

# Chapter 4

## Non-financial challenges and supports

4.1 Grandparent carers face many practical challenges when they assume the primary responsibility for raising their grandchildren. While financial considerations arguably present the greatest challenge, there are also non-financial matters which affect the grandparents and their ability to best provide for their grandchildren.

4.2 In this chapter, the committee examines:

- support and service needs of grandparents raising grandchildren;
- Commonwealth, state and territory non-financial assistance; and
- funding for community service providers.

### Support and service needs of grandparents raising grandchildren

4.3 Kinship care literature reports that access to timely and appropriate supports and services is critical to grandparents raising grandchildren.<sup>1</sup> Throughout the inquiry, participants informed the committee that these needs are not being adequately met. In some cases, grandparents are choosing not to access the supports and services (for example, due to a fear that they will be perceived as incapable of caring for the children).<sup>2</sup> In other instances, the committee heard that grandparents are not aware of or cannot access existing supports and services.<sup>3</sup>

4.4 A number of specific supports and services were discussed in evidence provided to the committee, including: staff in government departments and agencies; training for the care role; access to and availability of respite; education support and information; assessment of grandparents raising grandchildren; and support groups.

#### *Staff in government departments and agencies*

4.5 UnitingCare Children, Young People and Families identified a need for grandparents raising grandchildren to have ongoing access to support from caseworkers, according to the needs of the families concerned.<sup>4</sup> Research studies have highlighted that the type of caseworker is equally important:

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1 Brennan, D., Cass, B., Flaxman, S., Hill, T., Jenkins, B., McHugh, M., Purcal, C. and valentine, k. (2013), *Grandparents raising grandchildren: Towards recognition, respect and reward* (SPRC Report 14/13) (*Grandparents raising grandchildren*), Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales, p. 24. Also see: National Seniors, *Submission 131*, p. 7.

2 For example: Tweed Valley Kin Care Support Group Inc., *Submission 56*, p. 2; UnitingCare Tasmania, *Submission 65*, p. 13; Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Tasmania, *Submission 100*, p. [2].

3 The issue of grandparents' awareness of existing supports and services is discussed in Chapter 3.

4 *Submission 85*, p. 3. Also see: Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW), *Submission 132*, p. 8.

*What carers wanted from workers:* maturity, experience, understanding and respect; appreciation of a carer's situation/story; understanding the carer's mixed emotions/divided loyalties with parents and grandchildren; ability to involve extended family in decisions/planning; and an understanding of drug/alcohol addiction.<sup>5</sup>

4.6 Dr Bridget Jenkins described how many grandparents raising grandchildren:

...were a little bit miffed about the fact that the caseworkers and the people they come into contact with at [the Department of Family and Community Services (NSW)] are often young girls who are 50 or 40 years younger than them and cannot really understand what it is like to raise a child and raise a grandchild.

...

So many times, grandparents felt that they were being judged and blamed for the birth parent's behaviours...Being disrespected by people 30, 40 or 50 years younger than you are is not good in any circumstance. We hear a lot of grandparents saying: 'I don't want to enter the system. I know that there is financial [and non-financial] support available and I know I can get all these things, but I do not want [the Department of Family and Community Services (NSW)] to monitor me and to know what I am doing'.<sup>6</sup>

4.7 In Western Australia, the Department for Child Protection and Family Services advised that the average age for its 860 caseworkers ranges from 28.5 to 31 years of age. A representative assured the committee that understanding the circumstances of grandparents raising grandchildren 'is something that is front and centre for our priorities in terms of our learning and development agenda'.<sup>7</sup>

4.8 At the federal level, an officer from the Department of Human Services (Department) stated:

[W]hat we are doing...with the grandparent advisors is making sure that we have in place people with experience to talk to the grandparents in these situations as issues arise. Our grandparent advisors have the experience and understanding to be able to link those people and help them connect to the services we have.<sup>8</sup>

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5 McHugh, M. (2009), *A Framework of Practice for Implementing a Kinship Care Program*, Report for the Benevolent Society, Social Policy Research Centre, p. 10. Also see: Yardley, A., Mason, J. and E. Watson (2009), *Kinship Care in NSW: Finding a way forward*, Social Justice and Social Change Research Centre, University of Western Sydney, Sydney, p. 69.

6 Centre for Social Impact, *Committee Hansard*, Sydney, 13 June 2014, pp 7-8.

7 Ms Emma White, *Committee Hansard*, Perth, 6 August 2014, p. 15. Also see: Mr Matthew Strong, Senior Solicitor, Family Law and Child Protection, Civil Section, North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency, *Committee Hansard*, Darwin, 5 August 2014, p. 3, who remarked on the high turnover and limited training supplied to caseworkers.

8 Mr Bill Volkers, General Manager, Face to Face Service Delivery, *Committee Hansard*, Perth, 6 August 2014, p. 56.

4.9 The Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) submitted that cultural change is a crucial element of valuing unpaid care (such as grandparent provided care), recommending:

That Commonwealth and state and territory front line staff interacting with grandparent carers receive appropriate training so that services to grandparent carers are provided with sensitivity to age and culture.<sup>9</sup>

4.10 Women's Legal Services NSW agreed that there is a need for more cultural sensitivity, with the appointment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander caseworkers for matters involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families:

We hear anecdotally that in mainstream services rather than allocating an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander caseworker to work directly with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, there tend to be Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff appointed to advise the service more generally about culturally appropriate practices.<sup>10</sup>

### ***Training for the care role***

4.11 Some participants commented on the need for grandparents raising grandchildren to receive training in contemporary parenting practices. The Child and Family Welfare Agencies Association submitted, for example:

Grandparents may hold onto past techniques of parenting that are not viewed as positive by today's standards. This may result in higher levels of conflict within the household. Experience has shown that there are few resources to assist grandparents [to] make the transition to different ways of parenting.<sup>11</sup>

4.12 National Seniors endorsed evidence-based training programs, such as the Triple P–Positive Parenting Program, which was reported by the University of Queensland to:

...not only improve grandchildren's behaviour but also lower experiences of depression, anxiety and stress and help to create better intergenerational relationships.<sup>12</sup>

4.13 While some grandparents raising grandchildren considered favourably training in contemporary parenting practices,<sup>13</sup> Uniting Care Community argued that some grandparents fear parenting again as they 'feel that they may have indeed failed the first time and do not want to make the same mistakes'.<sup>14</sup> Further, currently available programs are not appropriately targeted to grandparents' needs, for example:

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9 *Submission 133*, p. 17.

10 *Submission 138*, p. 9.

11 *Submission 151*, p. [2].

12 *Submission 131*, pp 12-13.

13 For example: Sutherland Shire Grandparents' Support Group, *Submission 36*, p. 1.

14 Also see: Mrs Anne McLeish, Grandparents Victoria and Kinship Care, Victoria, *Committee Hansard*, Melbourne, 10 June 2014, p. 23.

We have a lot of single grandmothers on our program. Once their grandsons get to teenage years, they also contact us to try and seek mentors but those sorts of programs are few and far between.<sup>15</sup>

4.14 Submitters and witnesses commented also on training for the assumption of care responsibilities. Formal grandparents raising grandchildren are provided with training in some jurisdictions but this training is not necessarily mandatory. Participants argued that all grandparents should have access to,<sup>16</sup> or be required to undertake, training which adequately prepares them for their new care responsibilities. Wanslea Family Services Inc. (Wanslea), for example, submitted:

Often children come into the care of their grandparents for serious issues of neglect, parental abandonment and child abuse. Therefore, the children present with particular behavioural and developmental challenges and a history of trauma that require particular parenting and/or therapeutic practices and strategies.<sup>17</sup>

4.15 A grandparent in Western Australia recounted his experience and agreed:

You are not equipped. One of the things you realise is, 'Hey, we brought up three children when we were in our young 30s and so forth', but bringing up a child who is a fairly high-need sort of child, with [attention deficit hyperactivity disorder] and dyslexia and so forth, proved to be a big challenge. We were not really equipped to do this. That is how I felt early on. You do not have the skills.<sup>18</sup>

4.16 UnitingCare Tasmania remarked that grandparents raising grandchildren 'cannot be expected to respond therapeutically if they have not received robust training in how to respond to such challenges'.<sup>19</sup> The training must also be delivered in a sensitive manner:

Grandparents need to (a) know that [the training] exists and (b) know that they can pick up the phone and the person that they speak to is not going to be judgemental, is going to work with them in a collaborative way and is going to give them the respect that they deserve as people who know these children and who know the issues that their family has experienced more than any professional, any programmer or any worker does.<sup>20</sup>

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15 Ms Julie Argeros, *Committee Hansard*, Sydney, 13 June 2014, p. 33. Also see: Grandparents Rearing Grandchildren WA (Inc.) (GRG WA), *Submission 50*, p. [5].

16 For example: Ms Sue Rouch, Social Policy Officer, AASW, *Committee Hansard*, Melbourne, 10 June 2014, p. 40.

17 *Submission 150*, p. 6. Also see: Relationships Australia, *Submission 58*, p. [3]; GRG WA, *Submission 50*, p. [5].

18 Mr Ron Richards, *Committee Hansard*, Albany, 7 August 2014, p. 21.

19 *Submission 65*, p. 11. Also see: Mr Bernie Geary, Victorian Commission for Children and Young People, *Committee Hansard*, Melbourne, 10 June 2014, p. 27.

20 Ms Sue Rouch, AASW, *Committee Hansard*, Melbourne, 10 June 2014, p. 40. Also see: Mrs Anne McLeish, Grandparents Victoria and Kinship Care, Victoria, *Committee Hansard*, Melbourne, 10 June 2014, p. 22.

4.17 The Department of Health and Human Services, Tasmania argued that the training provided to grandparents raising grandchildren should be identical, or at least similar, to that provided to foster carers.<sup>21</sup> However, Winangay Resources contended that kinship carers' training needs are unique due to unresolved grief, loss and intergenerational trauma:

Kinship carers' previous experience of trauma and mental health issues can adversely affect the quality of care provided and has been identified as a factor in placement breakdown..."Brave Faces, Hidden Tears" a trauma informed training information/session was developed in response to many kinship carer stories...The Brave Faces, Hidden Tears session has been incorporated into the Strong People Strong Ways: Yarning and Sharing Sessions which can be adapted to meet the needs of non-Aboriginal carers.<sup>22</sup>

### *Access to and availability of respite*

4.18 In the Australian Capital Territory, South Australia and Queensland, informal grandparents raising grandchildren have access to respite.<sup>23</sup> In Tasmania and Victoria, the provision of such respite depends on the capacity of community service providers. In Western Australia, the Northern Territory and New South Wales, grandparents with the care of their grandchildren under informal arrangements are not provided with respite.<sup>24</sup>

4.19 Participants argued that all jurisdictions should offer unqualified respite to informal grandparents raising grandchildren, as well as formal grandparents raising grandchildren (who have variable entitlements to respite).<sup>25</sup> The Salvation Army, for example, submitted:

[One] significant area of need is for respite care to be available for grandparents who care full time for their grandchildren. Many grandparents experience their own fatigue, health concerns and social isolation, and the consideration of this support is essential for many grandparents to be able to continue to provide care for their grandchildren.<sup>26</sup>

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21 *Submission 32*, p. 4.

22 *Submission 107*, p. 12. Also see: Dr Stephen Nicholson, Grandparent and Kinship Carers Association Inc., Mid North Coast New South Wales, *Committee Hansard*, Sydney, 13 June 2014, p. 13.

23 See, for example: Uniting Care Community, *Time for Grandparents program*, additional documents, received 29 August 2014.

24 See: Ms Emma White, Department for Child Protection and Family Services (WA), *Committee Hansard*, Perth, 6 August 2014, p. 15, who stated that some respite is provided to informal grandparents raising grandchildren to facilitate medical treatment and recovery.

25 For example: The Aged-care Rights Service Inc. (TARS), *Submission 64*, p. 6.

26 *Submission 108*, p. 5. Also see: Women's Legal Services NSW, *Submission 138*, p. 10; Wanslea Family Services Inc. (Wanslea), *Submission 150*, p. 10.

4.20 The committee heard also that existing respite services are inadequate due to: not enough carers being available to meet the demand; and carers sometimes not having enough training to provide quality care (including for children with complex needs).<sup>27</sup> Mrs Anne McLeish, President of Grandparents Victoria and Kinship Care, Victoria, advised that the provision of respite is 'very much a hit and miss thing':

The issue of respite where the children go away from the grandparents for a while is fraught and it is hardly available to anyone—largely because the children can be quite difficult, particularly in the first 2½ to three years before they settle down, and the number of people who are willing to put up with that is diminishing. So it is a real pressure point.<sup>28</sup>

4.21 Some submitters highlighted the particular need for respite in sub-groups of the grandparents raising grandchildren population, including: older grandparents; grandparents based in rural and remote areas; and grandparents with multiple grandchildren in their care.<sup>29</sup> Dr Marilyn McHugh noted, for example:

All carers need a break from constant caring, but older, more vulnerable kinship carers are at higher risk of placement instability, when respite is unavailable. Without agency support for kinship placements, carer need for respite is unrecognised and unmet.<sup>30</sup>

4.22 National Seniors similarly submitted:

The need for [respite services] is critical for those grandparent families who live remotely and who may not have friends or family in close proximity and also during emergency situations.<sup>31</sup>

4.23 In the absence of respite and minimal, if any, family support, Mission Australia and The Mirabel Foundation highlighted the need for school holiday programs, particularly over the long Christmas/New Year's break.<sup>32</sup>

4.24 The Central Australian Women's Legal Service agreed that holiday programs are much needed, as well as general programs and activities, for children in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities:

Many grandparents expressed concern that their grandchildren would 'get up to trouble' as they are unable to supervise them all of the time...Grandparents encouraged the idea of a support group, a Youth centre or dedicated after school/holiday programs...This would enable

27 For example: Department of Health and Human Services, Tasmania, *Submission 32*, p. 4; GRG WA, *Submission 50*, p. [2]; UnitingCare Tasmania, *Submission 65*, p. 7.

28 *Committee Hansard*, Melbourne, 10 June 2014, p. 22.

29 For example: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (Qld) Ltd. (ATSILS Qld), *Submission 134*, p. [10].

30 *Submission 17*, p. 3.

31 *Submission 131*, p. 12 (quoting one grandparent).

32 Mr Brett Fahey, Mission Australia, *Committee Hansard*, Sydney, 13 June 2014, p. 43; Mrs Nicole Patton, The Mirabel Foundation, *Committee Hansard*, Melbourne, 10 June 2014, p. 2, respectively.

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grandparents to enjoy some respite and thus make for a more sustainable care arrangement[.]<sup>33</sup>

### ***Education support and information***

4.25 Many participants called for grandparents raising grandchildren to receive assistance in helping grandchildren with their educational needs. In this regard, several submitters and witnesses identified challenges attributable to generational issues (for example, modern curricula and teaching methodologies,<sup>34</sup> as well as information and communication technologies (ICT)).<sup>35</sup> One grandchild stated, for example:

Because our grandparents were taught a lot of different things. Like I would ask for help in maths and they don't know half the stuff I'm doing...Just having to deal with issues that go on in schools, it's a lot different to back in their day.<sup>36</sup>

4.26 In relation to ICT, the AHRC provided the following illustration of grandparents' limited experience in online communications:

While internet usage is increasing for older people, less than half of over 65s are online, with merely 37 per cent going online in 2010-11. That leaves a total of 1,790,000 Australians over 65 who are not online. In comparison, in June 2010, young people aged 14 -17 years old had the highest rate of internet use in Australia with 91 per cent spending time online every week.<sup>37</sup>

4.27 At public hearings, community service providers highlighted also the challenges associated with the circumstances leading to the care arrangement, where grandchildren may be behind in their schooling, underperforming or have learning difficulties. The Mirabel Foundation explained:

Many of the children that we see have fallen behind in their schooling while living with their parents. Unfortunately, they are not eligible for in-school support, because their IQ is above 70 per cent. In Victoria they need to be seen as below that or assessed as below that to be eligible. These children have absolutely the potential to succeed at school but have fallen behind and unfortunately there is no support available to them. So access to tutoring, homework help and support for the grandparents as well to be able

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33 *Submission 104*, p. 4. Note that this issue might not be relevant to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

34 For example: Wanslea, *Submission 150*, p. 4.

35 For example: North West Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Tasmania, *Submission 100*, p. [3].

36 The Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare Inc., *Submission 169.1*, p. 4. Also see: Ms Julie Argeros, Uniting Care Community, *Committee Hansard*, Sydney, 13 June 2014, p. 33.

37 *Submission 133*, p. 13.

to assist the grandchildren would enable the children to live up to their full educational potential and obviously broaden their options for their future.<sup>38</sup>

4.28 Mr Brett Fahey from Mission Australia described an initiative conducted in partnership with The Smith Family through the Grandparents Raising Grandchildren program: the 'homework club'. Mr Fahey indicated that this initiative is achieving positive results:

One of the grandchildren actually asked his teacher whether he could have extra homework so that he had an excuse to come on the two afternoons instead of just coming to one. This was a child that was two years behind in schooling, who had never read a book, let alone a chapter book, and is now doing those things with the help of the homework club.<sup>39</sup>

4.29 Grandparents Victoria and Kinship Carers Victoria referred to their longstanding efforts with 'government authorities to structure cross-portfolio agreements [to tackle the issue of under achievement]'.<sup>40</sup>

4.30 Standard 4 of the *National Standards for Out-of-home Care*, developed as a priority project for the *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020*, provides that 'each child and young person has an individualised plan that details their health, education and other needs'.<sup>41</sup> Mrs McLeish stated:

We see that as the key to [success in] schools. Just the fact that you sit down with your teachers and carers, and in some cases [with] the child, and certainly the administration of the school, and have a conversation about the specific needs of this child, then document them and turn that into a plan is really important...The individual learning plan, if it operates well, would be accompanied by regular meetings between all the stakeholders where everybody shares the responsibility for the education of the child...We struggle...to get the system to even highlight to the schools that this commitment exists.<sup>42</sup>

4.31 Submitters suggested a range of other measures to assist grandchildren with their education, including: access to computers;<sup>43</sup> funding the delivery of homework classes;<sup>44</sup> and education subsidies.<sup>45</sup> The AHRC proposed that programs (such as

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38 Mrs Nicole Patton, *Committee Hansard*, Melbourne, 10 June 2014, pp 1-2. Also see: Ms Julie Argeros, Uniting Care Community, *Committee Hansard*, Sydney, 13 June 2014, p. 33.

39 *Committee Hansard*, Sydney, 13 June 2014, p. 43.

40 Mrs Anne McLeish, *Committee Hansard*, Melbourne, 10 June 2014, p. 18.

41 Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs together with the National Framework Implementation Working Group, *An outline of National Standards for out-of-home care, A Priority Project under the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020*, July 2011, p. 7, available at: [http://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/pac\\_national\\_standard.pdf](http://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/pac_national_standard.pdf) (accessed 11 September 2014).

42 Mrs Anne McLeish, *Committee Hansard*, Melbourne, 10 June 2014, p. 24.

43 Grandparents For Grandchildren SA Inc., *Submission 55*, p. 3.

44 Wanslea, *Submission 150*, p. 4.

Broadband for Seniors) be linked to support groups, to assist and encourage grandparent carers to use the internet.<sup>46</sup>

### ***Assessment of grandparents raising grandchildren***

4.32 Foster carers are generally required to undertake formal assessment prior to the placement of children in their care. In contrast, grandparents raising grandchildren are subject to a less rigorous assessment process, which often occurs after commencement of a placement.<sup>47</sup> Dr McHugh expressed concern with such assessments, noting:

Placements where no assessment, or a minimal assessment, is conducted on carer family appropriateness, presents a risk not only to stability, but also to child safety...Because the majority of placements are monitored infrequently, little is known about quality of care in some placements. Risks to stability must surely arise for carers lacking financial resources and appropriate information, and for whom support is not provided, either initially or on an ongoing basis.<sup>48</sup>

4.33 Mr Bernie Geary from the Victorian Commission for Children and Young People emphasised the need for high quality assessment of kinship care placements, as well as support and supervision, to ensure the best outcomes for children and their families.<sup>49</sup>

4.34 Several participants—such as CREATE Foundation—contended that, in some instances, kinship care is not the most suitable form of placement for children and young people.<sup>50</sup> Mr Geary concurred:

Kinship care placements frequently commence at a time of crisis and a relative can seem to be a safe and familiar option for a child...Highly skilled assessment is required to ensure that the best option for the child is identified, not just the quickest or the most convenient.<sup>51</sup>

45 For example: GRG WA, *Submission 50*, p. [4]; UnitingCare Tasmania, *Submission 65*, p. 15.

46 *Submission 133*, p. 14.

47 AASW, *Submission 132*, p. 6.

48 *Submission 17*, p. 3. Also see: Ms Meredith Kiraly, Australian Psychological Society, *Committee Hansard*, Melbourne, 10 June 2014, p. 12; Ms Kelly Bucknall, CREATE Foundation, *Committee Hansard*, Sydney, 13 June 2014, p. 27 (referring also to the potential for further traumatisation).

49 *Committee Hansard*, Melbourne, 10 June 2014, p. 26. Also see: Miss Kathleen, *Committee Hansard*, Sydney, 13 June 2014, p. 30 (in relation to supervision).

50 For example: Family and Relationship Services Australia, *Submission 81*, p. 4; Tangentyere Council, *Submission 112*, p. 1; CREATE Foundation, *Submission 136*, p. 6; National Legal Aid, *Submission 141*, p. 4; Ms Trish Heath, Principal Policy Officer, Commissioner for Children and Young People, Western Australia, *Committee Hansard*, Perth, 6 August 2014, pp 6-7.

51 *Committee Hansard*, Melbourne, 10 June 2014, p. 26.

4.35 Representatives from the Australian Association of Social Workers confirmed the need for skilled assessment which engages the grandparents, as 'you are going to have to talk about things that grandparents are not necessarily going to want to talk about'.<sup>52</sup>

4.36 Two assessment options identified by participants included: comprehensive assessment identical to that required of foster carers (although this would entail delays in grandparent care placements);<sup>53</sup> and development of care plans subsequent to grandparent care placements (as is occurring in Victoria).<sup>54</sup>

### **Support groups**

4.37 Throughout the inquiry, the committee heard evidence regarding the need for better resourcing of support groups for grandparents raising grandchildren.<sup>55</sup> Grandparents Rearing Grandchildren WA (Inc.) explained the multiple reasons why grandparents have found the groups 'invaluable':

They give a wealth of information and personal support. Grandparents feel safe, relaxed and can gain confidence in raising their grandchildren. Many of these grandchildren can often be extreme, violent and exhausting all in one day. The support group can help grandparents with skills to better cope, [and] regain their social and emotional well-being. Grandparents come to rely on grandparent support groups for friendship, advice, [the] understanding that each member can offer and the group keeps the grandparent "going" and keeps their "sanity".<sup>56</sup>

4.38 Participants referred to the social isolation experienced by grandparents when their care responsibilities clash with their pre-existing social networks and activities.<sup>57</sup> In this context, submitters emphasised the value of support groups as a source of friendship. Wanslea, for example, submitted:

The friendships and connections grandparent carers make at Wanslea's support groups do contribute to alleviating [social isolation], and they often will interact socially beyond the group setting. This broader social interaction gives grandparent carers a sense of belonging and community.

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52 Ms Sue Rouch and Ms Wendy Frayne, *Committee Hansard*, Melbourne, 10 June 2014, p. 44.

53 AASW, *Submission 132*, p. 7.

54 Mrs Anne McLeish, Grandparents Victoria and Kinship Care, Victoria, *Committee Hansard*, Melbourne, 10 June 2014, p. 22.

55 For example: Dr Marilyn McHugh, *Submission 17*, p. 3.

56 *Submission 50*, p. [5]. Also see: Mrs Nicole Patton, The Mirabel Foundation, *Committee Hansard*, Melbourne, 10 June 2014, p. 7; Ms Wendy Frayne, AASW, *Committee Hansard*, Melbourne, 10 June 2014, p. 44; Dr Bridget Jenkins, Centre for Social Impact, *Committee Hansard*, Sydney, 13 June 2014, p. 2.

57 For example: North West Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Tasmania, *Submission 100*, p. [3].

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It contributes to 'normalising' their complex circumstances and they nurture one another through whatever difficulties they choose to disclose.<sup>58</sup>

4.39 However, submitters and witnesses indicated that non-ongoing and limited funding is jeopardising the continued operation of existing support groups, as well as the supports and services that are available to group members. Further, there is a lack of suitable support groups for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander grandparents raising grandchildren.

4.40 At the Melbourne public hearing, Mr Andrew Jackomos, Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People, advised that mainstream service providers:

...would not be the first place that a Koori carer would go [for support]. It would be their local Aboriginal organisation [as] Koori carers do not have access to a Victorian Aboriginal peak body[.]<sup>59</sup>

4.41 In Western Australia, Wanslea advised that it is strongly committed to increasing its outreach to regional areas, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander grandparents, by assisting local agencies to address local needs:

As a result of our engagement efforts in Narrogin, for example, we have managed to instigate an associate grandcare group in that town, with a group comprising 15 Indigenous grandfamilies at the moment. This group is coordinated by a local Indigenous support agency, named [Kaata-Koorliny Employment and Enterprise Development Aboriginal Corporation]. Distance factors [prevent] Wanslea facilitating this group, but we also believe that they are better served by having a local culturally appropriate facilitator. That seems to be working fairly well...Wanslea would like to expand this service to other regional areas as we see this...as the tip of the iceberg but are faced with budgetary and resourcing challenges which make such expansion not possible.<sup>60</sup>

4.42 In New South Wales, Mission Australia provides a program for grandparents with the primary care for raising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander grandchildren, however, 'that program may cease...due to changes in Commonwealth government funding'.<sup>61</sup>

4.43 Also in New South Wales, the Grandparent and Kinship Carers Association Inc., Mid North Coast New South Wales, which covers a geographical area of approximately 200 kilometres, informed the committee that 'it is a job to keep this group going':

We are reliant upon doing barbecues at Bunnings to finance us, to pay the insurance and the other ongoing costs...The big problem with all of the

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58 *Submission 150*, p. 6. Also see: Brennan et al, *Grandparents raising grandchildren*, p. 152, which noted the cultural importance of kinship to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander grandparents raising grandchildren.

59 *Committee Hansard*, Melbourne, 10 June 2014, p. 29.

60 Mr Moray McSevich, Albany Branch, *Committee Hansard*, Albany, 7 August 2014, p. 3.

61 Mr Brett Fahey, *Committee Hansard*, Sydney, 13 June 2014, p. 42.

groups like ours is to be able to survive. They come and go at quite a rapid rate because we are all stressed out; we are tired; and there is the financial cost of just getting to meetings.<sup>62</sup>

4.44 Ms Emma White from the Department for Child Protection and Family Services (WA) observed that there is a continuum of support groups, where some groups 'need input from a range of services and community supports to support them in delivering that care'.<sup>63</sup>

4.45 Submitters stated that governments should continue to establish and extend grandparents raising grandchildren support groups, with the provision of ongoing funding,<sup>64</sup> including funding for follow up services,<sup>65</sup> social activities and regular camps.<sup>66</sup>

#### *Committee view*

4.46 The committee acknowledges that state and territory governments are largely responsible for the provision of non-financial supports and services to grandparents raising grandchildren. Bearing this in mind, the committee makes the following comments with respect to the evidence received regarding unmet needs:

##### *Staff in government departments and agencies*

4.47 The committee recognises that some grandparents raising grandchildren are not comfortable when interacting with government departments and agencies. For this reason, it is important that customer service staff receive education and training on the special circumstances and needs of grandparents, as well as the supports and services which are available within each jurisdiction or where to go for such information.

4.48 The committee heard evidence indicating that some departments are conscious of these issues and are taking, or have taken, steps to provide more informed and sensitive services to grandparents raising grandchildren.<sup>67</sup> However, grandparents across the country argued there are still problems, and the committee is persuaded that a consistent and systemic change is required.

##### *Training for the care role*

4.49 If grandparents raising grandchildren would like to refresh their parenting knowledge and skills, as the evidence suggests, then the committee supports grandparents having access to the appropriate courses, particularly where this will

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62 Dr Stephen Nicholson, *Committee Hansard*, Sydney, 13 June 2014, pp 10 and 12. Also see: Dr Jan Backhouse, *Committee Hansard*, Sydney, 13 June 2014, p. 20; Ms Julie Argeros, Uniting Care Community, *Committee Hansard*, Sydney, 13 June 2014, p. 35.

63 *Committee Hansard*, Perth, 6 August 2014, p. 14.

64 For example: GRG WA, *Submission 50*, p. [6]; Shoalcoast Community Legal Centre Inc., *Submission 87*, p. [3]; Central Australian Women's Legal Service, *Submission 104*, p. 3.

65 The Child and Family Welfare Agencies Association, *Submission 151*, p. [3].

66 Dr Jan Backhouse, *Submission 51*, p. 3.

67 Ms Emma White, *Committee Hansard*, Perth, 6 August 2014, p. 15.

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enhance family relationships. The desire, or need, to attend parenting courses should not be construed as a failure on anyone's part but as a positive and proactive acknowledgement of the potential familial benefit.

4.50 The committee believes that training should be made available to all grandparents raising grandchildren on an 'as needed' basis. In this regard, the committee notes the significant potential for grandparents to require training in relation to the complex needs of children in their care. The committee considers that discrete subject areas should be identified for the development of training modules which are specifically targeted toward the needs of grandparent-headed families.

*Access to and availability of respite*

4.51 The committee accepts that respite is a fundamental support for grandparents raising grandchildren, to promote health and wellbeing (by providing time out and an opportunity to attend to personal needs),<sup>68</sup> and to help ensure placement stability. However, the provision of respite is variable and, according to the evidence received, there is not enough respite available to those who need it (particularly grandparents in rural and remote areas or with negligible family support). The committee urges governments to consider extending and enhancing respite services for all grandparents raising grandchildren.

*Education support and information*

4.52 It is difficult to understate the importance of education and it is highly commendable that grandparents wish to do more to ensure that their grandchildren receive an education which sets them up for life. The committee heard evidence regarding local, state and federal initiatives that similarly recognise and support this objective.

4.53 The committee endorses Standard 4 of the National Standards for Out-of-home Care, which provides for each child and young person to have an individualised education plan. The committee considers that this national priority will advance each child's education outcomes. Noting the concern expressed by some participants regarding implementation of the new standard, the committee suggests that governments collaboratively develop guidelines, protocols and templates for use within each jurisdiction.

4.54 Further, there is significant merit in equipping children with the necessary tools and supports to achieve their full educational potential. Whether this be through the direct provision of equipment or the funding of supports and services, consideration should be directed toward improving the educational outcomes of children in grandparent provided care by whatever means possible.

*Assessment of grandparents raising grandchildren*

4.55 The safety of children in out-of-home care arrangements must always be paramount. The committee recognises that there is not enough information available

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68 For example: TARS, *Submission 64*, p. 6; GRANDS Raising Kids NSW Inc., *Submission 74*, p. 2.

regarding grandparent-headed families, to assess the proportion of households where child safety is a live issue. The committee considers that this is one of the many areas which would benefit from further research. However, in the interim and primarily as a means of determining the suitability of a placement, as well as necessary supports and services, the committee believes that some form of assessment should take place within six months of the commencement of a placement.

### *Support groups*

4.56 The commitment of support groups to improving the circumstances of grandparents raising grandchildren was evident in their high level of involvement with the inquiry. Numerous other participants spoke well of various groups, acknowledging the benefits provided to grandparents at a most difficult time in the grandparents' lives.

4.57 While specific groups participated in, or were mentioned during, the inquiry, the committee recognises that there are many support groups throughout Australia, quietly and diligently assisting grandparents raising their grandchildren. The committee acknowledges and commends the altruistic efforts of all support groups, and encourages them in their endeavours.

4.58 Against this backdrop, it was encouraging to hear of the funding provided by governments in support of the groups. It was likewise discouraging to hear of funding uncertainties and the potential impact of budget cuts on support groups. The committee considers that it would be extremely unfortunate for these groups to cease or limit their activities: there is merit in considering funding options to facilitate the establishment, maintenance and operations of peer support groups which provide invaluable assistance to grandparents raising grandchildren.

### **Commonwealth, state and territory non-financial assistance**

4.59 The Commonwealth, state and territory governments provide non-financial assistance to some grandparents raising grandchildren. The type and extent of this assistance depends on a range of factors, including: the grandparents' geographic location; the type of care arrangement (formal/informal); and characteristics of the placement.

#### *Commonwealth non-financial assistance*

4.60 The Commonwealth provides non-financial assistance to grandparents through the Foster Child Health Care Card, the MyTime for Grandparents initiative and with the provision of Centrelink-based grandparent advisors in some states. These supports and services are available to grandparents regardless of the legal status of the care arrangement (formal/informal).

4.61 The Foster Child Health Care Card enables card holders to access cheaper Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme medications for children in care, as well as other

concessions offered by state and territory organisations. The card is issued to the grandparent but only the child is named on and covered by the card.<sup>69</sup>

4.62 MyTime for Grandparents is a national network of peer support groups for kinship carers with the full-time care of children aged up to 18 years. The groups aim to reduce carers' social isolation, increase carers' knowledge about available payments, services and resources, and improve family functioning and wellbeing. According to the Department of Social Services, there are 25 peer support groups across Australia.<sup>70</sup>

4.63 The Department of Human Services (Department) advises that there are six grandparent advisors across Australia, with two advisors based in New South Wales, one in Victoria (covering Tasmania), one in Queensland, one in Western Australia (covering the Northern Territory) and one in South Australia.<sup>71</sup>

4.64 The role of the grandparent advisers is to assist grandparents raising grandchildren by:

- understanding family circumstances, to provide tailored information about payments and services;
- arranging appointments with Centrelink's specialist staff (such as social workers); and
- arranging referrals to other federal, state and community service providers.<sup>72</sup>

4.65 The responsibilities of the grandparent advisers also include, for example: collaborating with other government and non-government agencies (to achieve optimum outcomes for grandparent carers); raising the awareness, skills and competency of departmental customer service employees; and identifying trends and developing proactive strategies to assist the grandparents.<sup>73</sup>

4.66 Each grandparent advisor reports monthly on the number of inquiries received from an 1800 telephone service (approximately 30-40).<sup>74</sup> A departmental officer explained that this data focusses on 'the delivery and co-ordination of a service',

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69 Department of Human Services, *Foster Child Health Care Card*, available at: <http://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/services/centrelink/foster-child-health-care-card> (accessed 9 September 2014).

70 Department of Social Services, *MyTime for Grandparents (peer support groups)*, available at: <http://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/families-and-children/programs-services/family-support-program/family-and-children-s-services/mytime-for-grandparents-peer-support-groups> (accessed 9 September 2014).

71 Answers to questions on notice, received 15 August 2014, p. 2.

72 Department of Human Services, *Grandparent advisers*, available at: <http://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/services/centrelink/grandparent-advisers> (accessed 9 September 2014).

73 Department, answers to questions on notice, received 15 August 2014, p. 4.

74 Ms Pene Fatcher, Operational Manager, Grandparent Adviser Program Delivery, Department, *Committee Hansard*, Perth, 6 August 2014, p. 52. Also see: Ms Donna Dei-Rossi and Ms Susan Thornton, Grandparent Advisers, Department, p. 55.

rather than providing qualitative data, such as access issues experienced by grandparents using the Centrelink service.<sup>75</sup>

4.67 In relation to policy development, the grandparent advisors meet regularly to discuss issues affecting grandparents raising grandchildren. Policy proposals are then forwarded to various program counterparts within the Department for decision-making at a higher level.<sup>76</sup> The Department provided two examples of policy proposals received from the community which have been actioned (relating to the Foster Child Health Care Card form and claims for child support).<sup>77</sup>

### *Specific issues relating to the Grandparent Advisors Program*

4.68 Submitters and witnesses commented particularly on the grandparent advisors, generally praising the advisors for their assistance to grandparents raising grandchildren in navigating Centrelink systems.<sup>78</sup> Ms Geraldine Burke described her experience with the Victorian advisor:

It was just the whole muddle of Centrelink and what you were able to receive through them and to help you through those forms that you cannot deal with due to your emotional state. You just cannot deal with it. They actually helped do that and sent out things that were partially filled in. You just needed to fill out the rest of the thing and sign them and take them in rather than going to wait in a queue for hours, being given a form, and then queuing again for hours—which you cannot do when you have a child that has all of a sudden come into your care.<sup>79</sup>

4.69 Grandparents Victoria and Kinship Care, Victoria informed the committee that assistance with the paperwork was an unexpected benefit: 'what we wanted out of the advisors was consistent and correct information, and we have certainly got that'.<sup>80</sup>

4.70 At the Perth public hearing, the committee heard from the Perth and Adelaide-based grandparent advisors, who gave evidence regarding their further role in progressing claims lodged by grandparents:

- one advisor described directing claims to the relevant processing centres for prompt attention (particularly for claims involving hardship);<sup>81</sup> and

75 Mr Bill Volkers, *Committee Hansard*, Perth, 6 August 2014, p. 53.

76 Ms Pene Fatcher, Department, *Committee Hansard*, Perth, 6 August 2014, p. 56. Ms Thornton provided one example involving questions asked on the claim form for the Foster Child Health Care Card: see p. 57.

77 Answers to question on notice, received 24 September 2014, p. 2.

78 For example: Sutherland Shire Grandparents' Support Group, *Submission 36*, p. 1; UnitingCare Tasmania, *Submission 65*, p. 7; Wanslea, *Submission 150*, p. 3; Child and Family Welfare Agencies Association, *Submission 151*, p. [2]; Mrs Nicole Patton, The Mirabel Foundation, *Committee Hansard*, Melbourne, 10 June 2014, p. 1; Ms Marilyn O'Neill, Grandparent and Kinship Carers Association Inc., Mid North Coast New South Wales, *Committee Hansard*, Sydney, 13 June 2014, p. 11.

79 *Committee Hansard*, Melbourne, 10 June 2014, p. 20.

80 Mrs Anne McLeish, *Committee Hansard*, Melbourne, 10 June 2014, p. 21.

- the other advised that she 'case manages' the file until the claim is granted (potentially four to six weeks):

I monitor to make sure that at each stage the claim has been granted. I keep in close touch with the relevant processing team. When all the claims have been granted and all the payments run out, then I let the grandparent know that everything that they could access from Centrelink has been successful and that their payments are up and running.<sup>82</sup>

4.71 In addition to these positive comments, participants described shortcomings in grandparents raising grandchildren's experiences with Centrelink and the Grandparent Advisor Program. Concerns were expressed with regard to, for example, the manner in which Centrelink interacts with grandparents and the high demand for assistance from the advisors.

*Manner in which Centrelink interacts with grandparents raising grandchildren*

4.72 Participants argued that grandparents raising grandchildren prefer to deal with a person when interacting with Centrelink. Dr Bridget Jenkins stated, for example:

[Grandparents] prefer to speak to someone rather than read information on the internet. Although this is not face to face for most grandparents, who will not be able to [travel to a grandparent advisor], certainly having someone to speak to over the phone, having that relationship with someone, is really positive.<sup>83</sup>

4.73 The Grandparent and Kinship Carers Association Inc., Mid North Coast New South Wales agreed that grandparents have an aversion to electronic interactions:

We are all nearly elderly people and we have to deal with modern technology, which we were not brought up with...In dealing with government services, we deal with Centrelink, which is now going to, primarily, an online organisation; Medicare is doing the same; and on and on it goes, with most government services.<sup>84</sup>

4.74 A representative from COTA Australia suggested that online processing and phone servicing may be limiting grandparents' access to entitlements:

The colocation of Centrelink and Medicare has exacerbated the problem in terms of waiting times and people feeling alienated from an office. Often you are directed to sit at a computer and do your processing, not with a person. Some of that model of service delivery for Centrelink really does work against people who are not familiar with the system and are uncomfortable with it. If they have language difficulties, if they come from

81 Ms Donna Dei-Rossi, Department, *Committee Hansard*, Perth, 6 August 2014, p. 51.

82 Ms Susan Thornton, Department, *Committee Hansard*, Perth, 6 August 2014, p. 52.

83 Centre for Social Impact, *Committee Hansard*, Sydney, 13 June 2014, p. 7. Also see: Dr Jan Backhouse, *Committee Hansard*, Sydney, 13 June 2014, p. 19.

84 Dr Stephen Nicholson, *Committee Hansard*, Sydney 13 June 2014, p. 10. Also see: Mr James Pilkington, Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation, *Committee Hansard*, Darwin, 5 August 2014, p. 14.

a non-English speaking background or they have cultural differences, all of that needs to be taken into account[.]<sup>85</sup>

4.75 Mrs Elizabeth Burton outlined her overall frustration dealing with Centrelink offices:

One of the biggest and most frustrating issues for me has been dealing with Centrelink...On one visit to Centrelink, the temperature was 40 degrees Celsius, the queue inside for checking in was approximately 20 to 30 people long and even extended outside into the heat at times. There were also approximately—I counted—100 people seated inside waiting up to 2½ hours for their appointment. There were small children running around, babies crying in prams plus many elderly patiently awaiting their turn, and I dread having to go through this each time I have to deal with Centrelink.<sup>86</sup>

4.76 According to the Department's evidence, the grandparent advisors endeavour to assist grandparents raising grandchildren who cannot attend the local Centrelink office (by conducting home visits, if practical, and outreach services), as well as helping with online claims.<sup>87</sup>

*High demand for assistance from grandparent advisors*

4.77 COTA Australia noted that two grandparent advisors have responsibility for providing services in more than one jurisdiction. However, in all jurisdictions, COTA Australia argued that there are not enough advisors, resulting in a diminished service to grandparents raising grandchildren:

When the adviser positions were announced, they were going to provide one on one support to grandparents who needed it. Obviously, with only six positions nationally, this is not provided to the majority on a face to face basis and is usually via a telephone conversation...There are sometimes long waiting times to speak with an advisor; as much as two to three weeks for a detailed discussion...People also reported feeling rushed and not having enough time with the adviser to go through all the issues they needed to address. Grandparent advisers have heavy workloads and often have other responsibilities as well[.]<sup>88</sup>

4.78 COTA Australia contended that the number of grandparent advisors should be increased, to ensure timely access and to allow for the provision of 'in depth' support.<sup>89</sup>

4.79 The Department of Social Services acknowledged previous feedback from the community on this issue, leading to recent discussions with the Department regarding 'the level of demand placed on those grandparent advisers [and] whether the current

85 Ms Josephine Root, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 20 June 2014, p. 21.

86 Grandparent, *Committee Hansard*, Perth, 6 August 2014, p. 40.

87 Mr Matt McNeil, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 20 June 2014, p. 27; Ms Donna Dei-Rossi and Ms Susan Thornton, *Committee Hansard*, Perth, 6 August 2014, pp 50-51.

88 *Submission 113*, p. 5.

89 *Submission 113*, p. 6.

number meets the demand'. However, 'the Department has not made any systemic changes to accommodate increasing demand for grandparent advisors'.<sup>90</sup> In evidence, a representative stated:

[T]here seem to be sufficient grandparent advisers to meet the demand. I think it is back to that face-to-face issue...People think [the advisers] are a really good service and they get them on the phone but they then want to sit down and talk through their documents and that quite often is not possible. I would say that has been an area of focus and interest for us...[W]e are conscious of...the desire and interest in a greater face-to-face presence of the advisers ...That is an issue that has been raised with us consistently.<sup>91</sup>

#### *Committee view*

4.80 The committee commends the Grandparent Advisor Program administered by the Department, and the individual efforts of the grandparent advisors. Most participants spoke very highly of the advisors, with concerns expressed in relation to the program and Centrelink's general capacity to facilitate face-to-face dealings with grandparents raising grandchildren.

4.81 The committee acknowledges grandparents' preference for people-based interactions, due to variable information technology knowledge and skills, as well as the personal and traumatic circumstances in which grandparents interact with the system. In addition, the committee recognises the need for grandparents to fully engage with Centrelink through the advisors, to access all supports and services to which the grandparents might be entitled. Clearly, if there are more advisors available, then they will have more time for each client.

4.82 Noting that the grandparent advisors are responsible for 14 Service Zones (rather than jurisdictions),<sup>92</sup> the committee considers that the Department should review its Grandparent Advisor Program, with a view to ensuring that need is being met in high-demand service areas and, if required, increasing the number of grandparent advisors employed under the Grandparent Advisor Program.

#### ***State and territory non-financial assistance***

4.83 Most non-financial government assistance for grandparents raising grandchildren is provided by the states and territories. There are four primary forms of non-financial supports and services, with variable provision to grandparents across Australia:

- all jurisdictions offer case management to formal carers, but the Northern Territory only offers case management to informal carers;
- most jurisdictions offer non-mandatory training to formal carers, but the Australian Capital Territory and South Australia only provide access to training for informal carers, dependent on service providers;

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90 Answers to question on notice, received 23 September 2014, p. 2.

91 Ms Elizabeth Hefren-Webb, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 20 June 2014, pp 29 and 32.

92 Department, answers to questions on notice, received 15 August 2014, p. 2.

- some jurisdictions offer respite to formal carers, with New South Wales, Victoria and the Northern Territory offering respite if it is articulated in individual case plans. The Australian Capital Territory, Queensland and South Australia provide respite to informal carers, with respite in Tasmania and Victoria dependent on the presence and capacity of service providers; and
- most jurisdictions have a foster care peak body that provides advocacy for formal carers, with peak kinship care bodies providing advocacy in other jurisdictions (including for informal carers).<sup>93</sup>

4.84 Social researchers Dr McHugh and Dr kylie valentine have noted that most jurisdictions provide information to grandparents raising grandchildren on other supports and services, including: support groups; government liaison officers; telephone helplines; and printed resources.<sup>94</sup> For example, the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services (Qld) provides online resources, brochures and fact sheets (such as Carer Fact Sheet 3: Providing Foster and Kinship Care, Support for carers).<sup>95</sup>

4.85 Submitters and witnesses noted the variation in non-financial assistance offered to grandparents by state and territory governments.<sup>96</sup> For many, there was an inequitable contrast with other out-of-home carers,<sup>97</sup> leading participants to call for parity with foster carers in the provision of supports and services.<sup>98</sup>

4.86 The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service (Qld) Ltd. (ATSILS Qld) argued that these supports and services should be available to

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93 McHugh, M. and valentine, k. (2010), *Financial and Non-Financial Support to Formal and Informal Out of Home Carers*, Social Policy Research Centre, Final Report for the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Tables 3.1-3.8 at pp 41-44. A summary of the supports available by jurisdiction is provided at pp 45-49.

94 McHugh, M. and valentine, k. (2010), *Financial and Non-Financial Support to Formal and Informal Out of Home Carers*, Social Policy Research Centre, Final Report for the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, p. 41.

95 Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services (Qld), *Carer information and fact sheets*, available at: <http://www.communities.qld.gov.au/childsafety/foster-care/resources-and-publications/carers-information-and-fact-sheets> (accessed 10 September 2014).

96 For example: Department of Health and Human Services, Tasmania, *Submission 32*, p. 4; COTA Australia, *Submission 113*, p. 6; Dr Caroline O'Neill, Board Member and Founder, Permanent Care and Adoptive Families, *Committee Hansard*, Melbourne, 10 June 2014, p. 53.

97 For example: Tweed Valley Kin Care Support Group Inc., *Submission 56*, pp 1-2; North West Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Tasmania, *Submission 100*, p. [2]; ATSILS Qld, *Submission 134*, p. [9].

98 For example: GRG WA, *Submission 50*, p. [2]. Also see: Brennan et al, *Grandparents raising grandchildren*, p. 68.

grandparents raising grandchildren on commencement of the care arrangement (due to the potential need to assist grandchildren with complex health needs).<sup>99</sup>

4.87 The Australian Medical Association added:

[A] stocktake of services available to both grandparents and foster parents in each State and Territory should be undertaken in order to identify any significant inconsistencies across the jurisdictions, as well as gaps in services, that aim to support children whose parents are not their primary care givers.<sup>100</sup>

### ***Committee view***

4.88 Consistent with earlier comments, the committee questions the rationale for distinguishing between foster carers and kinship carers—especially informal grandparents raising grandchildren who are the majority of grandparent carers—in the provision of non-financial assistance. This distinction might be based on a more traditional view of the role of family or be attributable to cost considerations. However, the question of supports and services for grandparents is essentially an issue of what supports and services are to be provided to the family unit, which is often significantly disadvantaged. In this context, it is fundamental that governments consider implementing a range of measures to support grandparent-headed families.

### **Funding for community service providers**

4.89 Community service providers operate alongside government departments and agencies to provide supports and services to grandparents raising grandchildren, which are funded through non-recurrent grants (via a tender process) and other funding programs (such as the Communities for Children initiative administered by the Department of Social Services). Evidence presented to the inquiry indicated that some of these existing supports and services may be threatened by funding uncertainties. Examples drawn from New South Wales, Western Australia and Tasmania appear below.<sup>101</sup>

4.90 In New South Wales, Mission Australia advised that its \$150,000 per annum Grandparents Raising Grandchildren program, partially funded by the Commonwealth through Communities for Children Direct, closed for tenders on 21 July 2014.<sup>102</sup>

4.91 In Western Australia, Wanslea provides the Grandcare Program to informal grandparents raising grandchildren in 10 southern locations (for example: Perth,

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99 *Submission 134*, pp [9-10]. The ATSILS Qld contended also that these supports and services should be delivered by 'culturally appropriate and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled support services'.

100 *Submission 82*, p. 6.

101 Also see: UnitingCare Children, Young People and Families, *Submission 85*, p. 3; Mrs Nicole Patton, The Mirabel Foundation, *Committee Hansard*, Melbourne, 10 June 2014, p. 4; Ms Kellie Booth, Indigenous Programs, Child Australia, *Committee Hansard*, Darwin, 5 August 2014, p. 17.

102 Mr Brett Fahey, Mission Australia, *Committee Hansard*, Sydney, 13 June 2014, p. 49.

Albany and Narrogin): 'we have 507 grandcarers and 667 grandchildren registered with the Grandcare program. Of those 507 grandcarers...94 are within the regions'.<sup>103</sup> Wanslea emphasised that government services are not accessible, or desirable, to all grandparents:

It is essential that funding be made available for current support group services to continue their services, but also gaps in service delivery identified and services established or expanded where necessary. As not all grandparent carers are involved with state based child protection services – and some fear such involvement due to the nature of their family relationships – it is recommended that this service be provided through the not-for-profit community sector.<sup>104</sup>

4.92 UnitingCare Tasmania provides the Grandparents Raising Grandchildren program in the southern and north-western regions of Tasmania. This program was initially funded by the Commonwealth, then by the Tasmanian Government from 2011-2012:

...however, the [state] funding was non-recurrent, and at the conclusion of the funding, [the program] has seen a reduction in capacity...leaving grandparenting families in the northern region unsupported.<sup>105</sup>

4.93 UnitingCare Tasmania contended that there is a critical need for the provision of ongoing funding to support the multiple and complex needs of grandparents raising grandchildren, which are not being met by current support services:

Grandparents are able to access initial support in some circumstances via the Tasmania Gateway Referral Service [Gateway Services], but this is short term, and doesn't offer the specialist support required to navigate the complex needs of grandparent families.<sup>106</sup>

4.94 The Department of Health and Human Services, Tasmania acknowledged that the Gateway Services offer 'brief and short intervention' (including provision of information and financial assistance to cover the cost of essential items),<sup>107</sup> which could be extended to cover the duration of the care arrangement:

It would be good if there was an organisation that wrapped support services around grandparents on a 'needs basis' over the time that the grandparents are raising their grandchildren. Tasmania's Gateway service only provides an initial (15 hour) support when a grandchild starts living with their grandparents (within the first three months), and this is not available to grandparents who are caring for grandchildren under orders. Support needs

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103 Mr Moray McSevich, *Committee Hansard*, Albany, 7 August 2014, p. 2.

104 *Submission 150*, p. 9.

105 *Submission 65*, p. 2.

106 *Submission 65*, p. 2. Also see p. 13.

107 *Submission 32*, p. 2.

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to be present as children develop, this shouldn't stop at a point in time, or not be applicable to some grandparents.<sup>108</sup>

4.95 North West Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Tasmania endorsed the need for long-term assistance, preferably from a dedicated agency where grandparents raising grandchildren can build rapport with support workers.<sup>109</sup>

4.96 As noted earlier in this report and in addition to these concerns, the committee heard that there is disparity in the funding provided to foster care and kinship care peak bodies. In Victoria, Mr Geary referenced a ratio of 8:1:

Clearly this level of funding for [kinship carers] cannot begin to meet the existing and impending growing need. We are happy to make it a growth industry, but we are also not funding it. This is despite how...the majority of carers are kinship carers and the trend and rapid growth is obvious. Foster care is a shrinking type of care. The equation is surely inverted.<sup>110</sup>

*Committee view*

4.97 Community service providers play an important role in the delivery of supports and services to grandparents raising grandchildren. As noted by Wanslea, grandparents would not necessarily be able, or choose, to access these direct from the government, and it would be impossible to predict when or for how long services are required. For those reasons, the committee agrees with the Department of Health and Human Services, Tasmania that support should be provided on a needs basis to all grandparent carers.

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108 *Submission 32*, p. 4.

109 *Submission 100*, pp [1-2].

110 *Committee Hansard*, Melbourne, 10 June 2014, p. 28.

