

Submission to:

**Community Affairs References
Committee**

**Inquiry into Grandparents who take
primary responsibility for raising their
grandchildren.**

**From:
Chris Bannah**

I am a grandmother with 10 grandchildren aged between 2 years old and 30 years old and I am a great-grandmother with 2 great-grandchildren aged 1 year and 4 years old. My sole income is a pension and I live in a 1 bed senior public housing unit.

I have played a major role in the raising of several of these children.

a) I see the practical challenges facing grandparents being:

1. The aging factor, including stamina, mind alertness, other health factors.
2. Locality/logistics – children attending kindy/preschool to be able to live close for afterschool care and attend “play dates” with their friends.
3. Environment – providing a safe and healthy environment with vigilance including appropriate accommodation, an example is my [REDACTED] grandson has to share my bed, he kicks and stirs all night and disturbs my sleep.
4. Support needs are nil as I have asked Housing to transfer to a 2 bed unit and they blatantly refused and said, family needs are above mine and I don't qualify unless I have custody and payments. There is no support in the community either as I pay full price if I take the child to an indoor play centre or swimming pool there is no discount for a pensioner. It also makes it harder as my grandchildren live at the Gold Coast and I live in Brisbane as I cannot get any welfare assistance for clothing, bedding or food. It cost \$12 to buy night pants for 1 weeks supply in case of bed wetting.

I also need to have everything here he needs such as Panadol, magnesium capsules, multivitamin and a first aid kit. Financially now the cost of transport is a burden to me as he has started school. I now have a financial strain as I have to help with his educational needs while in my care. His mother is a single parent paying [REDACTED] rent before paying electricity, gas, water, school uniform, lunches, fuel costs, vehicle registration, repairs, tyres and insurance then food. She cannot contribute to any costs I have when I have the child.

b) The role and contributor of grandparents & how should it be recognised.

1. I would like to have a card of authority similar to a “blue card” & including child's Medicare/pension No. and state that I am a grandparent carer. An example that happened to me when I had to take my very sick [REDACTED] grandson to the Mater Hospital at 1 am.

Prior – I had called a night doctor to come to my place but they wouldn't because I had no Medicare card or pension card for the child, I had no identification for the child and no medical history. At the Mater Hospital it was apparent that they had to try to contact the Gold Coast Hospital where he was born and get some medical

information in case of allergies. After 3 and a half hours I was given a script for antibiotics that I could not get filled at a chemist as I had no Medicare card or pension card and I did not have the money to pay for it.

Grandparent carers need a card as it will acknowledge we have authority to have the child treated.

2. Grandparents contribute by providing a family atmosphere of love, kindness, caring and sharing not like a day-care that have children a few hours a day then send them home. Grandparents provide a substitute parent that includes trust, reliability, consistency and time and especially unconditional love and acceptance.
- c) Other challenges that grandparents face undertaking their role.
1. Special circumstances such as mental illness, family conflict or child abuse or neglect, family violence and others. Each case must be examined by its own merits. If the grandparents however, must allow visitation to any of the above, it should be with supervision by child safety officers and should not be the responsibility of the grandparents. The duty of care here should be to the child.
- d) Barriers grandparents face regarding legal recognition.
1. There is little to no information available to grandparents regarding legal issues dealing with visitation rights or custodial arrangements. There is a lot of red tape and no support and this is why grandparents need a carer's card to recognise they have rights.
- e) The practical measures that governments can implement are.
1. An authority card
 2. Counselling
 3. Arbitration
 4. Set regular visitation rights
 5. Recognition for grandparents on both sides at child safety and other services
 6. Transport cards such as access cards (\$60 per year)
 7. A small part payment (Centrelink) \$30 p/w, that does not affect the mother/parent pension.
 8. Triple P program free to grandparents.
- f) The specific needs of groups within carers population.
1. Cultural respect
 2. Religious respect
 3. A focus group to brain storm needs and challenges
 4. A research group from a University could help.
- g) Other related matters.

1. Great-grandparents need recognition – aged Australians should be included with some rights as grandparents. As I am a great-grandparent I was told I had no rights as a kinship carer for my great-grandson as he'd been placed in the care of Child Safety at a young age.



Now the child is 4 years old Child Safety is now saying I can get visiting rights as they are giving the child's mother full custody in May this year. A bit too late for me as the child's mother can at any time stop me from seeing the child.

2. Aunties should also have rights. When my great-grandson was only about 8 weeks old, my daughter fostered the child to keep him safe. My daughter supplied nappies, formula, clothing and everything that was needed for him including pram, cot, car seat, etc. My daughter had him till he was around 8 months old. He was then taken from her and placed with the maternal grandmother who worked full time and left the child with the child's mother's step father – not maternal grandfather (as above).

I believe these matters need to be addressed.

In conclusion, my recommendations are,

1. A 'carers' card that is recognised by government & community services and by transport and medical providers.
2. A part carer's allowance i.e. \$30 p/w
3. Pharmaceutical allowance to be added to pension card of grandparents(possibly \$5 a month)
4. An access transport card \$60 per year payable by the grandparent or community service provider.
5. Legal aid providers should provide a special service for grandparents/great-grandparents who need to get legal recognition (and visitation rights) in the Family Court decision regarding the child/children.
6. A community service provider that could arbitrate between all stake holders regarding the child/children. The service provider could also provide a focus group and/or a support group for grandparents to deal with the issues and provide support.

7. All grandparents' medical, criminal, social history should be checked for the safety of the child/children.

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Date: