



For immediate release

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Grandparent caregivers receive “dreadful” treatment by Work and Income

An in-depth analysis of more than 800 grandparent care families desperately seeking support needed to look after their grandchildren has revealed concerns about our welfare systems in New Zealand. Kate Bundle, Chief Executive of Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Trust, says that their large research had identified “massive problems” with their clients accessing the Unsupported Child Benefit (UCB).

The figures speak for themselves, she notes. “Only fifteen percent are told they are entitled to the UCB on first approach, while many others are erroneously told they are not entitled to any support”. Bundle notes that many grandparents wait “years” for assistance. “Last year one woman bringing up five grandchildren received years of arrears in a lump sum and an apology, although she still only has about half the amount she was actually entitled to and she is not alone. We have many grandparents turning to us for help to get financial support for the children in their care, when they should have received it years ago”.

Grandparents are shocked at the state of Work and Income offices, where they are made to stand or sit in line for ages, declare their business in front of “everyone”, have their papers lost, receive conflicting advice, explain their business over and over and often get given incorrect information. Bundle says that “the majority find the quality of the service dreadful. Some are even fearful of Work and Income staff and the whole experience and some even give up rather than put themselves through the stressful rigmarole.”

Even worse than the office processes are the attitudes frequently found in these offices. “Many grandparents comment on the rude attitudes of staff. There is little respect for clients and many staff act as if ‘it is their own money’, providing support only grudgingly if at all,” says Bundle

“These grandparents are caring for some of our most vulnerable and traumatised children who would be in state care if it wasn’t for their grandparents taking them on. Just like children in care, they need help and financial support and that’s all they’re asking for. Support for the children, not for themselves. Is it too much to ask that they be treated with respect and advised from the get-go as to the supports available if they meet the criteria, rather than being punished and denied supports by staff who very often aren’t even applying the law correctly?” asks Bundle.

“Grandparents seeking income support reveal “Daniel Blake”-like experiences”, says GRG Researcher, Dr Liz Gordon of the participants in the study. The award-winning British movie ‘I, Daniel Blake’, told the fictitious story of one man seeking to get income support after a heart attack. “Director Ken Loach noted that “hundreds of thousands of people – the vulnerable and the poorest people – are treated by this government with a callousness and brutality that is disgraceful” and that is what it is like for many grandparents seeking support for the children,” says Gordon.

In the recent paper authored by Gordon and published in the journal *Kotuitui*, which is part of a series being published on the 2016 Grandparents and Whanau Caregiver research project, the data led to three conclusions. First, that the grandparents are in an excellent position, as older persons often with years of work experience, to critique the practices they find in Work and Income offices. Second, that grandparents seeking support for bringing up their grandchildren should take advocates (or ‘gradvocates’) with them to ensure they receive their entitlements. Finally, that the

service standards published by Work and Income are continually breached, not displayed in offices and are not subject to a complaints procedure, thus have no teeth at all.

A summary of key findings is attached. The full report is available at this link:

[Experiences of grandparents raising grandchildren in getting income support from work and income offices in New Zealand](#)

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Research data uncovers hidden world of welfare transactions

A large study of over 850 grandparents raising their grandchildren has highlighted multiple difficulties with offices at the agency Work and Income. Grandparents who meet the criteria are entitled to the Unsupported Child Benefit (UCB) to help with the costs of bringing up their grandchildren, who are often suffering significant health and emotional problems as a result of the family breakdown.

The research article, just [published in Kotuitui](#), finds that the road from policy to outcomes is far from straightforward. Less than 15% (86) of those who received the UCB were treated with courtesy and received their entitlements without fuss.

The initial struggle was in finding out that they were eligible for the UCB. Fewer than 15% were informed at first contact with Work and Income. Some struggled for years because

"I don't know how we got through the first two years, when we were grieving the loss of our son and my father, tragically taken about the same time. Work and Income told us we weren't entitled to anything".

they were told they were not eligible for any support. Many found out only through other agencies, such as Grandparents Raising Grandchildren.

Many of the grandparents had worked all their lives and were highly critical of the Work and income offices. They were critical of the open plan environment, the front desk system where everyone's business was transacted within

"I have to say I find it very difficult to go to WINZ [Work and Income], the whole environment".

"No wonder they need security. Where's the basic human respect for us?"

hearing of others, the lack of privacy, the long queues (sitting or standing for long periods) and the general lack of respect.

Many administrative problems were described by grandparents, including lost papers, delayed payments, the phone system giving different information than the office, difficulties in getting information from staff and inconsistencies between staff members. There were also differences between offices, as one former employee noted (see box).

"This office was unhelpful and unprofessional in their dealings with us every time. It is unfortunate that in having to move, I will once again have to deal with them. I have been putting off making an appointment there as I dread dealing with these people again... I find it extremely disappointing to find that any office still operates in this manner despite the not inconsiderable effort the Ministry put in to reducing, if not eliminating, this kind of inappropriate and inadequate service to clients.

If it were just one such office, that could be managed effectively. However, this research study demonstrates that the problems identified here are endemic within Work and Income offices around the country.

Many of the grandparents were very critical of the way they were treated by staff. Basically, many staff were unhelpful,

"I get stressed days before I go there, always have to beg for what I need."

"They act like it's their money you're taking and they made me feel that I was using the system when what I wanted to do was give my grandchild as good a life as I could."

'talked at' the clients and were often rude or arrogant. They also acted as gatekeepers to the information and services needed by grandparents. The result is that interviews are often uncomfortable and non-productive. Worse, many grandparents noted a form of humiliation meted out on the basis that it was others' money which was being provided. Many found this distressing and insulting. This service-level barrier is so widespread that it appears to be a part of the policy process, but nowhere in the office code of conduct is it mentioned that Work and Income clients are required to be shamed as part of the service delivery. It is therefore something about the culture of the organisation that inspires such approaches.

One of the extreme cases in the study was a sole grandparent who took on the care of five grandchildren as a result of parental drug abuse and family violence. She looked after the children for ten years without the UCB, and recently got a partial back payment and an apology from Work and Income. There are other in similar positions.

In the article, it is recommended that all grandparents looking to get the UCB take an advocate ("gradvocates") with them who is knowledgeable about the support available. While problems in Work and Income offices are well known to Grandparents Raising Grandchildren (NZ) Trust, this research has delved deeply into the stories of hundreds of grandparents seeking the support they are entitled to, and has demonstrated massive systemic problems with the service.

Media Brief

Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Trust NZ

www.GRG.org.nz



Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Trust NZ was established as a support group by Diane Vivian in Birkenhead, Auckland in 1999. It has had charitable trust status since 2001.

GRG's Membership today:

- 3792 grandparent and whanau care families throughout NZ (16/07/17)
- 6400+ caregivers
- 12,000 + children
- 42% Maori
- 45% NZ Euro
- 3% Pasifika
- 10% Mixed ethnicities (including Asian, African, European and others not specified)

GRG's Purpose: is to enable grandparents and whanau caregiver families to achieve better life-long outcomes for the vulnerable children and young people in their care.

GRG's Objectives:

1. To provide quality support services, information and education:
 - Enabling and empowering them to promote the wellbeing and best interests of children in their care; and to
 - Reduce stress and maximise stability in their lives.
3. To raise awareness of the needs of children, grandparent and whanau / kin caregivers
4. Lead change in law, policy and practice for the benefit of grandparent and whanau/kin care families.

GRG's Support Services and Initiatives:

- ♥ 0800 GRANDS Free Helpline - Around 730 calls per month
- ♥ New Member Resource Packs - Avg 70+ new families a month
- ♥ Monthly Grands Report Newsletters - 3600+ monthly subscribers
- ♥ Local Support Groups - 35 Support Groups from Kaitaia to Invercargill, 9 informal coffee groups
- ♥ Online Information Resources - Website and Facebook
- ♥ Community Outreach & Advocacy Services - Approx 580 clients supported each month
- ♥ Caregiver Education Programmes - Trauma informed care
- ♥ Respite and Holiday Camps - Kidzacoool and YMCA
- ♥ Awareness and Appeal Campaigns
- ♥ Sector Summits and Conferences
- ♥ Submissions to Parliament on law and policy
- ♥ Partnerships with other community providers

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