western countries. They provide a point of contact, not only for grandparents, but also for grandchildren, in the examples shown. The camp experiences during school holidays offer the opportunity to be 'just another kid', rather than having that awareness of being in the gaze of others as different.

These organizations, through fundraising efforts, are also able to support grandchildren's participation in cultural and sporting interests that they might otherwise not be able to afford. However, this funding is variable and dependent on application for ongoing financial support. It requires dedicated lobbying and perseverance to remain visible in the eye of government and philanthropic funders, always in competition with the other various not for profit support services.

In Aotearoa/New Zealand, we have seen the funding dollar shrink while concurrently the need for these services grows.

Government needs to proactively consider and reorganize the ability of these organizations and agencies to better support population groups such as grandchildren parented by their grandparents as, for those concerned with managing these budgets, this will be cost effective over time.

"There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children"

Nelson Mandela

## SUPPORT – WHAT’S NEEDED

Most of the participants have a very clear position regarding the lack of parity between grandparents/kin caring for children and those who are fostering children.

“Grandparents need more support – I realize now that grandparents don’t get as much support as foster parents, or children under the care of CYFS. I see this as the most important thing: for there to be better financial support and also emotional support.”

“People should know about the lack of support for grandparents parenting grandchildren – the government should get a wake-up call!”

“WINZ (Work and Income New Zealand, the government department managing superannuation payment and also welfare payment) need to know a bit more...the profile needs to be raised regarding children parented by their grandparents. The UCB (Unsupported Child Benefit, available to grandparents parenting their grandchildren) doesn’t cover much, especially if the child/young person wants to be involved in any cultural or sporting activities.”

One participant had a very pertinent point regarding the difference between parents who have their own parents for back-up/support and how this is different for grandparents:

“I know a couple of people, the mums have to rely on the grandparents quite often to look after their kids and thinking about it, the grandparents don’t really have anyone else to look to when they’re looking for another looker-after. It’s quite a big job looking after and raising a child. Nana’s had to do it all on her own.”

Of course, there are many parents who do not have their parents available as back-up, however if this is the case, they are much more likely to have a social support system, or through involvement in preschool/school. Parents are also in a friend network of others with children of similar ages. Grandparents raising grandchildren are often isolated. The fabric of their social connectedness often falls away where they are thrust back into the parenting of a child and, sadly remains so unless they are able to find a support group in their area.

There were similar descriptions regarding the isolation that can be experienced by a grandchild in these situations and how a habit of lonely self-reliance takes shape:

“...be sympathetic and have empathy for the idea that they don’t always have the solid figures in their lives. I was just with my Grandmother alone and a lot of the time I felt I had to go elsewhere or just deal with (it) myself if I had a problem that I was faced with. It can be difficult dealing with things on your own and feeling like you can’t go to other people. It might not be the same way for everyone, but it’s particularly hard for me to reach out to other people if I need assistance with something, or if I feel like I need protection I’ll often just go and stay with myself instead.”

A participant who had witnessed other grandparents parenting grandchildren, had an interesting observation to make regarding suitability and the need for an improvement in supporting the grandparent(s) willing to take on the parenting of their grandchild(ren):

“Sometimes a grandparent is not fit to look after their grandchildren, but they’re the last option before those children are taken into CYFS care – there is no one else in the whanau to step in. They are trying their hardest, but need more support to make it work.”

Both grandchildren and grandparents need specific services to support them. There is strong evidence to illustrate the best case scenario for children requiring alternative care situations is to be placed with their grandparents. Grandparents need the financial support to raise their grandchildren well. The research consistently shows that most grandparents who are raising grandchildren are below the poverty level (Brennan & Cass, 2014; Bryson & Casper, 1998; Edwards & Ray, 2010; Fuller-Thompson & Minkler, 2000; Livingston & Parker, 2010; Whitley & Kelley, 2007). Even grandparents who have some asset(s) may be disadvantaged in that their asset may limit their eligibility for financial assistance.

Many grandparents need assistance with housing, to adequately care for their grandchildren and may also need financial supplements to provide good food.

Grandparents also need respite care, to have a break from parenting their grandchildren, as so often, they do not have the backup within their family or social networks, as one of the participants so keenly observed.

Both grandparents and grandchildren are often in need of mental health support and family therapy with professionally trained workers who are conversant with the challenges of this unique population.



The children need opportunities to be and play like children, without having to worry or being self-restrictive in deference to concern for their impact on their grandparents. They may also need assistance to deal with the impact of their life prior to living with their grandparent. As the research shows, the focus on children with behavioural difficulties being raised by their grandparents is most often as a result of what occurred in their life prior to coming into the care of their grandparent(s), rather than as a result of this.

They may need help with their schooling, as this has often suffered also, while living in their previous situation. Tutoring is one option that has been suggested by educators as a way that children who have fallen behind can be given the chance to catch up with their peers and establish good study habits.

Counselling and Family Therapy are able to be put to good use, not only for the grandchild in attending to issues such as the impact of trauma, neglect, and their changing circumstances but also for both grandchild and grandparent to assist them in adjusting to their new life together.

## THE VOICE OF THE GRANDCHILDREN – “LISTEN UP”

### Instructions for improvement:

The participants had a number of ideas that were offered for consideration as a way to improve grandchildren’s (and grandparent’s) experience:

“It is really important to raise people’s awareness, get the knowledge out there for people to take into account regarding children who are getting raised by their grandparents.”

“Just showing that it is ok, somehow, so that you can get the most out of the grandparent situation.”

There were particular sectors that were identified as requiring amelioration:

#### COUNSELLING -

“Counsellors need to understand about these situations, it’s a bit of a different story when it’s a grandparent and other family members involved and those in between.”

“Counselling can be really helpful, depending on the counsellor. At school, I was made to go to the counsellors there and they weren’t very helpful. Then, my Grandparents and I met with a family therapist outside of the school and that worked really well.”

#### TEACHERS -

“Teachers need to go the extra mile with the children that are struggling – don’t give up on them! One teacher, in particular, I talked with her every day and she just listened. That was awesome.”

“Teachers need to understand these situations. It would be really cool if some teachers were able to relate more personally to their students, particularly

those that might need an extra bit of a push or an extra bit of help because of their circumstances.”

“There needs to be better communication between grandparents/students/teachers – school plays such a huge part in our lives.”

“Teachers, especially in primary school, need to be more aware of what a child could be going through in this kind of situation.”

“Even coaches, or teacher type people involved in holiday programs – I think it would be helpful for them to know about the specific needs, attention and understanding that could be given to the grandchildren being parented by grandparents.”

#### ***CYFS-(Child, Youth and Family Service)***

“It would be good if the transitioning from parents to grandparents could be made easier for children, less stressful. It’s not always handled that well, they can be really insensitive to the kids.”

“To think of ways to minimize the stress and trauma for the children when being removed from parents – they need a lot of good care and support.”

#### ***WINZ-(Work & Income New Zealand)***

“They need to have a better understanding, like having staff who deal with and know the particular issues around grandparents raising their grandchildren.”

“Maybe there could be a one stop shop, including counselling! People who are trained specifically to work with grandparents/grandchildren and are aware of their circumstances. Like the MSD/pensioners department is an arm of WINZ and off that arm, there could be the hand which is just for grandparents raising grandchildren, and off that hand the different fingers,

like people who either are counsellors or refer to counselling with people that they know are aware of the issues.”

### ***POLITICIANS, POLICY MAKERS, GOVERNMENT -***

“The politicians need to be better informed about grandchildren in our situations. They should attend more meetings or conferences and make an effort to get things fixed and sorted.”

“They need to address the funding issue and assist our grandparents to be able to care for us without making their lives so difficult financially.”

Closer to home, the young people had some ideas for those more directly involved:

“Maybe the parents could be informed and supported about how to deal with their side of the stress. Some kind of help for them so that they could still have a relationship with their kids if it was suitable.”

“I think it would be helpful if the grandparents themselves could have more support and be better informed to be able to deal with the problems that are likely to arise, like when the children become teenagers and start to play up.”

“Better support, facilitation for when the parents start to get involved again and things turn potentially nasty.”

“To have people the grandparents and grandchildren can turn to for help and having that information readily available.”

“The grandparents are parenting in a very different time than when their children were young. Just because they parented before doesn’t mean they know how to deal with 21<sup>st</sup> century challenges, in particular the internet, social media and so on.”

## OUR OWN CLUB

The participants were unanimous in their thinking on the need to generate ideas for better connection for grandchildren being parented by their grandparents. They promoted the idea of some kind of network for young people parented by grandparents to communicate and in this way, have another sense of belonging with those who share similar circumstances. One participant thought this could be in the form of a new club, “Grandchildren Raised by Grandparents” (a playful reference to the Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Trust). Interestingly, there is a support group of this nature already established in Britain – “Kinchat”. It developed out of the support organisation “Kinship Carers” and is for young people aged 16 and over, meeting once a week in Liverpool. The organiser of both groups said, “Whilst the grandparents were trying to shield their grandchildren from the stigma of being in kinship care, the young people were keen to speak out.” Their group offers the hope and example of the possibility for young people in Aotearoa/New Zealand. They have gone on to host a young person’s conference in the future. Echoing our own conversation via this research, one of the members says – **“How can we get it right if the voices of young people who are raised in kinship care are not heard?”**

Creating an international connection will also assist the connectivity for young people parented by grandparents.

We discussed how this possibility might be organized, in particular for those of the digital generation and also how children could safely participate and there is a willingness to put some thought into how, in example, an app could be developed, or even a digital game.

## THE GROUPS

### *PARTICIPANTS REFLECT ON THEIR EXPERIENCE*

Once the individual interviews were completed, I met with the participants in a group setting to offer the opportunity to reflect on the experience of participating in the research project and also to discuss the themes that emerged from their collective interviews. The individual interviews appeared to have highlighted and stimulated their thinking and produced new areas of insight:

“A bit of reflection kinda makes you more conscious about it. Also, being asked questions makes you aware of things you have thought about before - but now, able to voice them, which is nice.”

“At times it’s served as a reminder of the need to reflect about these sorts of things, and not to just take everything for granted.”

“There have actually been a few times where I’ve thought about your research and wondered, if I’m in a particular situation, how it would be dealt with differently if I was living with my parents.”

“Sometimes, I’ve thought about how (a certain circumstance) relates to what you’re researching – thinking “Oh! Sharon would really find this interesting because my Grandfather has reacted in this way, but that’s different to how my parents would have reacted.” So, I’m just a bit more aware.

They expressed appreciation for being involved in the project as consultants to the research and affirmed their thinking that this was a significant topic and one that demands the visibilising of their situation. They thought their experience is worth bringing to the attention of others, in particular those who are in roles that have contact and influence in the lives of young people parented by their grandparents. There is the implicit hope that this action might address the isolation they experience in being identified as ‘other’:

“I value the opportunity to be able to reflect on my experience, and I think that this is important – to get this information out there from our point of view. Being older is a good idea too – it helps to have some distance from the experience, rather than being in the midst of it.”

“I feel great that I’m able to lend my voice and it’s a privilege to be a part of it, developing this documentation. It makes me think that it’s quite an important situation that I’ve been through.”

“It sort of clarifies ideas so that other people might be able to relate to our situation. Providing information for people who are in positions around kids who are being raised by their grandparents, to help them be aware of the situation that they are in. Like, when I was going to school there were some awkward moments when people asked me “where’s your Mum and Dad?” - I really didn’t know what to say. It can be quite uncomfortable for you and them when they find out and “oh! What do I say...” kind of thing.”

### **CONNECTION, VISIBILITY & BELONGING**

Just as organizations such as Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Trust, have brought their plight as Grandparents into view and are receiving more support and visibility, the experience of grandchildren also needs to be heard and understood. Education, training and articles, both academic and in various popular media needs to happen to reduce the stigma these children and young people experience.

Meeting in the group setting also offered them the occasion to connect with others who had been parented by their grandparents. I was very surprised to learn that none of the participants knew, or had met other young people in the same circumstance previously, apart from those who had siblings and/or other extended family living with them. We discussed some possible ways that grandchildren could have a network, to connect with others who share their experience so that isolation and the experience of being different/other will be diminished.

The participants have all talked about their lack of a sense of belonging and this can be in relation to not knowing others in similar circumstances to identify with. It can also mean that the fabric of their family connection is also thin. There was a range of family connection, from knowing, both in name and from personal contact, both parents, and their respective extended families, to only having the knowledge of one parent (the mother), and in some situations that person was deceased.

### **PIECES OF THE PUZZLE**

In one of the groups, a participant reflected on his frustrating experience of attempting to find out more about his young life, prior to being placed with a grandparent. Any child who has come under the care of CYFS has a file in their records system and can request to see this at a later stage (age of consent). CYFS policy is to, literally, 'black out' any information mentioning another person, with reference to the privacy act. This young man had hoped that his file would help to fill in some pieces of the puzzle of his early life as his Mother died when he was three and at that time he was placed in the care of his Grandmother:

"I've recently read through those files that I was able to get from CYFS, and half of them were blacked out anyway because they included information about someone else, so there wasn't much of anything in there. I don't know what could have been there, especially when there were pages and pages – there were 200 pages in all! So, I don't know what I don't know – there seem to be a million legalities around that. I was thinking, this is *my* story, I want to know what went on! I wasn't of an age to be able to remember what was happening and can't really ask, because who else was there who would know? Especially when it's information about an interview with somebody who's no longer around and no one else knows that information! It is just wrong that they (CYFS) have all that knowledge about me, but I am prevented from having access to it! "



This appeared to me to be an area worth pursuing. Sooner or later, most young people want to know more about their origins, especially if they have been displaced from it, whether through adoption or long separation from a parent and this was applicable to all of the interviewees. Government agencies, such as CYFS need to better facilitate a young person's efforts to reclaim these missing pieces and make sense of their early life so that they are also able to know about their origins. In some situations, this is the only avenue open to a young person to understand how they came to be parented by a grandparent.

### **ALTERNATIVE STORY OF SUCCESS**

Another area that had emerged in this particular group of young people, was their consistent, alternative story of success and positive connection with their grandparents. I enquired as to what sense they made of this, when the dominant discourse in the research on children parented by grandparents makes the claim that the children are 'troubled', difficult and at times violent towards their grandparents. The participants offered their perspective, once again citing the benefit of the support and care of their grandparent caregivers:

"I don't think that it was ever something I thought about that would hold me back. If anything, Gran has always been very supportive and she would always encourage me to do anything and work hard if I wanted to. It might include a bit of nagging – I didn't ever think of it as something that was holding me back from being successful."

"It's good to think about, and how it's not the 'normal' situation but you can still make the most of it, do the best that you can do and still have a good support line. I'm aware that there are people who don't have that kind of support. You might not have the idealized nuclear family situation, but you still have someone who will love and support you through to the end. I'm also not taking it for granted."

“I just kinda feel privileged to have that support – like, get the most out of it that I possibly can. My Grandmother’s put a lot of herself into it.”

These grandchildren obviously have a very positive attachment with their respective grandparents – one of the factors noted in the research as a foundation for less disrupted lives. Although the participants were quick to point out that they also had their share of challenge, they were still able to navigate their way through those times of trouble, with their grandparents support and, at times, other factors, such as educational opportunities.

One of the Participants again reflected on the opportunity in successfully securing a scholarship for a highly acclaimed boarding school and how this contributed further to the ability to succeed and excel:

“I’ve been lucky to have been in the right time and environment at school where the things I’ve come to love were really fostered, so a really switched on faculty that were really supportive...brilliant staff that can do the right things and have the right resources. It’s often a lot harder for people who think they would like to do something but don’t know where to go. I’ve sort of had those opportunities a lot more accessible to me.”

Grandparents who find themselves in the role of parent to their grandchildren are often accused of failing as a parent by those without much insight into this topic. They are positioned as hopeless parents, ending up parenting their grandchildren as a result of their poor parenting skills the first time around.

“There is a tendency to blame the parents for the children’s problems – they say it must be our fault that our kids went off the rails.” (Canberra Mothercraft Society, 2007 in Baldock (2007) pg. 73)

However, many of the grandparents that I met through my involvement with The Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Trust have had other children who are highly successful in their lives. This isn’t any guarantee against having a child who ends up

unable to parent for any number of reasons and the grandchildren are acutely aware of this:

“Even though she has 3 other children who have done well in life, I think my Gran didn’t want a repeat of what happened to my Mum. I think she took every precaution to ensure a similar thing didn’t happen. The main thing was moving further away from Auckland (and my Mother) and making sure I was surrounded by people that would provide a positive influence.”

### **FIRST & SECOND TIER PARENTS**

The participants offered their insight into the specific qualities and values their grandparents offered them as distinct from being parented by what one young man describes as ‘first tier parents’. They speculate that their grandparents, mindful of their age and potentially limited time of availability, have attempted to infuse their grandchildren with as much of their wisdom and life experience as possible, which has also contributed to an early maturation for the grandchildren:

“I think it was about nurturing a culture of support to help us have a different experience. I might have a different mindset to a lot of people – the whole limited family support group that some of us may have and the notion that our grandparents raising us know they’re not going to be around to support us for as long as a ‘first tier parent’ would be. So, they’re trying to cram as much nurturing and life lessons into us as they can. I mean, from a younger age, some of us have thought about things that a lot of ‘first tier parents’ wouldn’t even bother talking about or mentioning around their kids.”

This participant’s reference to ‘first tier’ parents offers a graphic imagery. It is almost as though the ‘first tier’ does not have as much substance or breadth to support a young person, as compared to a ‘second tier’, which, in some cases, is not only supporting the grandchild, but also the ‘first tier’ of the birth parent(s).

“It was intensive, but a degree above, probably and exposure to a lot more heavy and core life ideas and values.”

### **LIFE CYCLE DISRUPTION**

The following quotes highlight the challenge for the grandparents parenting grandchildren, having been thrust into a fluid life cycle which disrupts the expected course of events. Becoming a parent the second time around extends this life cycle stage and disrupts the timing when grandparents are expecting to have an empty nest. With reference to Landry-Meyer (1999), “the social roles and developmental tasks have become disconnected from chronological age”. This in turn produces change in one’s established support network, is not adequately supported in terms of services and interventions and has an obvious roll on effect for the grandchildren in terms of their own life cycle being disordered:

“I think for me – as a youngster I was always brought along to adult things a lot of the time. Because my Gran doesn’t have friends who have kids my age, so I wasn’t always around, like at school, to have friends my sort of age. A lot of the time I was around these sort of higher level types of conversations, around adults and I learned to conduct myself in a certain way.”

“Yeah, living with someone who is that next generation up from what the norm age occurrence would be does expose you to more mature situations. The thing that’s interesting is that they often have different values to parents of this day and age. They’re a few decades older and they were brought up in a different time and would have taken things in differently.”

### **DEALING WITH THE CHALLENGES**

There was discussion about how each person has managed to deal with the challenges that have come their way and the factors that may have contributed to some of their choices and success:

“There’s only two real challenges I’ve faced, real challenges – when my Dad first moved away and when my Mum had a stroke. I could deal with the neglect – as a kid I just thought, “I’m in charge of my life” – no one tells me what to do – my Mum’s not there for me and my Dad’s not there for me – I don’t care. It’s my job, I will look after myself. I will decide who I want to stay with, I will decide where I want to be – I want to stay with my Grandparents, so therefore, I will stay with my Grandparents.”

“Probably coming from a family that has financial stability behind it really helped, in a way. Not with my own personal getting on with things, but it meant that I always had opportunities to do well and step up and go to a good school and excel. So, I was given the tools to succeed, if that makes any sense.”

“You see, there were a couple of years where I could have gone completely in one direction, and I’m not sure why I didn’t go the other way. I’m not sure why I went the ‘good/right’ way. I think it’s too soon to figure that out yet. I feel like it needs to be in hindsight, when I’m like, thirty, I’ll look back and I’ll go “*That’s why*”.”

### **TAKING A STAND FOR SELF**

There were two participants who negotiated their own ‘uplift’ with their grandparents as young adolescents and at the time of the interview, they were both just finishing high school. They happened to be in the same group and had this to say in response to my queries around the choice they each made and the action they took:

“The thing is, I actually wanted to live my life. I wasn’t going to sit down and say, “Hey, this sucks – I just want to go crawl into a hole and die”. I told myself, “Look, there’s nothing here for you, just move somewhere else, you’ve got to”.”

“We both had to grow up quite quickly – early maturity perhaps? In terms of, like, I make my own decisions – ‘cause I was like that too.”

### **RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AGES OF PLACEMENT & ADJUSTMENT**

A few of the participants had a theory regarding how old a child is when taken into the care of their grandparents making a difference in terms of the adjustment and acceptance of their situation and this is an idea that is posited in some studies as one worthy of further research. This came from both groups:

“I went straight to them from the hospital, not in some sort of traumatic situation – I really don’t know any better/different.” (Although, this young person had been carried in utero by a mother who was taking drugs and also medication for schizophrenia throughout her pregnancy and as a newborn, had to go through a managed withdrawal from those substances.)

“I wonder if the age of coming into care might make a difference in terms of the reasons for this intervention – like, the older you are, the more exposed you are to the circumstances/lifestyle; such as drugs, neglect, abuse, violence, suicide, murder. It seems to me that the younger you are, the better off because you haven’t been exposed to these situations for so long.”

### **CLOSENESS WITH GRANDPARENTS**

Another idea they discussed together was regarding the contrasting level of closeness they had with their parents and grandparents and what has contributed to that. Certainly, the reasons for being in the care of their grandparents due to issues such as their parents being too young/irresponsible; drug use; and extreme mental health issues have had a huge impact on the lives of grandchildren parented by grandparents. Even though this group of young adults were able to have a more reflective insight, as one of them said elsewhere, another ten or so years may allow the distance and perspective to look into these more disturbing issues:

“Yeah, I have no problem with my Grandmother, but I know that my Mum and Aunties have – the way that they describe her as a Mother when they were young is just totally different to the person that she is now. And I don’t think it’s her way of sort of making up for herself, but, it just goes to show how people can change, I guess.”

“Maybe it’s just a closeness of (alternate) generations? I don’t know – I found that quite interesting to think about.”

“You have a strange relationship with your parents, because they put you on the planet, so there’s more, kind of, karma or resentment and things like that. But with your grandparents, there’s sort of like a comfortable removal.”

“Your parents reflect traits of you that you might not like as well.”

“I don’t get along with my parents full stop. My Mum was never loving or nice to me – ever, for as long as I can remember. I’ve just always gotten along with my Grandparents. Even when I was still living with my Mum, I still considered myself raised by my Grandparents.”

### **HOW TO BE & HOW NOT TO BE A PARENT**

Towards the end of the group sessions, in both of the groups, participants offered their ideas out of their experience of being parented by their grandparents that they thought would inform their lives going forward. Not surprisingly, many of their ideas were in relation to their experience of their parents and in anticipation of being parents themselves:

“How NOT to be a parent, definitely!”

“Have emotional distance from your children – if I was ever a single mother, I would not put the emotional pressure that my Mum put on me. Taking responsibility for your actions, like my Dad taught me. Keeping your promises!

Just how not to treat your children - just a little bit of a platform in terms of how things could possibly not be done.”

“I think it’s pretty invaluable to know more about your grandparents as well. I’ll definitely take that with me and hopefully my kids will have the same with my parents. It is what it is, but that’s pretty awesome and they’ve taught me lots about life, so I can’t say that I won’t take that with me, because I’m sure that that will just come naturally. That’s the main thing – just a learning curve.”

“When I’m a parent, if I am, I’ll make sure computer use is monitored. My Mum never used to let me go on, ever, to talk to my friends – I didn’t have friends when I was a kid. She would just say “*play* on the computer, that’s your friend”. She didn’t want me to go outside, and that combination has had a massive detrimental effect on my life. I will just make sure that my children can have their friends over, have sleepovers, play outside with friends, NOT a computer.”

“Just acknowledge the fact that I don’t have parents and move on with life. I’m entering a management training scheme at work and later I want to go into a trade. I’m also making new friends who accept me for who I am and are supportive.”

## **PARENTING WISDOM FROM THE GRANDCHILDREN**

- Have emotional distance from your children
- Take responsibility for your actions
- Keep your promises!
- Know your grandparents
- Monitor computer use
- Encourage children to play outside
- Welcome your child’s friends into the home, including sleepovers



### ***BEING IN THE GAZE OF OTHERS – THE STIGMA OF DIFFERENCE***

They offered the following reflections, including their awareness of the ‘gaze’ of others and how this contributes to their ongoing experience of being positioned as different. There is a need to address the attitudes, views and assumptions of those looking in on their lives as grandchildren parented by grandparents and the participants hold the hope that this will make a significant difference for those children who are currently or yet to be parented by their grandparents:

“I think there exists this sort of insidious attitude, when people are being cynical or critical – it’s like “well, the reason you’re parenting your grandchild is because you stuffed up parenting your child – why should you get any funding?” I disagree with such a shallow attitude! I don’t think we are our grandparents’ second chance to get it right!”

“I’ve been thinking about the naïve and shallow view on life that a lot of people have surrounding our sorts of situations – it’s almost along the lines of victim blaming. I think this is a common flaw in our society at the moment, about a whole raft of things.”

“I think there is a stigma about living with your grandparents. When you tell other people about it, they kind of have an assumption that if you live with your grandparents, your life revolves around bringing in their meals on wheels, or, having to listen to them watch “Coronation Street”, or sitting around knitting – but it’s not like that at all!”

“People assume that if you live with your grandparents, you’re a bit messed up. The first thing they ask is “where are your parents?” I expect that now.”

## **HOUSING – COMPETING NEEDS**

One of the particular challenges highlighted by the participants in the group conversations centres around the topic of habitat. There is a tension between the competing needs of the grandchildren and grandparents in a dwelling. Some grandparents may own a home, mortgage free, but there are many more who have to rent, and are therefore also subject to the competitiveness of this market:

“One thing which is topical, and which is relevant to me is housing. Especially when living with grandparents and renting – moving is one of the most draining things for anyone. For them to have to worry about going somewhere that still suits the needs of the child/young person and their own needs and that’s in an area and price range they can afford – just trying to find somewhere in time that suits the various criteria is huge.”

“Housing is ridiculously relevant to what’s happening with us at the moment. I’m going to be going to university and Nan wants to move closer to Auckland. When she finds a place, I can stay with her again. It’s really difficult for her to find a place that is appropriate and close and affordable.”

“The grandparents can’t really cope with the stairs in apartment living in the city, and they need somewhere to park that is accessible!”

## **FUNDING & DEALING WITH GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS**

It would seem that the grandchildren can’t help but be aware of the impact of dealing with government departments, such as WINZ (Work and Income, New Zealand) who manage the funding for ‘unsupported children’ (UCB – unsupported child benefit) and also the pensions of the grandparents. Once again, the participants bring attention to the direct conflict of those charged with managing a financial budget and keeping spending to a minimum (WINZ workers) and the grandparents who are charged with the care of their grandchildren on an already tight budget:

“Dealing with WINZ is one of the most stressful things for my Gran. The meetings are always a mixed bag about how they are conducted. She is dealing with a different person every time and has to try to get through to them. They just don’t have enough awareness of these sorts of situations.”

“Like, WINZ will say to my Nan, “you need to get more income if you want to stay living here – you could get a boarder in”. I pay heaps of board! None of my friends pay anything. When she tells them that I pay board, they say, “Oh, he doesn’t count.” It’s very inconsistent, just really weird.”

“Another thing is how the government might give grandparents funding until the grandchild gets to the end of high school, but they don’t take university into account, which is when things get more expensive as well.”

### ***PARENTIFICATION & BECOMING A KID AGAIN***

In both of the group conversations, the participants shared a consideration in common, regarding the gap filled by their grandparents when their parents have been unavailable to take up their responsibilities and therefore inflicting on them the experience of parentification. Fortunately, living with their grandparents provided the emotional environment in which they could be the child again:

“My experience with my Grandparents has been a lot better than with my Parents – not just because they’re reliable – because they’re more stable people in themselves and I don’t think I would have had the same opportunities or life that I’ve had if I hadn’t moved in with them. I don’t regret living with them at all.”

“Grandparents can offer you so much better advice with your life. I don’t think my parents are particularly wise people, which I struggle with because I know that I am. Some of the things that my Mum does, my Dad might be a bit better, but I feel like my Mum just doesn’t get life. I don’t know how to explain it, but sometimes when she does things, I look down at her, almost as

if I'm *her* Mum and it kind of annoys me. So, it's nice having people, like my Grandparents, who look after you, having that parental figure who knows more about life than I do. I don't mind if they look at me and think "you're sort of naive", because that's how it should be – they're supposed to be more mature than me! It's not nice if you have to do that with your parents. It's like – what are you doing with your life? You can feel a bit mean for thinking that way and then sad that your parents aren't running their lives."

The group responses show the benefit of having had the time to reflect on this topic and also to have the stimulation of the interactive discussion.

Again, the point is made to find proactive ways to address the stigma and shame that can come as a result of being positioned as different/other and the impact on these young adults who have been parented by their grandparents of having to think about responding to people's queries and responses about their living situation.

Participating in this project, contrary to previously held distorted beliefs of those who are in positions to prohibit such participation when children are under age, has provided the opportunity to reflect, both individually and with peers on the issues, concerns and value of being parented by grandparents. It has also boosted their confidence in thinking that their experience and contribution to this topic is one of importance.

The groups also provided the opportunity to meet with others who have a shared experience of being grandchildren raised by grandparents, a first for all of the participants.

The point was highlighted regarding the significance for young people to be able to find answers to their questions about their heritage and origins, in particular, government agencies such as CYFS need to assist them to locate this information, rather than act prohibitively.

Both grandparents and grandchildren in these skipped generation families are in a respective fluid life cycle where social roles and developmental tasks do not reflect their chronological age. Support services are required to respond to the particular needs of grandchildren and grandparents. The grandchildren, as spoken of so clearly in the final quotes, have often been parentified in their lives with their birth parent(s). Some would go so far as to deem this reversal of roles between parent and child a form of child abuse. Fortunately, these grandchildren have had grandparents who have stepped in and taken up the parental role, allowing the participants to have the experience of a stable parental figure who is more knowledgeable than they are.

# Cultural Considerations

---

It is important to understand the influence of culture for Māori, the indigenous people of Aotearoa/New Zealand in the context of grandchildren in the parental care of their grandparent(s).

“That’s what they like to say – and that’s what I like to say – being parented by my Grandparents was a whāngai arrangement. Back in the day, a child in a whāngai situation was seen as something, you know, special – and that’s true, but it shouldn’t be glorified like that today, being parented by a grandparent these days is so diverse and so large....”

Prior to the arrival of Europeans in Aotearoa/New Zealand, the practice of whāngai in Māori society was a custom where a child is given to, usually, kin members, (other than the child’s birth parents) to be raised. This may or may not have been a permanent arrangement.

As described in Te Ara Encyclopedia of New Zealand (December 2014), there could be a number of reasons a child might be taken as whāngai, such as:

- Finding homes for an orphaned child (pani)
- Taking a child from a large family that was struggling to support all the children
- Taking in a child who had young parents
- Taking in an illegitimate child
- Finding a child for people who cannot have children
- Finding a child for older people whose children have grown up
- Strengthening whanau, hapu or iwi ties by strategically placing children within selected whanau

- Particularly in the case of kaumatua (elders), taking in a mokopuna (grandchild) to pass down tribal traditions and knowledge
- Taking children in as whāngai so that they could inherit land

Whāngai has often been compared to the European practices of fostering and adoption. However, there are significant differences. Previously, whāngai children have not necessarily been the result of birth parents who are unable to care for them. The decision making took place in an open way within the wider community, rather than being limited to a parent/parents. The child had full knowledge of both their birth and whāngai parents.

Prior to the arrival of Europeans, whāngai was a well-functioning aspect of Māori culture. However, with the impact of colonization, including the imposition of western law, there began to be an undermining of the previous practice of whāngai. From the introduction of the Native Land Claims and Adjustment and Amendment Act 1901, whāngai placements were required to be registered in the Native Land Court so that the child could “succeed to lands of their whāngai parents” (McRae & Nikora, 2006). This was followed by the Native Land Act 1909, which affected the whāngai system further by disallowing whāngai to be practiced in the usual way. From this point, the law required Māori to *legally* adopt via the Native Land Court. Even though the practice of whāngai continued, it was with the risk that these whāngai children may not legally be able to succeed to land. (Pitama 1997)

The two Māori participants in this study both subsequently ended up assisting their Grandmothers to raise younger whanau. The young women made the point that, historically, whāngai was a gift – the expectation that the child would be given to grandparents to learn and carry on the traditions and whakapapa, a role of responsibility and honour. However, now it’s a predominantly different story – one of protection and care for grandchildren who are not in healthy situations; to prevent CYFS from taking away the children and for the whanau to have the authority to determine outcomes in their children’s lives.

When I was working with the Grandparents Raising Grandchildren organization, I listened to numerous descriptions of the same scenario: police and/or CYFS workers would arrive on a grandparents' doorstep at any time of the day or night, having uplifted a child or children from an unsafe situation and asking different versions of the same question – “will you take these children into your care? If not, we will have to (split them up, if more than one) place them in foster care”. Even though they are being put on the spot, without time to fully consider the implications, there are very few grandparents of any ethnicity who could bring themselves to turn their mokopuna (grandchildren) away. Although, as one of the participants recounted the scenario in which her maternal grandmother who was the first to be approached, said no - refusal does happen, but this is not common. (Her paternal grandparents said yes and took her home from the hospital only weeks old.)

This is a very different situation today when compared with the historical practice of whāngai, where a decision making process would occur within the Hapu (kinship group) or Iwi (tribe).

Further, although a generic comparison could be made across all cultures, of the protective response from grandparents being called upon to care for and parent their grandchildren, there is a compelling additional consideration for indigenous grandparents:

“Almost universally, Indigenous grandparents believed that continuity of cultural and kinship knowledge was of paramount importance for them and their grandchildren. Many highlighted the importance of Indigenous kinship systems and relished the opportunity to spend time with grandchildren to instil traditional Indigenous values.” (Brennan & Cass, 2014, pg. 115)

I have also heard from many grandparents, while working with Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Trust, of grandchildren arriving with only the clothes they are wearing and nothing more – leaving the grandparent(s) to start providing from scratch, with little or no information regarding funding and both grandchild and grandparent in



shock. I have found in my search for information that this scenario is not unique to Aotearoa/New Zealand, as many research articles have reported.

I found similarities in the literature for Māori, American Indian/Alaskan Native and Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in relation to the influence in the context of grandparents raising grandchildren and the additional influence of culture.

The following quotes, from two adults who were raised as whāngai, illustrate by their examples how this practice is distinctly different to adoption:

“There will always be whāngai because we don’t feel comfortable with adoption. To adopt means you take away the child’s identity and whakapapa.”

“Whāngai has lots of faces. What is important is the nurturing of the child. It is a huge responsibility and like our old people we try to model them. It’s the ability to connect them back to their Māori communities so that they can enjoy the richness of their people.”

(McRae & Nikora, 2006, Pg. 12)

The cultural significance of this practice is echoed in at least the Native American/Alaska Native population of North America and also in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia. They also share the historical impact of western colonization disrupting the links with their children, through forced relocation, and the removal of children who were then placed in foster homes or in institutions.

Although there are over 500 recognized tribes in the U.S., they share a general consensus which is “to be Indian is to believe that everything is alive and we are all related” (Fuller-Thompson & Minkler, 2005). The tribal elders there are also the keepers of cultural legacy and provided the training for their grandchildren.

Traditionally, the elders and grandparents are responsible not only for “raising and

educating children” (this is also how) “cultural knowledge, spiritual awareness and kinship ties are continued for generations” (Sharpe, 2012). These grandparents who are providing day to day care for their grandchildren in today’s world are also endeavouring to keep them out of the foster care system and to maintain cultural traditions.

These distinctions are significantly important in understanding not only the responsibility experienced by grandparents in Māori and other indigenous cultures to teach and connect their grandchildren to their culture, but it is imperative to keep these children within their family/whanau systems in order to do so, rather than the children being placed in foster care or adoption. This is how the grandchildren are connected to their culture and have a sense of belonging which reaches beyond Euro western nuclear family constructs.

## CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION

---

This research project set out to discover what some young people in Aotearoa/New Zealand have to say regarding their lived experience of being parented by their grandparents. At the core of this study, was the purpose to assist their published voice, in their own words and to explore what it is *they* want *us* to know. The hope was to be able to contribute to the fledgling body of knowledge of the impact and experience of young people who have been raised in a skipped generation family and that this might inform those involved in the lives of grandchildren parented by grandparents in ways that will benefit those children and young people to follow.

As noted in the rationale for this project, previous research on grandchildren brought up by grandparents has focused on the impact on and experience of the grandparents providing the care and on this topic, there exists volumes of research documents. What research there is into the experience of grandchildren raised by grandparents tends to focus on statistical information provided by others with some connection to the children's lives, for example as caregivers, teachers, counsellors, social workers or those simply reporting on this rapidly rising phenomenon.

The prevailing story in these studies is primarily focussed on the problem saturated lives of grandchildren parented by grandparents. Very few represent accounts of difference, or alternative stories to this dominant discourse.

Through the interviews and conversations, I was surprised to notice such a consistent story of difference occurring with this group of young people. The accounts of their lives challenge a stereotype in that these are young people who are:

- Successful despite the adversity of their circumstances as children parented by grandparents
- Appreciative and aware of their grandparents contributions to their lives

- Acknowledging and able to articulate the challenges they have faced and the impact of these in their lives
- Socially and politically aware of the issues facing grandchildren and grandparents in skipped generation families
- Grateful, devoted and loving towards their Grandparents

There were asked for their ideas on what has been supportive, in their experience and also to offer their thinking on how, specifically, those who are involved in their lives, such as teachers, counsellors, social workers, could improve their response to grandchildren parented by their grandparents.

The participants in this study are all seventeen years or older and, therefore, able to give their own consent to be involved in the research. Being older has also provided some distance and separation from their experience as children in the care of their grandparents. This allows for a more reflective positioning rather than being in the midst of the experience of childhood, although still near enough in their lives to be easily re-membered. Most of those participating in this study reflected on having had times of disruption, challenge and difficulty, including substance abuse, teen pregnancy, and leaving school at a young age. However, having had the benefit of time and their Grandparent(s) love, support and encouragement, they have emerged from these troubled times and are now showing signs of success through their academic achievement, appreciation of their Grandparent(s) commitment to them and the understanding of themselves and their experience in the context of a wider cultural, societal and political context.

One of the widely held concerns and beliefs that has been prohibitive in pursuing research from the grandchild's perspective directly, is that researchers should not disturb these young people by probing into their already disrupted lives. From the Participants' accounts, the opportunity to speak for themselves has not been re-traumatizing for them but rather has been a liberating opportunity to reflect and have authorship in storying their lives in their own words and from their own point of

view. Most have also expressed an appreciation of their lived experience stories as material worthy of consideration and inclusion in a publication.

No one had asked these young people about their lived experience as grandchildren parented by grandparents previously. The researcher enquired with open questions and with a respectful interest to hear what they had to say. It was important not to take a power over position, and to leave room for the participants to speak about what was important to them. Meeting in a group setting after the individual interviews were completed, provided the opportunity to discuss the emergent themes, which were further developed by the participants in these shared conversations.

Rather than being positioned as research subjects, the participants collaborated to make a contribution to the body of knowledge of the lived experience of grandchildren parented by grandparents.

As a result of the Māori participants raising the subject of whāngai, a respectful contribution has been made to highlight the significance of this cultural practice in the twenty first century and the links that exist with other indigenous cultures.

As well as this, the further contribution of this research is to identify the specific ways that society in general and specifically teachers, counsellors, support services, social workers, government departments and policy makers can make a positive difference in the lives of grandchildren parented by grandparents.

In particular, the social intelligence needs to improve in the knowledge and awareness of the issues of the stigma, shame and isolation of grandchildren parented by their grandparents. Increased resource through therapeutic and financial support for these families and those organizations which support them requires action from government.

## Limitations

One of the possible limitations of this study is the number of participants who are conversant with the efforts of the Grandparents Raising Grandchildren organization through their grandparent's involvement. This could contribute to a skewed representation of the political, financial and grandparent-sensitive awareness of the interviewees through their knowledge of the networking and lobbying done on behalf of GRG's members.

## Further Research

This research project was originally envisaged as a two-step process – initially to conduct the research as has been done, and then to interview a greater number of participants based on the subject matter emerging from the original interviews. This would be a massive project in itself, and could be extended to a more randomized sample of grandchildren parented by their grandparents, inviting participation from a wider scope of population in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Whether conducted in this manner, or as a new study, there would be merit in investigating what does contribute to a young person parented by a grandparent being able to be as successful as the participants in this study have demonstrated. Conversely, it would also be of interest to gather information on what are identified as the factors which determine less successful outcomes in the context of the dominant discourse which presumes troubled grandchildren.

A longitudinal study could provide a wealth of information on this identified group of young people and make a valuable contribution to understanding what makes a difference in the lives of children being parented by their grandparents.

A study specifically focussed on Māori grandchildren being parented by grandparents and including the practice of whāngai in the context of the 21<sup>st</sup> century would highlight and assist this group of the population who are disproportionately represented and would hopefully better assist these families to care for their mokopuna. It would be preferable for this research to be conducted by Māori researchers.

## Appendix A: Information Letter – Interview

1 February 2014

Dear (Prospective Participant)

My name is Sharon Lee. I am studying to gain a Master of Education degree from Waikato University. To achieve this, I am required to do a research project. I am doing this research with Associate Professor Wendy Drewery as my supervisor. She has a long career supervising people like myself who are engaged in post-graduate study. She also has a special interest in the area of human development. Her contact details are on this letterhead.

Via this letter, I am inviting you to participate in my study of the experience of young people who have been parented by their grandparent(s). I am asking you to allow me to consult you about what issues are important for you, and what you think should be communicated to others who might try to help young people who are put into the care of their grandparents. I would like to *represent* your voice and ideas about this topic, rather than speaking *for* you.

I am approaching you, along with some others with similar experience, to be involved as someone who has this 'insider knowledge' of being parented by grandparent(s). I happen to have also had this experience as a young person.

In designing the research, I am particularly interested to know what you think is important for others such as teachers, counsellors, social workers, policy makers and even other grandchildren and their grandparents to know about this area. There is very little knowledge in any of the places I have looked that has come directly from young people who have been in this situation. The information to date has primarily come from adults who have been involved in one way or another, such as the grandparents themselves, teachers, counsellors, social workers. There is a huge amount of writing which represents the experience of grandparents parenting grandchildren, and very little on the experience of the children/young people. There is even less, and possibly none, which involves young people at the beginning of a research project. I am hoping you will help me with more of an inside out exercise, versus those that are looking from the outside in.

In the first instance, if you agree to participate, I will meet with you in person for not more than an hour, to ask you about the kinds of questions people should be asking that you think will bring out what is important to know about this experience of being parented by grandparents.



Your decision to participate is entirely voluntary, and you are free to decline, or to withdraw from being involved in the study, at any time up until you have verified the transcript of your interview. The interview will be audio-taped if you agree.

Otherwise I will take hand-written notes.

After this interview, I will summarise the information and check back with you to see if I have represented you accurately. We will make any necessary corrections.

I am planning to involve up to 9 other young adults in this process and after all the individual interviews and checking back to get the information right, I will write a combined general summary of the information that has been generated from the interviews. Then, I hope to get most of you together to have a conversation about the project, to discuss the issues together, see if there is anything else that might need to be included, and also to offer the opportunity to reflect on how it has been to be involved in the project. No one will be identified in any of the material I write. Any identifying details will be changed.

In order for you to participate, you must be at least 17+ years.

I would really appreciate your participation as a consultant to this research project. If you agree to take part, would you please text or call me to let me know. I will ask you to sign the enclosed consent form when we meet. If you have any questions, concerns and/or want to know more before you make your decision, ring or text me on 027 286 6794 and I will ring you back.

If you have any difficulty with this process, you are most welcome to contact me in the first instance, or, secondly, my supervisor, Wendy Drewery on the phone number or address given on the letterhead.

If you decide not to participate, that's fine. I will follow up only once.

Sincerely

Sharon Lee

**Appendix B: Informed Consent – Individual Interview**  
**Research Project**  
**Assisting a published voice of those with insider knowledge of being**  
**parented by their grandparents – What do they want us to know?**

Researcher: Sharon Lee

Supervisor: Wendy Drewery

I have read and understood the information provided about this research project  
(letter dated 1 February 2014)

I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.

I understand that the interview will be audio taped and transcribed by the researcher.

I understand that the data gathered for this research will be used for presentations  
and publications, and that under no circumstance will names, identities or any  
personal details be shared with anyone else.

I understand that I may withdraw completely from the study, or have some parts of  
the material about me deleted from being used in the study up until I see the first  
draft, without being disadvantaged in any way.

If I withdraw, I understand that all relevant tapes and transcripts, or parts thereof,  
will be destroyed.

I understand that if I have any concerns about how this is taking place I can contact  
the supervisor, Wendy Drewery.

I agree to take part in this research.

Participant name: .....

Participant signature: .....

Date: .....

Participant contact details: .....

.....

Sharon's contact details:

**Appendix C: Informed Consent – Focus Group  
Research Project  
Assisting a published voice of those with insider knowledge of being  
parented by their grandparents – What do they want us to know?**

Researcher: Sharon Lee

Supervisor: Wendy Drewery

I have read and understood the information provided about this research project  
{letter dated 1 February 2014}

I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have them answered.

I understand that the group discussion will be recorded and that my preference will  
be honoured by the researcher. My preference is for the group discussion to be:  
(Please circle your choice)

Audio-taped      Video      either

I understand that the purpose for recording the group discussion is for the researcher  
to transcribe the conversation.

I understand that the data for this research will be used for presentations and  
publications, and that under no circumstance will names, identities or any personal  
details be shared with anyone else. This also means that the video/audio tape will  
not be shown to anyone other than the researcher and in particular, not played as  
part of any presentation.

I understand that I can withdraw completely from the study, or have some parts of  
the material about me deleted from being used in the study at any time prior to  
seeing the first draft, without being disadvantaged in any way.

If I withdraw, I understand that my voice in the relevant tapes and transcripts will be  
deleted.

I agree to take part in this focus group.

Participant name.....

Participant signature.....

Date:.....

## **Appendix D: Participant Interview Questions**

Opening statements:

Take a few moments to reflect on your experience of being parented by your grandparent(s).

Initial questions to locate the participant in the topic:

- 1) How did you come to be parented by your grandparent(s)?
- 2) How old were you?
- 3) What is significant about this experience for you?
- 4) What do you think is important to know about your experience of being parented by your grandparent(s)?

Questions specific to the topic:

- 1) What do you think would be important for others to know about children/young people being parented by their grandparents?
- 2) What are some of the ways you are aware of that affect children/young people's lives by this experience?
- 3) Who, in particular, would you want to be better informed about children in this situation?
- 4) What, in your experience, have you found to be supportive (including any services) in responding to any challenges which have occurred?
- 5) What suggestions do you have that might influence and improve responding to the needs of children/young people being parented by their grandparent(s). (such as counsellors, family therapists, teachers, social workers, policy makers and grandparents)
- 6) Is there anything else that you would like to share, or questions that haven't been asked that you think would be beneficial to include?

Questions for the focus group:

- 1) Upon reflection, what has been the effect of participating in this research for each of you?
- 2) You have all had a chance to read the summary of the research - What responses do you have to the collected information that has been gathered in collaboration with the other members of this research project?
- 3) Is there anything else you would like to say that I haven't asked?

## **GLOSSARY**

- Aotearoa – Māori (Land of the Long White Cloud) name for New Zealand
- Auckland – city in North Island, Aotearoa/New Zealand with largest population
- Centring – the action of placing something/someone in the middle
- CYFS – Child, Youth and Family Service
- FGC – Family Group Conference
- GRG – Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Trust – New Zealand based
- Hapu – Sub tribal kinship group
- Iwi – Main tribal group
- Kaumatua – Elder
- Koro - Grandfather
- Mokopuna – Grandchild
- NGO – Non-government organization
- Pani – orphaned child
- Re-membered – re-connecting with internal representations of supportive and significant members of family and networks
- Skipped Generation/Transgenerational Family – Grandparent Raising Grandchildren
- Tangata Whenua – People of the land
- Tikanga – Māori customs and protocols
- UCB – Unsupported Child Benefit
- Whakapapa – Ancestry
- Whanau – Immediate and extended family (may not be blood tie)
- Whāngai – Māori customary practice of raising children (may not be permanent)
- WINZ – Work and Income, New Zealand

## WHAKATAUKĪ

I was first made aware of the Māori Whakataukī (proverb) at the bottom of the Acknowledgements page (v) by Paraire Huata, (a dear friend, colleague and mentor), many years ago when I used to consult with him for cultural supervision.

I have also encountered this Whakataukī in numerous other texts and on occasions where it has been spoken on Marae.

For me, it encapsulates the effort and process of this thesis.

In her article on the Seng website titled “Whakataukī Proverbs...Learning Social Expectations by Looking into the Past”, Rose Blackett includes a further explanation of this particular Whakataukī:

“Said humbly when acknowledged. This encompasses the concept of collective giftedness, which is accepted within Māori culture. It may be the intra-personal relationships within a group that makes them shine. Sometimes no “one” individual possesses a gift. This is in contrast to the internationally accepted mainstream concept of an individual being “gifted”.”

## REFERENCES

- American Indian/Alaskan Native grandparents raising grandchildren: findings from The census 2000 supplementary survey. *The Free Library*. (2014) Retrieved Feb13 2016 from <http://www.thefreelibrary.com/American+Indian%2fAlaskan+Native+grandparents+raising+grandchildren%3a...-a0132226488>
- Backhouse, J. (2009). *Grandparents raising their grandchildren: impact of the transition from a traditional grandparent role to a grandparent-as-parent role*. PhD thesis. Southern Cross University, Lismore, NSW.
- Baldock, E. (2007). Grandparents raising grandchildren because of alcohol and other drug issues. *Family Matters*, 76, 70-75.
- Brennan, D., & Cass, B. (2014). Grandparents as primary carers of their grandchildren. *Families, policy and the law*, 12, 109-118.
- Bryson, K.R. & Casper, L.M. (1998). *Co-resident Grandparents and Their Grandchildren: Grandparent Maintained Families*. Population Division, U.S. Bureau of the Census, Washington D.C., U.S.A.
- Byers, L. (2010). Native American Grandmothers: Cultural Tradition and Contemporary Necessity. *Journal of Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Social Work*, 19(4), 305-316.
- Campbell, L., Carthron, D., Miles, M. & Brown, L., "Examining the Effectiveness of a Case Management Program for Custodial Grandparent Families", *Nursing Research and Practice*, vol. 2012, Article ID 124230, 6 pages, 2012. doi:10. 1155/2012/124230.
- Care of Children Act 2004, No 90, Part 1. New Zealand Ministry of Justice. Reprinted as at 31 March 2014, pg. 9-18.
- Carpenter, S.C. & Clyman, R.B. (2004). The long-term emotional and physical Wellbeing of women who have lived in kinship care. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 26, 673-686.
- Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act 1989.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2001). *Research methods in education* (6<sup>th</sup> ed.). London: Routledge.
- COTA National Seniors, (2003). Grandparents raising grandchildren. A report of the project commissioned by the Hon. Larry Anthony Minister for Children & Youth Affairs and carried out by COTA National Seniors.

- DiScuillo, E., & Dunifon, R. (2012). Biological Parents and Kinship Care: It's Complicated!!. Available online at [http://www.human.cornell.edu/pam/outreach/parenting/research/upload/R\\_B\\_Biological-Parents-and-Kinship-Care.pdf](http://www.human.cornell.edu/pam/outreach/parenting/research/upload/R_B_Biological-Parents-and-Kinship-Care.pdf)
- Dolbin-MacNab, M.L., & Keiley, M.K. (2009). Navigating Interdependence: How Adolescents Raised Solely by Grandparents Experience Their Family Relationships. *Family Relations*, 58(2), 162-175.
- Downie, J.M., Hay, D.A., Horner, B.J., Wichman, H. & Hislop, A.L. (2009). Children Living With Their Grandparents: Resilience and Wellbeing, *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 19,8-22.doi:10.1111/j.1468-2397.2009.00654.x
- Dyhrberg, M. (2004). *Grandparents and Grandchildren, Rights and Responsibility: A New Zealand Perspective*. Paper presented at the International Bar Association Conference. Auckland, New Zealand.
- Edwards, O.W. (2001). *Grandparents raising grandchildren. Handbook of diversity parent education. The changing faces of parenting and parent education*. California: Academic Press.
- Edwards, O.W. & Daire, A.P. (2006). School-age Children Raised by Their Grandparents: Problems and Solutions. *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, 33(2), 113-120.
- Edwards, O.W., & Mumford, V.E. (2005). Children Raised by Grandparents: Implications for Social Policy. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 25(8), 18-30.
- Edwards, O.W., & Ray, S.L. (2010). Value of Family and Group Counselling Models Where Grandparents Function as Parents to their Grandchildren. *International Journal Advanced Counselling*, 32, 178-190.
- Edwards, O.W. & Taub, G.E. (2009). A Conceptual Pathways Model to Promote Positive Youth Development in Children Raised by Their Grandparents, *American Psychological Association*, 24(3).doi:10.1037/a0016226.
- Families Commission – Komihana a Whānau. (July 2009). *Changing roles of Grandparents – A Quantitative Study*. Wellington, New Zealand
- Fuller-Thompson, E. & Minkler, M. (2000). The mental and physical health of grandmothers who are raising their grandchildren. *Journal of Mental Health and Aging*, 6, 311-323.
- Gaddis, S. (2004). Re-positioning traditional research: Centring clients' accounts in the Construction of professional therapy knowledges. *International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work*, 2, 1-12.



- Goodman, C. (2012). Caregiving grandmothers and their grandchildren: Well-being nine years later. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 34(4), 648-654.
- Gosche, M. (2009). What Children Think of Being Raised by Their Grandparents, *Adults and Children: Parenting*. Retrieved from <http://missourifamilies.org/features/parenting/articles/parenting84.htm>.
- Grandparents Plus (2014, Spring). Talking about my generation... in *Kinship First*, Issue 29, pg. 1-2. London, U.K.
- Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Founder Calls for Better Support for the “Unsung Heroes”. Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Press Release on 22 October 2015.
- Griggs, J., Tan, J-P., Buchanan, A., Attar-Schwartz, S. And Flouri, E. (2010), ‘They’ve Always Been There for Me’: Grandparental Involvement and Child Well-being. *Children & society*, 24: 200-214. Doi:10.1111/j.1099-0860.2009.00215.x
- Grinstead, L., Leder, S., Jensen, S. & Bond, I. (2003). Review of research on the health of Caregiving grandparents. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 44, 318-326.
- Grinwis, B., Smith, A.B., & Dannison, L.L. (2004). *Custodial Grandparent Families: Steps for Developing Responsive Health Care Systems*. Ann Arbor, MI: MPublishing, University of Michigan Library, 9(1), 37-44.
- Hart, R. (1992). Children’s Participation – From Tokenism to Citizenship. UNICEF International Child Development Centre, Florence, Italy. Innocenti Essays #4.
- Hayslip, B. & Kaminski, P. (2005). Grandparents raising their grandchildren: A review of the literature and suggestions for practice. *The Gerontologist*, 45, 262-269.
- Health Research Council of New Zealand. (2010). *Guidelines for Researchers on Health Research Involving Māori* (Version 2). Auckland, New Zealand.
- Available on the Health Research Council of New Zealand Website:  
<http://www.hrc.govt.nz>.
- Hislop, A., Horner, B., Downie, J., & Hay, D. (2004). *The Perceived Experiences of Children and Adolescents living with their Grandparents: “Why living with my Grandparents is so ...Good”*. Curtin University of Technology, Australia.
- Keane, B. ‘Whāngai – customary fostering and adoption – The custom of whāngai’, in *Te Ara – The Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, updated 17-Dec-14.
- Keeling, S., Glasgow, K., & Morris, C. (2008). *Grandparents in Rural Families – Young People’s Perspectives*. Blue Skies Report, No 24/08. Wellington, Families Commission – Komihana a Whanau.

- Kelley, S., Whitley, D. & Campos, P. (2011). Behaviour problems in children raised by Grandmothers: The role of caregiver distress. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 33 (11): 2138-2145.
- Kelly, S.J. (2007). College of Health and Human Sciences and Georgia State University. Predictors of Behaviour Problems in Children Raised by Grandparents: The Role of Psychological Distress, Family Resources and Family Characteristics, *Family Health Issues*. Retrieved from [http://stti.confex.com/stti/congrs07/techprogram/paper\\_34104.htm](http://stti.confex.com/stti/congrs07/techprogram/paper_34104.htm)
- Kirby, P., Lanyon, C., Cronin, K. & Sinclair, R. (2003). *Building a Culture of Participation – Involving children and young people in policy, service planning, delivery and evaluation*. Handbook for the National Children's Bureau by PK Research Consultancy (UK).
- Landry-Meyer, L. (1999). Research into Action: Recommended Intervention Strategies for Grandparents Caregivers. *Family Relations*, 48(4), 381-389.
- Leder, S., Nicholson Grinstead, L., & Torres, E. (2007) Grandparents Raising Grandchildren: Stressors, Social Support, and Health Outcomes. *Peer Reviewed Articles*, Paper 9. [http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/kcon\\_articles/9](http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/kcon_articles/9)
- Letiecq, B., Bailey, S. & Kurtz, M. (2008). Depression among rural Native American and European American grandparents rearing their grandchildren. *Journal of Family Issues*, 29, 334-356.
- Livingston, G. & Parker, K. (2010, September). Since the start of the great recession, more children raised by grandparents. *Pew Research Center Publications*. Retrieved from [persocialtrends.org](http://persocialtrends.org).
- Luo, Y., LaPierre, T., Hughes, M. & Waite, L. (2012). Grandparents Providing Care to Grandchildren: A Population-Based Study of Continuity and Change. *Journal of Family Issues*, 33: 1143.
- Marx, J., & Solomon, J.C. (2000). Physical health of custodial grandparents. In C.B. Cox (Ed.), *To grandmother's house we go and stay: Perspectives on custodial grandparents* (pp. 37-55). New York: Springer.
- McCabe, M. (January 2008). *Conscience in Professional Life*. Paper presented at the Inaugural Australian National Colloquium on Bioethics. Melbourne, Australia.
- McLaughlin, H. (2006). Involving Young Service Users as Co-Researchers: Possibilities, Benefits and Costs. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 36 (8): 1395-1410.
- McRae, K. & Nikora, L.W. (2006). Whāngai: remembering, understanding and experiencing. *MAI Review* (1).
- Ministry of Social Development. (November 2012) *Home for Life Evaluation*

- Findings* (Prepared by Centre for Social Research and Evaluation for Child, Youth and Family Executive Committee). New Zealand Government.
- Minkler, M., Fuller-Thompson, E., Miller, D. & Driver, D. (1997). Depression in grandparents raising grandchildren: Results of a national longitudinal study. *Archives of Family Medicine*, 6, 445-452.
- Morgan, R. (2006). *About social workers: A children's views report*: Office for the Children's Rights Director, Commission for Social Care Inspection.
- Musil, C. & Ahmad, M. (2002). Health of grandmothers: A comparison by caregiver status, *Journal of Aging and Health*, 14, 96-121.
- Mutchler, J.E., Baker, L.A. & Lee, S.A. (2007). *Social Sciences Quarterly*, 88 (4), 990 – 1009.
- Nixon, P. (2007)(a). *Relatively Speaking: developments in research and practice in kinship care* (Volume 11 of Research Review). U.K.: Research in Practice.
- Nixon, P. (2007)(b). Seen but Not Heard? Children and Young People's Participation in Family Group Decision Making: Concepts and Practice Issues. *Protecting Children*, 22(1), 20-36.
- Nordqvist, C. (2010). More U.S. Children Being Raised by a Grandparent, *Medical News Today*. Retrieved from <http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/2007>.
- NZAC. (2002). *New Zealand Association of Counsellors' Code of Ethics: A framework for ethical Practice*: New Zealand Association of Counsellors, P.O. Box 25154, Wellington.
- Pakura, S. (6-9 June 2004). *The Family Group Conference 14-Year Journey: Celebrating the Successes, Learning the Lessons, Embracing the Challenges*. Paper presented at the American Humane Association's Family Group Decision Making Conference and Skills Building Institute. Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, USA.
- Pitama, S.M. (1997). *The effects of traditional and non-traditional adoption practices on Maori mental health: Adoption and Healing. Proceedings of the International Conference on Adoption and Healing*. Wellington: Uniprint.
- Poehlmann, J. (2003). An Attachment Perspective on Grandparents Raising Their Very Young Grandchildren: Implications for Intervention and Research. *Infant Mental Health Journal*, 24: 149-173.
- Ross, M. & Aday, L. (2006). Stress and coping in African American grandparents who are raising their grandchildren. *Journal of Family Issues*, 27, 912-932.
- Sands, R.G., Goldberg-Glen, R.S., & Shin, H. (2009). The Voices of Grandchildren of Grandparent Caregivers: A Strengths-Resilience Perspective. *Child Welfare League of America*, 88(2), 25-45.

- Scarella, C.A., Ehrle, J., & Geen, R. (2003). Identifying and Addressing the Needs of Children in Grandparent Care. *The Urban Institute*, B-55, 1-7.
- Smith, G. & Palmieri, P. (2007). Risk of Psychological Difficulties Among Children Raised by Custodial Grandparents. *Psychiatric Services*, 58(10), 1303-1310.
- Smith, L.T. (2012) *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. (2d ed). London: Zed Books Ltd.
- Smith, R., Monaghan, M., & Broad, B. (2002). Involving Young People as Co-Researchers: Facing Up to the Methodological Issues. *Qualitative Social Work*, 1, 191-207.
- Thornton, C. (1993). *Family Group Conferences: A Literature Review*. Lower Hutt, New Zealand: Practitioner's Publishing.
- Tolan, L.D. (2005). *Perceptions of Young Adults Who Were Raised By Their Grandparents*. (Master of Social Work Thesis, California State University: U.S.A.)
- Tootell, A. (2004). Decentring research practice. *International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work*, 3, 54-60.
- Whitley, D.M., & Kelley, S.J. (2007). *Grandparents Raising Grandchildren: A Call to Action*. National Center on Grandparents Raising Grandchildren: Washington D.C., U.S.A.
- Whittenberg, J.F. (2012). *The Lived Experiences of Mexican American Adolescent Grandchildren Raised By Their Grandparents: A Phenomenological Study*. (Doctoral Dissertation, Capella University. U.S.A.)
- Worrall, J. (2001). *Grandparents Raising Grandchildren: A Handbook for Grandparents and other Kin Caregivers*, Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Trust, Auckland, N.Z.
- Worrall, J. (2005). *Grandparents and Other Relatives Raising Kin Children in Aotearoa/New Zealand*, Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Charitable Trust, Auckland, N.Z.
- Worrall, J. (2006). "Challenges of grandparent custody of children at risk in New Zealand." *Families in Society*, 87(4): 546-554.