



Child Needs Analysis
of Children Being Raised,
or Significantly Cared for
by their Grandparents

Conducted 31st August 2004

At Marymead Child and Family Centre
255 Goyder St Narrabundah

By Daphne Dawson

On behalf of GrandParents ACT and Region
REPORT BASED ON CONSULTATION WITH GRANDCHILDREN
BEING RAISED BY GRANDPARENTS

BACKGROUND AND ISSUES

Within the Australian Capitol Territory the agencies Marymead, Relationships Australia Canberra and Region and Canberra Mothercraft Society and Queen Elizabeth II Family Centre, noticed a significant gap in services for grandparents with major responsibility for their grandchildren. These agencies formed a partnership to initiate support groups for grandparents. These meetings have created an opportunity to understand the issues these grandparent face as described by the grandparents themselves. Subsequent funding from the Federal Department for Family and Community Services became available, and a decision was taken by the partnership to use some of the funds to undertake a needs analysis which would cover the grandchildren themselves and document their voice. A similar needs analysis has been undertaken in Western Australia.

On Saturday 31 July 2004, 13 grandparents attended a group to explore their parenting issues. Their grandchildren aged 2-12 attended in order to be interviewed regarding their needs while being cared for by grandparents. 13 children were spoken to.

On Wednesday 4 August 2004 the children aged 12 and above, attended ZONE 3, where they were able to play games. 7 children were interviewed at this time, 4 briefly as they had been spoken to previously.

Altogether 16 children participated in this review.

The aim was to consult the children to discover what the issues, needs and areas of importance for these children are. Including what difficulties the children and their families experience.

ACQUISITION OF INFORMATION

The children were interviewed in small groups.

Age 3-6, 7-10, (11-12, 12-13).

All the children were presented with the same questions.

The children's responses were age appropriate. The younger group responded more simply while the older children understood issues at a deeper level. All children had responses to their situational needs. Their thoughts were age appropriate.

The numbers in this research are significantly smaller than the Western Australian group. However the issues appear to be similar and are no less relevant.

SUMMARY

- ? *The overriding issue seemed to be lack of finances.*
- ? *By and large the children seemed settled although they expressed some*
Difficulty and "shock" at having to reside with grandparents.
- ? *There was a sense of the children missing parents.*
- ? *There was an awareness by the children of the physical difficulties*
and
disruption experienced by their grandparents.
- ? *The children were protective of their grandparents.*

QUESTIONS FOR CHILDREN RESIDING WITH GRANDPARENTS

This is an amalgam of all the questions asked to all age groups. The questions were adjusted to suit each age group. Not all children responded to all questions.

The discussion was kept formal so that boundaries remained for the children and the purpose of the talk did not leave the children disturbed or raise difficult issues for the children.

AGE GROUP 11-13:

7 children

5 children reside with their grandparent/s. 2 reside with their mother and visit with grandmother frequently.

3 children reside with their siblings.

4 children see their mother fairly regularly.

This age group was engaged and eager and happy to answer questions and speak of their experiences. They had a good understanding for some of the difficulties their grandparents were experiencing. 4 children were spoken to twice.

1. What do you call your grandparents?

Nanna, Grandma, Gran, by name, Grandpa, Pop.

2. How long have you been living with your grandparents?

8 months.

About 2 years.

1 year or so.

3. What are some of the good things about living with your grandparents?

Get off easily.

Don't get into trouble.

Get spoiled.

Get to do what we want.

They take me to stuff.

Go out more.

Eat fabulous food.

4. What are some of the hard things living with your grandparents?

Eat disgusting food.

Go to boring places like art galleries.

Receive less pocket money
Sometimes getting abng.

5. If you could change something what would it be?

Rather not have Mum around as she upsets Gran.
Wish Gran was not so frail.
Raise pocket money.
Live with Mum.

6. How do you feel knowing your grandparent is willing and wanting to care for you?

Grateful.
Special.
Cool.
Feel really good.

7. Do you tell other kids that you live with your grandparents?

Careful who tell.
Most people know.
Yes.

8. What is the reaction when you tell other children? What questions do they ask?

Could be nosy.
OK.

9. What do you think would be different for children who live with their grandparents compared to those who live with their parents?

Watch less TV.
They don't like our music.
They are older than our parents.
They don't know what Nintendo is.
They take us to special places.
We get spoilt.

10. What do you think your siblings or other children need and what do you think they will need as they get older? What did you need when younger that is different to what you need now?

More money.
They may want to go to parties.

11. What do you think you will need from your grandparents as you get older?

Friends to rely on.
When they die where will I go?
More money.

12. Have you had to move to live with your grandparents? How has this been for you re: school, friends, teachers etc.? What is it like now?

Hated it.
People are helpful.
Shock.
It was hard to leave friends.
It was hard to leave everything.

13. Do your siblings live with you? How is this?

Yes. They are annoying but I miss them when they are not there.
No. I miss my brother.
No it is OK.

14. How do you and your grandparents agree on things like going out with friends, watching television, listening to music, household chores etc?

Nag.
Keep going till they give in.
They agree to everything.
I go on and on.
I say things are safe when they may not be.
I accept 'no'.

15. What are you not allowed to do now you live with grandma and grandpa?

Watch TV during the day.
Have soft drinks.
Sleep over.
Go out really late.
Have transport. I have to walk everywhere.
Smoke, do drugs watch R movies.

16. What are the difficulties/issues you think your grandparents are having to cope with looking after you? (How has it been?)

Difficult having a new person in the family.
It is expensive for them.
They get more tired.

17. What activities do you do with your grandparents?

Go out to places, shopping, MacDonaldis, galleries, church.
Have outings.
Go to movies.
Watch TV.

18. Who do you talk to when you are worried or sad?

Nan.
Friends.
Mum.

19. Do you visit with your parents?

Some do.
Some do not.
I would rather not see Mum as she upsets Gran.

20. Do you think you can make a difference to government policy and how?

Write letters.
Talk to the government.

21. What could government change?

Get rid of GST.
Free refugees.
Give more money.
Assistance.
Cheaper things. (Give discounts)

AGE GROUP 8 – 10:

5 children
There were 5 children and 4 reside with grandparent/s.

1 child resides with mother and sees grandparent frequently.

3 children see mother or father regularly.

This age group was more forthcoming than the young group. One child refused to take part and one left early.

1. What do you call your grandparents?

Nanna, Grandma, Grandpa.

2. How long have you been living with your grandparents?

Between one and two years.

3. What are some of the good things about living with your grandparents?

They take care of us.

They give us pocket money.

They take us places.

They spoil us.

4. What are some of the hard things living with your grandparents?

They want us to do lots of chores.

We can't go places because of their beliefs.

They don't have much energy.

It's boring.

5. If you could change something what would it be?

Have my friends sleepover.

Have more pocket money.

6. How do you feel knowing your grandparent is willing and wanting to care for you?

Feel good.

7. Do you tell other kids that you live with your grandparents?

Tell friends.

8. What is the reaction when you tell other children? What questions do they ask?

OK.

No questions.

9. What do you think would be different for children who live with their grandparents compared to those who live with their parents?

Mother more loving and caring.

10. What do you think your siblings or other children need and what do you think they will need as they get older? What did you need when younger that is different to what you need now?

More is expected as you get older.

It could be harder.

I'll want to play more football.

11. What do you think you will need from your grandparents as you get older?

As above.

12. Have you had to move to live with your grandparents? How has this been for you re: school, friends, teachers etc.? What is it like now?

This was not applicable to this age group.

13. Do your siblings live with you? How is this?

They are annoying.

Its OK.

14. How do you and your grandparents agree on things like going out with friends, watching television, listening to music, household chores etc?

They persuade us.

We persuade them if we want something.

15. What are you not allowed to do now you live with grandma and grandpa?

Go to shops on own.

Watch M programmes.

16. What are the difficulties/issues you think your grandparents are having to cope with looking after you? (How has it been?)

They need extra energy cos. they are older.

17. What activities do you do with your grandparents?

Go out to places.

18. Who do you talk to when you are worried or sad?

No one.

Nanna.

Friends.

Siblings.

19. Do you visit with your parents?

Yes it is good.

I live with my Mum.

20. Do you think you can make a difference to government policy and how?

?

21. What could government change?

Give more money.

AGE GROUP 3-6:

4 children.

3 reside with siblings.

2 see father frequently and mother occasionally.

One child was too young to take part.

It was at times difficult to keep the group focused because of their young ages and stages.

1. What do you call your grandparents?

Grandma, Nannie, Grandpa, Pop.

2. How long have you been living with your grandparents?

Unclear.

3. What are some of the good things about living with your grandparents?

She plays soccer with me.

Takes me places.

4. What are some of the hard things living with your grandparents?

They don't play with me.

5. If you could change something what would it be?

-

6. How do you feel knowing your grandparent is willing and wanting to care for you?

-

7. Do you tell other kids that you live with your grandparents?

Sometimes.

Do not tell people.

8. What is the reaction when you tell other children? What questions do they ask?

-

9. What do you think would be different for children who live with their grandparents compared to those who live with their parents?

Friends come to play more.

10. What do you think your siblings or other children need and what do you think they will need as they get older? What did you need when younger that is different to what you need now?

-

11. What do you think you will need from your grandparents as you get older?

-

12. Have you had to move to live with your grandparents? How has this been for you re: school, friends, teachers etc.? What is it like now?

Not an issue for this group.

13. Do your siblings live with you? How is this?

OK.

No (do not have siblings).

14. How do you and your grandparents agree on things like going out with friends, watching television, listening to music, household chores etc?

They tell me.

15. What are you not allowed to do now you live with grandma and grandpa?

Bring the dog into my room.

Make a mess and not clean it up.

16. What are the difficulties/issues you think your grandparents are having to cope with looking after you? (How has it been?)

-

17. What activities do you do with your grandparents?

They buy me things.

They take me places.
We play sports.

18. Who do you talk to when you are worried or sad?

Nanna, Pop, friends.

19. Do you visit with your parents?

-

20. Do you think you can make a difference to government policy and how?

-

21. What could government change?

CONCLUSIONS

It was clear from speaking to all these children that the overriding feeling for them was gratitude that their grandparents had taken them in. They also, especially

the older children had a good understanding of some of the difficult issues their grandparent's were experiencing.

Most of the children spoke of the financial difficulties their grandparents were experiencing. This also had an impact on the children's needs. The children were frequently aware of the physical constraints their grandparents were under such as fatigue and inability to maintain the energy their younger parents displayed. It was also indicated that there could be conflict between parents and grandparents.

There will be various and complex issues and difficulties for these grandparents depending on their different situations.

These are children who have experienced challenging times in their short lives. They are nonetheless coping and engaged with their lives depending on their ages and stages at this time. This is not to overlook that they will have special needs. Assistance both psychological and practical as a result of their complex and at times demanding emotional situations will be crucial. These are likely to be ongoing and shifting for sometime.

The children's grandparents will also need support for sometime in order to maintain as stable as possible an environment for these children who have experienced more than average challenges.

It was to the grandparent's credit that the children were happy, engaged, courteous, and happy with their activities on the days they were interviewed. They are a credit to their grandparents and themselves. However, in some ways the children's answers belied the complexity of their situations. Their "gripes" could have been those of children in much less complex emotional and care situations. This was because the process of the interviews remained formal in order to protect the children from entering difficult emotional terrain at this time.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Family Law Act is now acknowledging the input and importance of grandparents in the care of their grandchildren.

Financial assistance directly to these families seems a high priority. Equally important, agencies that give psychological and practical support for these families, need extra financial assistance in order to continue to assist, maintain and promote well being for everyone concerned.

These conclusions seem consistent with Western Australian findings of needs concerning grandparents and their grandchildren.

Daphne Dawson
FAMILY AND CHILD COUNSELLOR
AUGUST 2004

EVALUATION REPORT

SUMMARY OF EVALUATION FEEDBACK

GRANDPARENT'S TRAINING DAY

31ST JULY 2004

HELD AT MARYMEAD CHILD AND FAMILY CENTRE IN PARTNERSHIP WITH
RELATIONSHIPS AUSTRALIA, MARYMEAD CHILD AND FAMILY CENTRE AND
CANBERRA MOTHERCRAFT SOCIETY

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EVALUATION REPORT

SUMMARY OF EVALUATION FEEDBACK GRANDPARENT'S TRAINING DAY 31/7/04

HELD AT MARYMEAD CHILD AND FAMILY CENTRE IN PARTNERSHIP WITH MARYMEAD
CHILD AND FAMILY CENTRE RELATIONSHIPS AUSTRALIA AND CANBERRA
MOTHERCRAFT SOCIETY

There were 16 evaluation sheets returned. Sixteen grandparents participated in the Grandparents Training Day.

An Evaluation form is attached at Appendix 1

Question One: "I found the day....." (circle any relevant) 12 categories provided. All respondents circled between 2 and 5 categories.

Results as follows:

Helpful	14 (87.5%)
Informative	12 (75%)
Enjoyable	8 (50%)
Fun	6 (37.5%)
Fantastic	3 (18.75%)
Good	2 (12.5%)
So-So	1 (6.25%)
Too Long	1 (6.25%)
Too rushed	1 (6.25%)

Comments

Nearly 88% of respondents found the training day to be helpful, 75% found it informative. It is interesting to note that the three participants who circled "So-so" "too long" and "too rushed" also circled "helpful" and/or "Informative".

Question Two: "What I like best was: "

Results as follows:

Information Sessions and Speakers	9	(56.25%)
Relaxed atmosphere	4	(25%)
Meeting other grandparents	4	(25%)
Conflict Resolution Session	3	(18.75%)
Group Discussions	2	(12.5%)
Childcare	1	(6.25%)
Problem Solving	1	(6.25%)

Quotes:

Information Sessions and Speakers

"I liked talking about ways to improve our unique situation"

"...advice from speakers – a lovely bunch"

Relaxed atmosphere

"The relaxed way in which people participated....."

"Gentle presentation"

"Relaxed friendly atmosphere"

Meeting other grandparents

"Having the company of other grandparents....."

"Sharing problems and situations with other grandparents in similar or like circumstances"

Conflict Resolution Session

"The info on conflict resolution – I can see a lot of use for it"

Group discussions

"The group sessions of three people – discuss things that are relevant to me"

Childcare

"That the children could come with me and I did not have to worry about where they were"

Question Three: "The part I found least helpful was: "

None or left blank 6 (37.5%)

Conflict Resolution 3 (18.75%)

Quotes:

"I felt the Conflict Resolution a little bit daunting"

Group discussions 2 (12.5%)

Quotes:

"Small groups – each group needs a skilled facilitator"

Other 7 (43.75%)

In the "other" group, there was one comment on each of the following issues:

heater,

more positive stories,

lack of childcare,

time management,

no need for self care,

more details/info,

negotiation

Question Four “....I think we should work on: “

Don't know or left blank	5	(31.25%)
More on Mental Health, AOD Issues	3	(18.75%)
How to share time with other grandchildren	2	(12.5%)
More sharing experiences with other G P's	2	(12.5%)
Specifically, managing children's behaviour	2	(12.5%)
Self Care	1	(6.25%)
Differences in activity levels between G'parents and G'children, how to cope	1	(6.25%)
Managing parents of G'children	1	(6.25%)

Summary

All respondents expressed positive reactions about the Day. Those that didn't circle "informative"(4 – 25%) did circle "helpful" and another 25% found the atmosphere relaxing

The range of experiences and expectations were diverse and indicates how wide an area of interest and need the participating grandparents have. The Speakers and sessions were particularly mentioned by 56.25% of grandparents and 37.5% thought the day fun.

The Conflict Resolution session were well received, although 3 (18.75%) found it least helpful and one wanted more time spent on "Conflicts managed well"

Many grandparents mentioned directly or indirectly the usefulness of sharing with G'parents in similar situations although there was a comment that each group needed a "skilled facilitator"

Certain practical aspects of the day (the heater, lack of childcare for a particular grandchild, late start long intro) had a negative impact on at least three of the grandparents (18.75%)

Suggestions for future training days were diverse and ranged from more education on mental health, violence and AOD issues to sharing time with other grandchildren not in their direct care.

Anna Coleman-Snow
11 August 2004