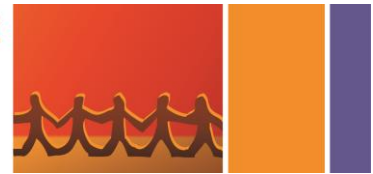


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**Permanent  
Care and  
Adoptive  
Families**



Committee Secretary  
Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

7 April 2014

Dear Committee Secretary

**We are writing in response to the Senate Inquiry into grandparents who take primary responsibility for raising their grandchildren.**

Permanent Care and Adoptive Families (PCA Families) is the trading name for Post Placement Support Service (Vic) Inc. PCA Families is a state-wide, not for profit, incorporated and member based organisation. Our Board of Directors have lived experience of adoption and permanent care, and our Patron is Emeritus Professor Dorothy Scott OAM.

The primary interest of PCA Families is to provide long term support to families created through adoption and permanent care. We have been delivering high-impact, early intervention, education, and support services to our primary interest group since 2003, and up until 2013 we also delivered these services to families providing kinship care and foster care. We were recently part of the Kinship Services consultation undertaken by the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare Inc.(Vic), and we support their submission “‘There is no choice’: Grandparents who take primary responsibility for raising their grandchildren.”

PCA Families understand that children raised by grandparents often have specific needs coming from pre-placement trauma, abuse, neglect and attachment disruption, and as such, these children require consistent, targeted support throughout their developmental years including early adulthood.

“The physical, learning and emotional needs of the children (due largely to earlier experience of neglect, abuse, disruption and, sometimes, the death of one or both parents)

meant that most had challenging behaviours and required considerable energy, as well as expensive services such as counselling, tutoring and speech therapy.”<sup>1</sup>

Generally grandparents have considerable experience raising children and create a significant saving for the community by undertaking the primary responsibility for raising children whose parents are unable to care for them. The cost of raising children is substantial and the long term impact of this cost on people seeking retirement and at risk of health issues is not insignificant. For many grandparents, taking the primary responsibility for care of their grandchildren involves the following

- postponing retirement;
- diverting superannuation funds for the upkeep of children;
- increase in credit card use;
- difficulty accessing loans;
- depleted savings;
- forgoing employment; and
- navigating community and Centrelink services for the first time.

Unfortunately, as for many families with extensive experience raising children, behaviours emerging from pre-placement trauma, abuse, attachment disruption and neglect are difficult to manage. These behaviours can also make it difficult for primary carers to engage schools and the usual family members and community groups to help care for and raise the children in their care. This form of social isolation can have a significant long term impact on grandparents at a time in their lives when they are becoming increasingly vulnerable in terms of their physical health and financial wellbeing.

Our work indicates that there is an enormous need for grandparents and grandchildren connected through permanent and kinship care, to be able to access specialised support and education on an ongoing basis. Grandparents need support in their role as primary carers, including peer support, counselling, and training in therapeutic parenting. They need to be supported as their grandchildren develop through their milestones, especially in adolescence.

Grandparents have identified legal support as especially lacking. “ The relationship between grandparents and their children was also complicated by the fact that very often it was the grandparents who had reported their own children to child protection- or faced them in court in a custody hearing”<sup>2</sup>

Research into the support needs of kith and kin carers<sup>3</sup> found the needs included: carer payment equity between statutory and non-statutory carers; access to relevant legal advice; accessible information on the financial implications of non-statutory care, assistance with parental contacts; and improved community education on the issue of kinship care.

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<sup>1</sup> O’Neill, C. (2011). Support in kith and kin care: The experience of carers. *Children Australia*, 36, 2, 93.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. 93

<sup>3</sup> op. cit. 88-99

Our members agree that both state and federal governments have a responsibility to ensure that this assistance to children continues post placement. This should include preventative, early intervention, and other supports necessary to ensuring best outcomes for these vulnerable children. As an organisation that specialises in post placement support, we are concerned that little attention or funding has been given to this area. There does not appear to be any clear evidence that post placement support services are increasing, or currently adequate to meet identified needs of grandparents and their grandchildren.

PCA Families relies totally on donations and philanthropic trust funding to provide phone advice, peer support, therapeutic parenting training, professional training, children's programs, playgroups, journal clubs, etc. We believe that the current lack of support operating for grandparents caring for children placed through formal and informal arrangements, is counter to the evidence provided via research and feedback from grandparents in our community.

We appreciate that the Commonwealth Government is committed to working with the states and non-government sector to deliver kinship reform. Our members with lived experience of permanent care view this inquiry as extremely important and long overdue. It is hoped that this inquiry will deliver concrete solutions for grandparents in this sector of care.

Yours faithfully

BRENDA CARMEN  
General Manager

CHRIS LOCKWOOD  
President