

Kinship First

Grandparents
plus

*For members of the
Grandparents Plus Support
Network for the wider
family raising children*

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Have your say

Fill in our 2016 survey, send it straight back and you could be a winner in our prize draw.

“Our surveys are vital to help us decide future priorities and plans,” said Support Network Manager Alison Blaxland. “We want to be able to build a picture of what it’s like to be a kinship carer in 2016 and look at what we can do to help.”

This year’s survey particularly focusses on managing contact with parents, one of the issues that has come up on many occasions at our events for members.

Members can return the survey using the freepost envelope provided. It can also be completed online – go to www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/2016KinshipSurvey

Please send the survey back by Tuesday 1 March to enter the prize draw for a £30 Marks and Spencer gift voucher.

Stronger together

Grandparents Plus has merged with The Grandparents’ Association. The merger brings two charities for grandparents and the wider family together to create one strong organisation. “We will be a powerful voice for grandparents and kinship carers, and we plan to develop our services, advice and support to reach more of them,” said Chief Executive Lucy Peake.

Continued overleaf ...

We champion the wider
family who care for children

Meet our new Chief Executive

Lucy Peake joined Grandparents Plus in September, taking over from previous Chief Executive Sam Smethers who left the charity in July.

Lucy worked at The Fostering Network for 11 years, where she was Director of External Affairs and then Director of Development. She is passionate about ensuring that children and young people have the best start in life, and looks forward to building on her experiences to ensure that all kinship carers are better recognised and supported in the vital role they play in looking after vulnerable children.

Lucy brings experience of policy and research, programme development, fundraising, membership and business development. She developed and oversaw delivery of London Fostering Achievement, the award winning programme to raise the educational attainment of children in care that was co-designed and delivered with foster carers and care-experienced young people. Her other highlight was the successful Staying Put campaign to enable young people to stay with their former foster carers until the age of 21.



Lucy has a PhD in Politics and three young children.

“I’m really looking forward to leading Grandparents Plus at such an exciting time. The charity has such a strong reputation and we’ll be building on that as we shape our plans for the next phase. We want to grow our reach and keep in touch with more grandparents and kinship carers so that we can understand and respond to the issues that matter to them. We look forward to working with our members as we develop our plans.”



Photo: Joanne O'Brien

Continued from cover

“Our members are at the heart of what we do,” said Lucy. “They come together through our peer support network, their experiences shape our policy and campaign priorities at local and national level, and they have helped secure major policy changes. We want to grow our reach so that we are in touch with more grandparents and kinship carers. We need to do this so we can understand and respond to the issues that matter and continue to work with our members to drive change.”

One in 74 children in England are being brought up by relatives because their parents are unable to look after them, and over half are cared for by their grandparents. “This means that kinship care will continue to be an important part of what we do and we will continue to support kinship carers and to influence kinship care policy and practice,” added Lucy. “At the same time, we will be seeking to develop new services for grandparents, focusing on their relationships with their grandchildren.”

“We need to continue to respond to the needs of our beneficiaries and make sure that what we do makes a difference. This means developing existing and new services, testing new approaches, measuring the impact of what we do, and being open to change. This is why we are delighted to have been awarded development funding from the Big Lottery Fund – with partner charity Family Lives – towards the roll out of our Relative Experience project for kinship carers in the North East to other parts of the UK.”

The merge has brought three advice services together. “We know that thousands of grandparents and kinship carers have benefitted from advice from us and that this makes a real difference, for example helping them to access vital welfare benefits, grants for essential household goods, the first family holiday in years, or to seek contact with a grandchild. But we want to reach more people, and this means thinking about what information and advice people need and how they want to access it. It means we need to take some time to review our services and then, crucially for us as a charity, seek funding to support our plans.

“The funding environment for charities is tough, with ongoing cuts to public sector funding and increased competition for grants,” said Lucy. “Grandparents Plus needs to look at new ways to raise money so that we can continue to deliver and develop our vital services. We are really grateful to all our funders, to those people who donate to us and to those who continue to run and cycle and fundraise for us in so many ways.”

Could you get involved in fundraising or make a donation? Contact Alana on 020 8981 8001 or email info@grandparentsplus.org.uk.

Campaign triumph over welfare benefit reforms

Kinship carers will be exempted from plans to limit benefits to two children per family following a government U-turn in the House of Lords. The U-turn is a major triumph for the hundreds of you who wrote to MPs expressing concern about the proposed change.

We would like to thank everyone who took part in our e-campaign, and to the MPs and Peers who have raised the issue with Ministers,” said Sarah Wellard, Director of Policy and Research at Grandparents Plus. “This is a really important concession from the Government that will help kinship carers keep vulnerable children out of care. We are delighted Lord Freud has recognised that it is vital for kinship carers to get the financial support they need through the benefits system.”

The proposed change, limiting Child Tax Credit and Universal Credit to the first two children in a family, was introduced in legislation by the Work and Pensions Secretary, Iain Duncan Smith, in October last year. It was seen as a way to teach parents ‘that children cost money’ and cut an estimated £1.3bn a year from the social security budget by 2021. But Ministers have now acknowledged that this argument makes no sense for kinship carers who are keeping vulnerable children out of care.

However, Ministers have not said whether kinship carers will be exempted from the benefit cap, which will limit total benefits claimable by unemployed working-age households to £20,000 or £385 a week (£23,000 or £442 in London). Many kinship carers are living in larger households because they have taken on several children and so are at risk of being affected by the lowering of the benefit cap from April. Grandparents Plus research indicates that one in six kinship carers is raising three or more kinship children and a similar number have their own children still living with them.

A high proportion of kinship carers – at least three in ten – are unemployed, often because they find they have to give up work when they take on the care of children. Unlike adoptive parents, kinship carers have no entitlement to take leave from work. Many then find it difficult to get back into the labour market, especially if they are older.

“Other measures in the Welfare Reform and Work Bill risk further impoverishing kinship carers already struggling on low incomes,” warned Sarah. “We are urging Ministers to think again about imposing the benefit cap on kinship carers.”

To take part in our campaign to protect kinship carers from benefit reforms please go to

<http://act.grandparentsplus.org.uk/lobby/17>.

If you need advice or information about welfare benefits, contact our Family and Friends Advice Line on 0300 123 7015 or email advice@grandparentsplus.org.uk.

News & resources...

Could you be our champion?

Grandparents Plus is looking for members of the Support Network who would like to get involved in raising awareness of kinship care by becoming one of our volunteer Kinship Champions.

“Thanks to funding from the Big Lottery Fund, we want to find members who have the time and energy to help locally,” said Support Network Manager Alison Blaxland. “We are hoping that our Kinship Champions will get involved in a number of ways, whether it’s speaking out in the media, helping to raise awareness of our work and the challenges kinship carers face, or by setting up support groups in their area. We want to work together to make a difference locally.”

Plans include training days and materials to support our Kinship Champions – contact Alison on 020 8981 8001 or email support@grandparentsplus.org.uk for more information.

Project Worker Bernie Huxley has joined the Grandparents Plus team and will be working to develop the buddying service, helping to put kinship carers in contact with others in similar situations.

Bernie is currently contacting all those who have completed registration forms for the service and will be following up with everyone who has already been matched with a buddy for feedback.

For more details on the buddy service contact Bernie on 020 8981 8001 or email support@grandparentsplus.org.uk.

Vital resource available for kinship carers

The second edition of the *Kinship Care Guide for England* is available at a special rate for our members.

The Guide is a vital resource written for kinship carers which will also be useful for social workers and others who work with special guardians, family and friends foster carers and other kinship carers.

The Guide is available to members of our Support Network at a discounted rate of £4.95 per copy, plus p&p.

“It’s the best thing I’ve ever seen for kinship carers,” said grandparent Shelly. “Every kinship carer should receive this when they start looking after a child.”

To order your copy please email guide@grandparentsplus.org.uk or call Alana on 020 8981 8001.

Grandparents dismayed by appeal after bedroom tax ruling

Grandparents Paul and Sue Rutherford, whose grandson Warren is severely disabled, have challenged David Cameron to explain why the government is appealing against a ruling by three judges who declared that the bedroom tax had not been justified in the family’s case.

Following a two-year legal fight, Paul and Sue were delighted by the ruling in January but left feeling dismayed after the Department of Work and Pensions confirmed it would be appealing.

Warren, who is 15, requires 24-hour care by at least two people at all times. His grandparents, who both suffer from disabilities themselves, struggle to look after him alone and need the help of two paid carers who can stay overnight at least twice a week. The family live in a three-bedroom bungalow that has been specially adapted to meet Warren’s needs, with the third bedroom needed for carers to stay overnight and to store Warren’s equipment.

The Child Poverty Action Group has been acting for the couple. “Paul and Sue work round the clock to care for Warren,” said solicitor Michael Spencer. “Without carers who can stay overnight they just wouldn’t be able to cope and Warren would have to go into care, at substantial cost to the taxpayer. The court has at least indicated that the local council should help pay the shortfall in Warren’s rent, but ultimately families with severely disabled children should be entitled to the same exemption as disabled adults and not have to rely on discretionary payments.”

SGO update

Grandparents Plus welcomes the Government announcement on Special Guardianship Orders following consultation.

“We welcome the announcement to strengthen the assessment framework for Special Guardianship Orders and improve support to special guardians and children, made by Minister for Children and Families Edward Timpson,” said Lucy Peake, Chief Executive of Grandparents Plus.

“During the course of the consultation DfE officials met with special guardians and other kinship carers supported by our Relative Experience project in the North East. Whilst some local authorities are providing good support for special guardians, many kinship carers are struggling to get the financial and practical help they need for the vulnerable children they are raising.”

In memory of our founder

Jean Stogdon OBE, co-founder and co-chair of Grandparents Plus, died on Christmas Day 2014 after a period of ill health.

Jean co-founded the charity with social entrepreneur Michael Young in 2001. They shared a belief that the role of the wider family was not sufficiently recognised, valued or supported, so set about changing that. Tragically Michael died in 2002, leaving Jean to carry Grandparents Plus forward without him.



Born in London in 1928, Jean married Bill Stogdon in 1948 and had three sons. She was a full-time housewife until the age of 40, when she began her career as a social worker. Ignoring Bill's protests, Jean enrolled as a mature student – as a trade off she still ironed 18 shirts for her family every week and put supper on the table.

By the time Jean retired from social work in 1988 she had risen to become an area head in Camden, north London, overseeing a team of 200. She then went on to work as a guardian ad litem and trained as a social entrepreneur in the 1990s where she first met Michael Young.

Jean, pictured receiving her OBE for services to children and families in 2013, never retired and campaigned until the end. Just before her final illness she was due to speak on improving the experiences of patients undergoing dialysis and had succeeded in getting the hospital unit connected to wireless broadband for patients.

“Without Jean Stogdon, there would be no Grandparents Plus,” said Stephen Burke, who was co-chair alongside Jean. “The charity has put grandparents on the policy and practice agenda and is driving forward change to secure significant recognition and support for kinship carers. None of this would have happened without Jean’s leadership, energy and single-mindedness.”

Grandparents Plus hosted a celebration of Jean’s life in June 2014, with speakers including her friend, actress Shirley Eaton, and journalist Yvonne Roberts.

Unique course for kinship carers

Grandparents Plus has teamed up with adoption charity, PAC-UK, to pilot an exciting new parenting programme designed exclusively to meet the needs of kinship carers.

“*Raising Kinship Children* is a unique 10-week parenting course aimed at helping grandparents and other family carers manage the challenging behaviours that children living in kinship care can sometimes present,” said project manager Susannah Cardy. “It has been heavily shaped and influenced by kinship carers and is designed to help anyone raising a kinship child aged between three and 11.”

Thanks to funding from both the Tudor Trust and Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, 13 kinship carers living in or near Islington were able to attend this brand new course, which was piloted at Islington Children’s Services during the autumn term of 2015.

The programme recognises the challenges that kinship carers face in raising their children. It gives help with understanding issues such as the different forms of attachment in children and how best to manage difficult behaviour after contact with birth parents.

“So sad it’s over – please do another,” one kinship carer told us. “The course for me has been brilliant and I haven’t wanted to miss a session,” said another.

“The course is being externally evaluated by Coram to gather feedback and refine the programme,” said Susannah. “We now need to wait for the results of that but our hope is that we can run more courses like this in the future.”

Helplines & groups

National

Grandparents Plus Family and Friends Advice Line

Tel: 0300 123 7015 (10am–3.00pm)
www.grandparentsplus.org.uk

Family Rights Group

Tel: 0808 801 0366 (10am–3.30pm)
www.frg.org.uk

South West

Kinship Care Support Group

Bristol – Meets every Monday during term time in Southmead, Bristol. For more information call Julie on 07407 443381.

London

Islington – Islington Council runs a monthly support group for Special Guardians and other kinship carers who are caring for Islington children or who live in the borough. Contact Ethel Ibeh on 0207 527 7691.

North East

Kinship Support Group

Middlesbrough – Meets every second Wednesday at Trinity Church, Stainby Road, Middlesbrough. Contact Mari at mari.dilworth@grandparentsplus.org.uk or call 07931158313.

A full listing of support groups can be found on our website – www.grandparentsplus.org.uk

Include your details...

If you run a group and would like to include your details please email support@grandparentsplus.org.uk

News & resources...

News from the North East ...



The Relative Experience team has set up a new Volunteer Network Forum to provide our volunteers with the chance to share good practice and meet up.

The project, run by Grandparents Plus in partnership with Family Lives and the Family and Childcare Trust with funding from the Big Lottery Fund Silver Dreams Fund, has also run three training courses for new volunteers in Newcastle, Durham and Middlesbrough.

Halloween was celebrated in style as our photos from Middlesbrough (above) and Wallsend (below) show.



Great news - Grandparents Plus and partner charity Family Lives have secured development funding from the Big Lottery Fund Accelerating Ideas Programme. The funding will enable us to scope roll out of Relative Experience to other parts of the UK. This is a huge vote of confidence in the project and our team of staff and volunteers involved in delivering it. We're really excited to be working with Family Lives and the Big Lottery Fund to develop it further.

Fundraising for the future

Hot on the heels of our new Chief Executive Lucy, who ran the Royal Parks Half Marathon in October to raise funds for Grandparents Plus, comes two fundraising stars who are taking on gruelling challenges this spring – Nicola Kerr and Terry Keen.

Nicola, who works for the Grandparents Plus advice service, will be taking on the Isle of Wight Challenge – trekking 25km across the island on Saturday 30 April.



“We have dug out our trainers and have been in training since the start of January,” said Nicola, who will be taking on the challenge with wife Amy. “25km is a long way but we’re challenging ourselves to jog it.”

“Grandparents Plus is a charity that’s close to both of us through our work. I provide information and advice on their much-needed advice line and Amy is a child care solicitor who often represents family members and children in court proceedings and has links with the charity.”

Please support Nicola – go to www.justgiving.com/NikAmy120615 to donate.

Terry Keen will be relying on two wheels for his challenge as he cycles the length of the country from Berwick upon Tweed to Helston in Cornwall.

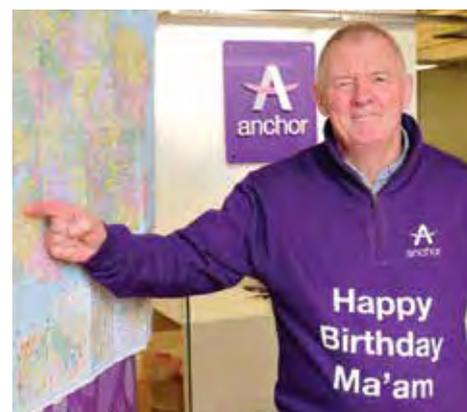
Anchor Housing resident Terry, who is 69, will leave Anchor’s most northerly property on 14 March. He will arrive at their most southerly property on 9 May, completing a 1,400 mile cycle ride and visiting 90 care homes and retirement properties on the way. As well as raising money for Grandparents Plus, Terry will be giving Anchor Housing residents the chance to sign a special birthday card for the Queen to celebrate her 90th birthday. Anchor Housing will also be giving residents at their other properties the chance to get involved in fundraising and hope that more than 3,000 will sign the Queen’s card.

Terry, from Reigate in Surrey, has been married to Jackie for 50 years and has four children and 11 grandchildren. He felt inspired to raise money along his journey for Grandparents Plus because his friends are grandparents who are raising their grandchildren.

Terry, pictured below as he plans his route, will deliver the card to Buckingham Palace after he completes his challenge.

“It’s heart-warming that Terry is supporting our work,” said Lucy Peake, Chief Executive of Grandparents Plus. “The money that Terry raises will enable us to reach more grandparent and family carers and ensure they receive the support they need.”

To find out how to donate and support Terry on his epic journey call Alana on 020 8981 8001 or email support@grandparentsplus.org.uk.



First conference for young people

A group of young people who attend a Kinship Care Group in Liverpool organised the first-ever conference to raise awareness of kinship care from a young person's perspective.

"We were very proud of what we achieved," said Alex, who has been raised in kinship care. "We used personal stories showcased through a variety of methods including presentations, soundbites and a monologue to show the very real challenges that we have had to face in our lives. At the same time we also wanted to show the positive experiences we have had being part of the project.

"We feel that our families are often forgotten and have gone unnoticed in the past. We shared our experiences because we wanted people to truly understand what kinship care is and what we have to deal with. We hope this young person's conference will bring about change and hopefully other young people will know about us and can be supported."

The group's local MP, Stephen Twigg, attended the event, which was funded by the local authority. He praised the project, saying how he would like to continue to help and support the group.

"Our aim for the future is to be able to hold a National Conference and bring about real change," said Alex. "We also think it would be great if there were other groups like ours across the country as young people need support and advice as much as our kinship carers do."

Get in touch if you know of a young person's group - call 020 8981 8001 or email support@grandparentsplus.org.uk.



Young people pictured at the event, which was held at Everton FC, with Colette O'Brien, Director of Children & Young Person's Services; Bernie Brown, Assistant Director; Project Co-ordinator Pauline Thornley; and Sam Smethers, former CEO at Grandparents Plus.

OBE for Lynn Chesterman

Congratulations to Lynn Chesterman, former Chief Executive of The Grandparents' Association, who received an OBE in the New Year Honour's List.

Lynn, who led The Grandparents' Association for 18 years, retired in November 2015 as the organisation merged with Grandparents Plus.

Over the years Lynn has supported, recruited and trained hundreds of volunteers. Lynn wrote *How to be a Grandparent* and two books in The Grandparents' Association's *Relative Values* series. She has championed the role of the wider family and the relationships between the generations. We are delighted that her work has been recognised with this award.



News in brief

Grandparents Plus has developed an Early Help Model Training Course thanks to funding from the Department for Education. The course will be delivered to staff working at children's centres and schools to raise awareness of the support needed by kinship carers and has been produced in partnership with Mentor UK, 4Children and the Childhood Bereavement Network.

The Kinship 'Foster' Carers Group are planning Kinfest events for this summer. The events, which are open to all kinship care families, will take place in Camber Sands, Sussex from 30 May to 3 June and again from 6 to 13 August in Skegness, Lincolnshire. Contact Vicki on 07762 317947, Janellen on 07771 770608 or email kinshipfostercarers@gmail.com for more information.

A Yorkshire couple celebrated receiving a payment of £80,000 from their local authority. The payment represents 12 years of back payment due to them after the local authority failed to increase residence allowance payments for their two grandchildren. "This is a record payment for Ridley & Hall," said Senior Partner Nigel Priestley. "The case sends out a clear message to all grandparents who are receiving either special guardianship allowance payments, child arrangement order payments or residence allowance. They should check that their allowances are being annually up-rated and should seek specialist legal advice if they think that the local authority is short changing them."

Grandparents Plus received £7,627.50 in donations from the BBC Lifeline charity appeal. Many thanks to everyone who supported the appeal.

Congratulations to Scarlet, aged nine, who won our Christmas card competition. Scarlet's lovely reindeer design won her a £20 voucher from Toys R Us.

Gulliver's travels

Our annual family celebration day took place in September, bringing over 550 kinship carers and children together.



“It was our biggest celebration day so far – we hope everyone had a day to remember and we’re really grateful to the Big Lottery Fund for making the event possible,” said Alison Blaxland, Support Network Manager at Grandparents Plus. The events took place at Gulliver’s theme parks in Warrington (pictured above) and Milton Keynes (pictured below, in the sunshine!).

“Thank you so much for putting on such a lovely day ... we had such a wonderful time,” said Trudi. “The children made friends and though it had never really occurred to me before, they actually enjoyed meeting other children who are also being looked after by family. I was a bit apprehensive about attending but this event has definitely changed my mind.”

“What a fantastic day had by all. Thank you to all at Grandparents Plus who help to make it happen every year. My four thoroughly enjoyed the day at Milton Keynes and can’t wait for next time,” said Pam.

We are planning our next celebration day for September 2016 – watch out for details in future newsletters and on our website.



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