

# GRANDPARENTS RAISING THEIR GRANDCHILDREN: AN UNEASY POSITION

JAN BACKHOUSE<sup>1</sup> AND ANNE GRAHAM<sup>2</sup>

## ABSTRACT

Whilst the phenomenon of grandparents caring for grandchildren is not new in Australia, there is growing acknowledgement in the community that the number of children in such care arrangements is growing and that relatively little is known about how such developments are shaping the lives and identities of the grandparents involved. This paper draws on the findings of a recent qualitative study that investigated the experiences of 34 grandparents currently raising their grandchildren. The findings suggest these care arrangements take place in a complex space marked by paradox and ambiguity, particularly in relation to the grandparents' social, financial and legal status, as well as their social and emotional well-being, that current policy contexts fail to adequately recognise.

## BACKGROUND

Over the past 25 years there has been a dramatic increase in the number of children being raised by their grandparents, due primarily to the inability of the children's parents to effectively meet their parenting responsibilities.<sup>3</sup> Reasons for this phenomenon include a number of changes in family structure and social conditions,<sup>4</sup> as well as the trend internationally towards placing children at risk into 'kinship care' rather than 'foster care'<sup>5</sup>. In Australia, recent figures<sup>6</sup> indicate that there are approximately 31,000 children in formal out-of-home care, an increase of almost 10% on the previous 12 months and a 115% increase in the last 10 years. Forty-five percent (approximately 14,000) of these children were in kinship care, with more than half (7,723) residing in NSW. However, it is important to note in interpreting such statistics that these relate only to formal kinship care, that is when children have been officially placed in the care of an extended family member by state welfare authorities, and do not include informal kinship care, that is when the care of children has been arranged by the family without the involvement of child protection or welfare authorities. Whilst it is often not self-evident, other studies have pointed out that 'kinship care' often translates as 'grandparent care', with grandparents, especially maternal grandmothers, being the most frequent caregivers of children in out-of-home care.<sup>7</sup> The policy context that underpins such arrangements is complex, since grandparent care remains somewhat precariously positioned at the crossroads of state/family provision<sup>8</sup>. As Cashmore and Ainsworth<sup>9</sup> signal, much more needs to be addressed in

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<sup>1</sup> Dr Jan Backhouse is a Researcher at the Centre for Children & Young People, School of Education at Southern Cross University, Lismore NSW.

<sup>2</sup> Professor Anne Graham is Director of the Centre for Children & Young People, School of Education at Southern Cross University, Lismore NSW.

<sup>3</sup> See Carole B Cox (ed), *To Grandmother's House We Go and Stay: Perspectives on Custodial Grandparents* (Springer, New York, 2000); Alison Richards, *Second Time Around: A Survey of Grandparents Raising Their Grandchildren* (Family Rights Group, London, 2001); Margaret Fitzpatrick, *Grandparents Raising Grandchildren* (Council on the Ageing, Melbourne, 2004); Jill Worrall, *Grandparents and other Relatives Raising Kin Children in Aotearoa/New Zealand* (Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Charitable Trust, Auckland, 2005).

<sup>4</sup> See Jan Backhouse and Trevor Lucas, *Social Change and its Impact on the Generative Role of Contemporary Australian Grandparents* (Unpublished Honours Thesis, School of Social Sciences, Southern Cross University, Lismore NSW, 2003).

<sup>5</sup> See Stacey R. Kolomer, 'Kinship foster care and its impact on grandmother caregivers' (2000) 33(3) *Journal of Gerontological Social Work* 85; Bob Broad (ed), *Kinship Care: The Placement Choice for Children and Young People* (Russell House, Dorset UK, 2001); Jan Mason et al, *Understanding Kinship Care* (Association of Childrens Welfare Agencies, Sydney, 2002).

<sup>6</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Child Protection Australia 2007-2008* (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Canberra 2009).

<sup>7</sup> See Jill Worrall, *Because We're Family: A Study of Kinship Care of Children in New Zealand* (Unpublished Masters Thesis, Massey University, 1996); Bob Broad, 'Kinship care for children in the UK: Messages from research, lessons for policy and practice' (2004) 7(2) *European Journal of Social Work* 211; Barbara Horner et al, 'Grandparent-headed families in Australia' (2007) 76 *Family Matters* 76.

<sup>8</sup> See Bettina Cass, 'Exploring social care: Applying a new construct to young carers and grandparent carers' (2007) 42(2) *Australian Journal of Social Issues* 241.

terms of the impacts of federal and state social policy systems in areas such as income support, childcare services, child protection, family support services, physical and mental health services and the like, particularly as these pertain to the wellbeing of grandparents and the children for whom they care.

Despite the considerable rise in the number of kinship carers in Australia, grandparents-as-parents remain largely 'hidden' within our community, with the attendant consequences significantly unrecognised. Whilst there has been some important research undertaken in the past in relation to grandparents raising their grandchildren<sup>10</sup> this has focused predominantly on documenting the reasons surrounding these care arrangements, together with the benefits and challenges in doing so. However, little is known about the views and experiences of grandparents in relation to their *grandparent-as-parent role*, that is, the ways in which taking on the care of grandchildren shapes the identity of this sub-group of Australian elders. The study<sup>11</sup> briefly reported below set out to address this gap. One of the key issues emerging from the research findings, discussed later in this paper, was a pervading sense of injustice reported by the grandparents in relation to their care work.

## THE STUDY

Given a key interest of the study was on accessing the meaning grandparents attach to their experiences, a qualitative methodology based on narrative inquiry was chosen to accommodate an emphasis on grandparent 'voice'. Narrative inquiry involves a joint storying and restorying process in a collaborative relationship between participant and researcher<sup>12</sup> and seeks to capture participants' views and experiences such that their voices are present in the telling or (re)presentation of their stories. The study design was underpinned by a strong concern with, and detailed attention to, the ethical considerations embedded in the inquiry process, since it was anticipated many of the grandparent stories would be woven with potentially sensitive or painful emotional experiences. All Southern Cross University Ethics Committee guidelines and protocols were adhered to in relation to advice regarding information and purpose of the research, as well as issues of consent, confidentiality, privacy and anonymity of participants.

A purposive sampling technique was used to recruit the participants, in order to select 'information-rich' cases for in-depth study.<sup>13</sup> Grandparents of any age, gender, cultural background or socio-economic group were eligible, but were required to be involved in the full-time caregiving role of their grandchildren. A total of 27 grandmothers and 7 grandfathers (caring for 45 grandchildren) took part in the study. The participants were drawn from a range of metropolitan (n=8) and rural (n=26) areas of NSW. The grandparents ranged in age from their late 40's to mid 70's (m=56.7) and were from a diversity of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. The grandchildren they were caring for ranged in age from 1-17 years old (m=8.5).

Data were collected through in-depth interviews as this was deemed the most appropriate method for accessing grandparent views and experiences. Narrative principles guided the interview process and hence required questions to emerge in response to participants' stories rather than from a prepared schedule of pre-determined questions. Consistent with this approach, the interview with each grandparent focused on two main questions only:

1. Can you tell me how the grandchildren came into your care?
2. Can you tell me about your experiences of raising your grandchildren?

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<sup>9</sup> Judy Cashmore and Frank Ainsworth, *Audit of Australian Out-Of-Home Care Research* (Association of Childrens Welfare Agencies, Sydney, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> See Margot Fitzpatrick and Patricia Reeve, 'Grandparents raising grandchildren—a new class of disadvantaged Australians' (2003) 66 *Family Matters* 54; Ellison, Sarah et al, *Access to Justice and Legal Needs, Volume 1: The Legal Needs of Older People in NSW* (Law and Justice Foundation of NSW, Sydney, 2004); Fitzpatrick, above n 3.

<sup>11</sup> Jan Backhouse, *Grandparents raising their grandchildren: Impact of the transition from a traditional grandparent role to a grandparent-as-parent role* (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Southern Cross University, Lismore NSW, 2008).

<sup>12</sup> Jean Clandinin and F. Michael Connelly, *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research* (Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 2000).

<sup>13</sup> Michael Q Patton, *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods* (Sage Publications, 3rd ed, 2002), 230.

The stories that emerged in response to these questions were rich and extensive, with over 50 hours of interviews transcribed into a total of over 180,000 words of typed text. The qualitative data analysis software program, NUD\*IST, was used to manage and organise the large volume of data. Whilst a detailed discussion of the approach taken in analysing the narratives is beyond the scope of this paper, it is important to note the data were subject to three layers of analysis: firstly, a paradigmatic or 'top layer' analysis identified major themes in the data linked to both the key research questions (above). Secondly, a narrative analysis 'unpacked' these themes to reveal a number of key, paradoxical issues emerging in response to the grandparents' stories, including the highs and lows, joys and sadness, struggles and achievements of these grandparents as they re-lived their role as grandparents-as-parents. Thirdly, since issues of role and identity were central to the narratives, the findings were then analysed using key concepts drawn from the field of identity theory, including 'role identity', 'identity salience' and 'commitment'<sup>14</sup>. The process of analysis revealed significant dissonance and ambiguity for grandparents as they moved back and forth between different states of 'being' both parent and grandparent. This movement between roles was compounded by the extent of the change, loss and grief that grandparents negotiated as they assumed the parenting role and the sense of inequity and injustice embedded in many of the narratives. A second round of interviews was subsequently conducted with five of the participants in order to confirm these emerging interpretations. The further interviews constituted an important part of the restorying process integral to a narrative inquiry approach.

## KEY FINDINGS: THE PARADOX OF CARING FOR GRANDCHILDREN

### *Pain and Pleasure*

The initial, thematic analysis of the grandparents' stories revealed a complex picture of their experience of raising grandchildren, simultaneously marked both by deep pain and pleasure. Every grandparent interviewed spoke with considerable emotion about the circumstances leading up to the placement of the children in their care. Key issues included parental drug and alcohol addiction, sole parenthood, mental illness, incarceration, domestic violence/abuse and HIV/AIDS. Whilst these six factors have previously been well documented in the literature<sup>15</sup>, two further issues linked to notions of 'apathy' or 'indifference' on the part of the children's parents were also identified.

As the grandparents' talked of their experiences, the feelings of sadness, frustration, grief and loss were palpable in their stories, particularly as they revealed the many challenges they faced in taking over the primary care of their grandchildren. These included financial issues, legal battles, physical and emotional health problems, social isolation and lifestyle changes, parenting problems and conflict with the children's parents:

*Since taking on (granddaughter) I mean I'm in debt, and I've been in debt the whole time. Personal loans, credit cards, friends, whatever. I mean, it goes up and down, it fluctuates, but then basically I'm in debt. Especially now that she's getting older. (Penny)*

*To enforce the court orders, we were left with the fact that, ok, if you want to do something about it, then you take her (daughter) back to court, which means you've got to have the money and if you go into debt to do that, to take her back to court, then you're taking off the children you're trying to protect. (Pam)*

*I do get tired now and I think I am more than a bit tired by the end of the week ... after I finish work I pick up the children from the after-school care and then I go and visit my Mum and then I come home and start school homework, bath ... it gets a bit much sometimes. (Helen)*

<sup>14</sup> See Sheldon Stryker and Peter J. Burke, 'The past, present, and future of an identity theory' (2000) 63(4) *Social Psychology Quarterly* 284.

<sup>15</sup> See Daphne Joslin, 'Grandparents raising children orphaned and affected by HIV/AIDS' in Carole B Cox (ed), *To Grandmother's House We Go and Stay: Perspectives on Custodial Grandparents* (Springer, New York, 2000); Carrie Smith et al, 'Grandparents raising grandchildren: Emerging program and policy issues for the 21st century' (2000) 34(1) *Journal of Gerontological Social Work* 81; Jan Mason et al, above n 5; Nicole Patton, *Parental Drug Use – A Recent Phenomenon* (Mirabel Foundation, Victoria, 2004); Jill Worrall, 'Challenges of grandparent custody of children at risk in New Zealand' (2006) 87(4) *Families in Society* 546; Emma Baldock, 'Grandparents raising grandchildren because of alcohol and other drug issues' (2007) 79 *Family Matters* 70.

*Yes, we did have quite a good social life, my partner and I ... We were involved in quite a large group and now we're very much on the fringes of that. We sometimes get an invitation along to something, but in general the people in our group know that we're just not available most of the time, so they don't ask any more. (Joanne)*

*We've never begrudged having these boys, because we wouldn't have had it any other way, but the emotional side of it, it wasn't just with the boys, it was still with the parents ongoing and it never ceased ... the drama just never left us, and it still never does, even to this day, 9 years down the track. (Carol)*

Apart from such challenges, a number faced additional concerns when the children's parents were in prison, suffered from a mental illness, or had supervised access with their children. Grandparents also voiced a number of future concerns, including the grandchildren's education, raising teenagers, retirement issues, conflict with members of their extended families, as well as what might happen to the grandchildren if and when they could no longer care for them.

At the same time, however, the grandparents' stories revealed the depth of their commitment to the care, safety and happiness of their grandchildren, often at the expense of their own lives. For example, the grandparents reported giving up their routines, their friends, retirement plans, social lives and, in some cases, their jobs to devote more time and energy to the well-being of their grandchildren. They routinely put their grandchildren's financial needs before their own, often drawing on very meagre income to provide for the children's health, education, out of school/sporting activities and the like, in an attempt to give their grandchildren the same opportunities available to other children. Some of the grandparents took on menial jobs such as ironing and cleaning to supplement their income, and furthered their education in order to help grandchildren with their schooling, as well as 'updating' their parenting skills. For most, the fact they could do this gave them deep satisfaction despite their ongoing pain, since they knew their grandchildren's lives would be immeasurably better as a result. The benefits they perceived for themselves included the chance to parent a second time, be close to their grandchildren as they grow, and feel reassured and confident they were now emotionally and physically safe, happy and cared for:

*I think (grandson) has gained and I think all these kids in a similar situation have gained from being with grandparents. They come to us for a reason and if it's because of family breakdown, they gain a great deal by coming into the care of grandparents. I think we mellow over the years, we have a lot of life experiences, more patience, more tolerance and I think we're better able to deal with these children who do come with lots of psychological issues and behavioural problems. (Michelle)*

*The benefits are I've watched them, I just look at them growing up ... I look at these kids, these four kids and I can't imagine our lives without them ... (Carol)*

*There's a lot of joy, you know, and I think in a lot of ways it's quite a privilege to do it, to have so much involvement with your grandchildren. They keep you younger, I think, because you have to be, you've got to be more active and organised ... Yes, knowing that they're safe, definitely, knowing that they're safe and well. (Joanne)*

### *The space between 'myth' and 'reality'*

A deeper examination of the grandparents' narratives revealed a gap between quite deeply embedded expectations of a 'traditional' grandparent role and the reality of the current, lived experience of being grandparent-as-parent. The space between these two roles was often described in terms of a perceived sense of 'difference':

*I don't feel like a grandparent. I feel like a parent ... I thought that being a grandmother would involve being able to indulge them and spoil them and then hand them back. I guess that's how I thought it would be. Well, it's entirely different because I don't have that role at all. I have the role of a mother, because it's full time 24/7, there's no handing them back, there's no taking a break. (Cindy)*

*I want to take on the grandmother role and treat them as a grandmother would, but I can't because I have to be the disciplinarian ... You can't be their grandparent and raise them, it just doesn't work that way. You've got to take on a different role. (Joanne)*

It was clear from their stories that the loss of the traditional grandparent role was significant. Instead of the 'mythical' grandparent role involving 'pleasure without responsibility', these grandparents perceived their relationship with their grandchildren in terms of being disciplinarian, provider and authority figure.

Hence, the loss of the traditional grandparent role, and consequential shift to the grandparent-as-parent role, impacted on the grandparents in a number of different ways, including provoking feelings of being unrecognised, disadvantaged, misunderstood and isolated within the community:

*I don't know, but I do think grandparents are a forgotten race, well grandparents caring for their grandchildren. (Sarah)*

*We go back to what would our government do for these children. They give their mother and father the dole, they get free medical, they can go and see a psychiatrist and the government will pay that, but when it comes to these people's children, who are young and need the guidance now, it's not available. (Peggy)*

*There was nobody to talk to about it. Everybody I spoke to ... it was sort of like a door slamming in your face. You don't have that right, you're only grandparents ... It's quite traumatic, when life should be easier, it's not. And there's nobody there helping and making it easier. (Joy)*

*I think there needs to be more general awareness that a lot of grandparents are raising grandchildren ... a general acknowledgement in the community, or awareness, that is not such an unusual thing for kids to be living with grandparents ... (Joy)*

It was evident from the views reported by grandparents that their experience of grandparent-as-parent placed them in a quite ambiguous policy position - between being visible/invisible, deserving/undeserving, voice/silenced, and included/excluded. Whilst these themes are explored in more depth elsewhere<sup>16</sup> it is important to note here that most grandparent participants perceived a strong sense of injustice in relation to their experience.

#### GRANDPARENTS-AS-PARENTS: APPEALING FOR JUSTICE

The complexity that surrounds the experience of grandparents raising grandchildren is very evident in the discussion thus far. For the most part, the participants interviewed could articulate how and why the pleasure outweighed the pain and everyday realities muted any longing to be in the role of 'traditional' grandparent. However, as signalled above this often left these grandparents in a difficult and ambiguous emotional, social, financial and legal space where they felt they often weren't afforded the recognition and respect their caregiving efforts deserved. Many grandparents commented, for example, they were 'saving the government money' by raising their grandchildren, yet not receiving adequate financial and social support to do the job well:

*I'm trying to do it (raise grandchildren) to save the government money, but anything that's handed out is handed out to parents, but not grandparents ... (Helen)*

*Our government knows that we exist, but I think our government thinks, "Oh, well, they're grandparents, that's what they should do". (Pam)*

*So, you're forever dipping in (to savings). It's quite traumatic, when life should be easier, it's not ... And there's nobody there helping and making it easier. (Joy)*

Many of the grandparent narratives made reference to a belief that foster carers were 'appreciated' for the job they do, however grandparent caregivers were 'expected' to do the same job without any recognition:

*If you foster children you're appreciated, but if you're a grandparent that's expected of you, and that's not on. Because, it's not really our job, so I think if any of us do that sort of thing we should be appreciated more than anyone. We're taking on another family that we shouldn't have had to take on. Yes, I do believe that. (Helen)*

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<sup>16</sup> Backhouse, above n 11.

Also, foster carers were viewed as being able to avail themselves of ongoing support from the NSW Department of Community Services (DoCS) in raising foster children, whereas when children were placed with grandparents it was assumed that 'they're okay, they're with family' and no further support was required:

*We feel that DoCS attitude has been, in terms of need (grandchildren) are doing okay, so shut the door on that, they're okay, they're with their grandparents ... We know that things need to be prioritised and we know that (grandchildren) are not a high priority to DoCS any more, because they're in a long-term placement, their needs are being met, they're well cared for, they're developing. So we can understand that, but that's not to say that we don't need some support and we don't get any. (Cindy)*

*I think DoCS feels that once a child is placed in kinship care they're okay, they're with family, we don't need to do anything more, case closed. But they have to realise that we need support too, that it's a shock to us the circumstances around us getting these kids are sometimes tragic. They're not okay just because they're with family, we're not okay just because we're family, we still need the same back-up and that there's a chance of respite and things like that and the availability of services for the children outside, sometimes the other things that they need like speech therapy, specialists for health problems. (Joanne)*

A number of the grandparents also commented on the fact that authorities did not appear to acknowledge that, unlike foster carers, grandparent caregivers have the 'baggage of family' to deal with in addition to their caring responsibilities. Many of the grandparents believed that there was a lot of stigma attached to the grandparent-as-parent role, that they have been unjustly blamed for having to raise their grandchildren, and are 'somehow responsible for what's gone wrong':

*I've had comments from people within DoCS that because we haven't done a very good job with our own kids, why should we be given another lot to try with ... It might be the shame attached to us, that we've done something wrong with the (adult) children that have gone along the drug path, the alcohol path, and yes, there is a definite stigma I think between foster carers and kinship carers because there is this sense of blame, that we're somehow responsible for what's gone wrong. (Joanne)*

The grief and frustration evident in the narratives of the majority of these grandparents is consistent with Kittay's<sup>17</sup> research on care and justice, which argues that when caregivers experience a lack of support or social cooperation, both the caregiver and the care receiver will suffer. As Kittay argues, 'justice requires the reciprocity of those equally situated'<sup>18</sup>, a dynamic not readily recognised or experienced by the grandparents in this study. Kittay's view is also endorsed by Fine<sup>19</sup>, who adds that 'justice is not served if those who provide care to those who are dependent are penalized, either directly or indirectly'. It is clear that grandparents in the study believed they had a moral duty to raise their grandchildren in the absence of the children's parents. However, a lack of financial and social support by government towards the care of their grandchildren was perceived as an injustice that needs addressing.

A number of the grandparents interviewed were also fighting for legal custody of their grandchildren in order to prevent them from being placed into foster care and to keep the family unit together. In some cases, this was undertaken whilst continuing their support for adult children whose often chaotic or dysfunctional lifestyles were the very reason why the children were in their care. A number of these grandparents spoke about the perceived injustice associated with Legal Aid in NSW<sup>20</sup> where, in custody/residence cases, their adult children were entitled to advice and representation through (means tested) Legal Aid, whereas the grandparents mightn't qualify because of home ownership, retirement savings or current employment. Cindy described how she and her husband had to use his retirement funds to pay legal expenses:

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<sup>17</sup> Eva G. Kittay, 'When caring is just and justice is caring: Justice and mental retardation' in Eva F Kittay and E K Feder (eds), *The Subject of Care: Feminist Perspectives on Dependency* (Rowman & Littlefield, Maryland, 2002).

<sup>18</sup> Ibid 140.

<sup>19</sup> Michael Fine, *A Caring Society? Care and the Dilemmas of Human Service in the Twenty-First Century* (Palgrave Macmillan, Hampshire UK, 2007).

<sup>20</sup> Legal Aid NSW, *Policies in Brief* (April 2010) <<http://www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au/data/portal/00000005/public/06408001248933505762.pdf>>.

*Everybody else has Legal Aid and because we are self-funded retirees, we obviously don't get Legal Aid, so we pay \$500 a day for someone to appear in court for us. And we've been dragged into court for the most ludicrous things. (Cindy)*

Pam also told the story of numerous court appearances over more than two years, which had cost thousands of dollars because her husband was employed and therefore they were not entitled to Legal Aid:

*The thing with the mother is she could take us back to court and keep us there forever, because she got Legal Aid, we didn't, and even though when the eldest girl no longer wanted to see her mother, her mother got Legal Aid to take us back to court ... It cost us, I think it was about \$8,000-\$10,000 for us to go back to court for that child to have the right not to see her mother. (Pam)*

Additionally, the funds they had to use on enforcing court orders, Pam believed, was money that should have gone towards the care of the grandchildren:

*To enforce the court orders, we were left with the fact that, ok, if you want to do something about it, then you take her (daughter) back to court, which means you've got to have the money and if you go into debt to do that, to take her back to court, then you're taking off the children you're trying to protect. (Pam)*

At the heart of this difficulty seems to lie the different ways both law and policy are applied across jurisdictions which 'entail different treatments of grandparent headed families, shaping the conditions and frameworks of care, and affecting the distribution of services and benefits'<sup>21</sup>. The financial and emotional stress reported by the grandparents appeared to be exacerbated by the pervading sense of injustice they experienced as they fought for the decisions, supports and resources they felt would be available to them were they not a kin carer, a finding which supports earlier work in this area undertaken by Dunne & Kettler<sup>22</sup>.

At the time of this study, there was little by way of acknowledgement of the rights and support available to grandparents raising grandchildren in NSW. This was despite a number of key documents such as the NSW Social Justice Directions Statement<sup>23</sup> and the 2006-09 Strategic Framework of the Australian Federal Government's Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, suggesting principles of equity, access, participation and rights were available for all<sup>24</sup>. Based on the experience reported by the grandparents in this study, it appears such 'high level' State and Federal Government policy initiatives had failed to take into account the complexity of their circumstances in raising their grandchildren. As West<sup>25</sup> also argues:

If caregiving is not to impoverish or diminish the opportunities of those who engage in it, they need familial, community, or state support, whether or not the decision to embark on the caregiving path was voluntarily taken.

Some more recent policy initiatives offer new promise. Firstly, improving support for grandparent caregivers has been made a national priority in the recent Federal Government's *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children*<sup>26</sup>. Under this initiative the Federal Government has committed to exploring options for improving financial and non-financial support to grandparent caregivers, as well as providing enhanced support for grandparent-headed families as a specified target group under the Federal Government's Communities for Children program. Secondly, in response to the *Wood Special Commission of Inquiry Report into Child Protection*, the NSW Government has implemented the 'Keep them Safe: A Shared Approach to Child Wellbeing' Action Plan for the five years 2009-2014.

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<sup>21</sup> Cass, above n 8, 249.

<sup>22</sup> Emer Dunne and Lisa Kettler, 'Social and emotional issues of children in kinship foster care and stressors on kinship carers' (2006) 31(2) *Children Australia* 22.

<sup>23</sup> New South Wales Government, *Fair Go, Fair Share, Fair Say: New South Wales Social Justice Directions Statement* (NSW Government, Sydney 1996) 1.

<sup>24</sup> Australian Government, *FaCSIA Strategic Framework 2006-2009* (Department of Families Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Canberra, 2007).

<sup>25</sup> Robin West, 'The right to care' in Eva F Kittay and E K Feder (eds), *The Subject of Care: Feminist Perspectives on Dependency* (Rowman & Littlefield, Maryland, 2002) 93.

<sup>26</sup> Council of Australian Governments, *Protecting Children is Everyone's Business* (Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 2009) 13.

Included in this Plan are improved supports for foster, relative and kinship carers, in order to 'ensure they feel recognised and valued for the important contribution they make to the outcomes for children and young people in care'<sup>27</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

The grandparents who participated in this study are clearly deeply committed to the welfare and well-being of their grandchildren. Only time will tell whether more recent policy initiatives will better recognise the complex positioning of these grandparents as they navigate the difficult emotional, social, financial, legislative and policy contexts of their lives, primarily in pursuit of better outcomes for their grandchildren. Governments will need to continually examine how their emerging policy frameworks can accommodate the experiences of grandparents raising their grandchildren given such policy practices considerably shape what is possible in such relationships of care, including the health and well-being of both grandparent and grandchild.

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<sup>27</sup> NSW Government, *Keep Them Safe: A Shared Approach to Child Wellbeing* (Sydney, 2009) 16.



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