



# GRANDPARENTS UNITED FOR CHILDREN



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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Grandparents United For Children (GUFC) was born out of the experiences of many grandparents, whose relationships with their grandchildren has been unexpectedly and often abruptly removed. It is important to state that the removal of these relationships was not because of safeguarding concerns. GUFC recognise and support the need for all children to be protected, and where there are safeguarding concerns, the protection of the child is paramount.

We would like to thank those courageous grandparents and grandchildren who have openly shared their experiences to inform this report.

This report has also been informed by professionals and grandparents' groups who work with and advocate on behalf of those affected. They have all generously given their time and experience and have engaged in open and transparent dialogues. This report aims to ensure that the voices of grandparents and grandchildren are not only heard, but are mobilised to achieve change.

Woven throughout this report are the lived experiences of grandparents denied contact with their grandchildren. The opinions expressed are the grandparents' own perspectives. They are not the authors' views.

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# Foreword

I have advocated for the rights of the most vulnerable children and families for over three decades but to my shame, was not aware of the heart wrenching and often tragic circumstances and challenges faced by both grandparents and grandchildren, because of their enforced separations. I had no idea of the extent of pain on both sides, until it affected me, and it was this experience that brought me closer to those adversely affected by the issue, that I now understand to be a scar running through the lives of children and grandparents. The author Maya Angelou said ‘when you know better, you do better’. I could not look the other way and I implore you to do the same.

This journey has led me to hearing about the tragic suicides of grandparents who struggled to live with the loss of their grandchildren. I have engaged with grandparents who have been arrested and told to accept police cautions for sending gifts and cards to their absent grandchildren. It is important to know that we are talking about grandparents and grandchildren who have had safe and established loving relationships removed from their lives. This is not a new story or even a new campaign as many have been campaigning for change for decades, and have been promised many things from successive governments, only to be consistently let down.

This report has been informed by the real-life experiences of grandparents, grandchildren and the many who have been tirelessly raising their head above the parapet, and those supporting grandparents, advocating for their grandchildren. I hope this report not only informs you but moves you to act, as this is not only about children today but those in the future. These issues impact on a child’s right to have loving, safe, positive family relationships.

I made the decision aged 16 to stand up and say no to a forced marriage and subsequently I continue to be disowned by my family, as I approach 60. I understand the pain of rejection and abandonment, and the impact on a young person that can lead to future trauma, no child should ever be robbed of a loving family.

This cause matters because it is first and foremost about children, and we seek a change in how the Judiciary responds, especially to ensure that Contact Orders are enforced, so that children do not have long absences from grandparents.

We aim for a time when a child’s safe and loving relationship with their grandparents is protected and enshrined in the Children Act 1989. I recently met with the Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak, to bring to his attention these issues, and was invited to submit a report which was sent in November 2022. This also represented the testimonies of grandparents who have visited the surgeries of their local MPs, sharing their grief and need for change.

I fundamentally believe that we are dealing with the tip of the iceberg as was the case in 1993 when I was speaking out against forced marriage. I always believed there were more cases and only when we broke the silences, did we realise just how big the problem was and the number of hidden victims and survivors. I believe we are scratching the surface on the issue of grandparent alienation, and it now requires a concerted effort from across government and society for us to change this landscape.

This report has 12 Recommendations that have directly been informed by those affected and by independent research. For the first time we can present a statistically reliable estimate of the extent of grandparent alienation in the UK. Research commissioned for this report from Savanta suggests that **2 million grandparents** are affected. The extent of children affected is likely to be higher, and this finding is indicative of a major social and welfare problem that must not be ignored. The implementation of this report’s recommendations are the responsibility of many and these will inform the next part of our campaign.

We came together due to a shared experience and committed ourselves as volunteers to provide those in positions of responsibility with clear calls for action. We are committed to achieving the changes that we hold within our vision for the children of our children, and ask that you now invite us to your table to work in partnership for change.

**Jasvinder Sanghera CBE**



**This campaign is about the rights for grandchildren to continue having safe, established contact with grandparents and to protect children from adverse childhood experiences .**

## Building the picture

In December 2021 we initiated a Change.org petition to support the campaign to protect the relationship between grandparents and children. Quickly, thousands not only signed the petition but shared their harrowing and heart-breaking experiences. Those signing included adults who had experienced lost relationships with grandparents as children, grandparents, and family members and friends supporting those affected. This led us to immediately establish an email address, so that volunteers could respond to the ongoing need for emotional support and where necessary offer legal guidance.

At the time of writing 36,227 people have signed the petition that calls upon the Prime Minister and Justice Minister, to change the Children Act 1989 in relation to legislation and the urgent need to improve judicial responses.

It is important to note that Grandparents United FC firstly sought to create a petition on the government's website and this was twice turned down due to being informed that such a petition already existed.



### Methodology

Several methodological approaches have been undertaken to inform this report. The overall aim was to gather data, evidence, information and to document the experiences of those affected, to identify the issues and seek solutions and recommendations. Key areas that inform the report are:

- A literature review of key research and findings
- An independent survey conducted by Savanta Comres commissioned by Lloyd Platt & Co Law Firm
- An analysis of Change.org petition comments
- The Voice of the Child – Review of a significant number of letters from grandchildren received by Dame Esther Rantzen, in response to BBC's The One Show highlighting the issues
- The mapping of support services to grandparents.

# REAL LIFE EXPERIENCE



"We didn't see the 3 grandchildren for over a year which was devastating".

"Our son met and married a girl, and their first child was born, who naturally we loved and helped with childcare whenever possible. Sadly, our daughter-in-law had an affair shortly after this birth. They tried to reconcile their marriage, had a second child, and considered emigrating. We loaned him a large sum of money to set up a new home and to date he refuses to repay the loan.

But the marriage ended in a bitter divorce and our son started a new relationship with a much younger girl. We regularly helped with childcare several times a week for both grandchildren. However, his new partner took any well-meaning constructive advice we gave as criticism. Eventually we were informed by her that we had been substituted now as grandparents by her parents".

## **Magistrates Court and frustrating the Court Order**

"A third grandchild was born, but we were only granted limited access. Shortly after, two serious false allegations were made against us for physical & verbal abuse. Our offers to talk, 'letter write', and even 3rd party mediation was rejected. We didn't see the 3 grandchildren for over a year which was devastating. We reluctantly decided to go down the legal route but have never regretted it. The Magistrates court granted a Contact Order as they rightly decided that it was in the best interests of the children. Our son disagreed and has spent the last 10 years trying to frustrate the Contact Order, even though all 3 children had always enjoyed their limited, but happy times with us. His recollection of the proceedings is not only at variance to our solicitor's and ourselves, but also to the Court Records".

"False allegations of harassment and historic domestic abuse (without injury) were given to the police 5 years ago. This led to an extremely aggressive and stressful police visit to our home who were considering making an "arrest and interview". We made a formal complaint about the Police Officers involved, and how they had mishandled the accusation. They eventually conceded there was no evidence of harassment nor domestic abuse. We received a written apology, and an officer was disciplined. They assured us they would revise the procedure of any future handling of such accusations".

## **More False Accusations**

"Our son continued his campaign of 'revenge' against us, poisoning the minds of an elderly relative, and recently the elder two grandchildren, who are in their late teens, with his false allegations. This has been done to alienate them from us completely. By exerting coercive control over them he tries to ensure they we have minimal to no contact with us in case they discover what is the reality".

## **War in Ukraine - A place for refuge**

"These last few months we have had two diametrically opposed experiences. For several years our son and daughter-in-law have 'gaslighted' us, claiming that we are "not good people" and that the children were not safe with us. 11 Months ago, a Ukrainian mum with her 2 young children came to live with us. They were bombed and shelled out of their home by the Russians. Because of the war they have been separated from their father and grandmother. All of that family are so grateful that we can offer our home as a safe refuge until the war is over. Unlike our son, they appreciate the love and care given to them".

# Frequently Asked Questions



*What is Grandparent Alienation?*

The strength of the grandparent and grandchild relationship often stems from the fact that they are a step removed from the parents and are seen as the patriarchs/matriarchs of the family. They provide valuable additional role models and therefore a positive part in a child's life.

Grandparent alienation occurs when grandparents are unreasonably denied meaningful opportunities to have a relationship and spend time with their grandchildren.

It often involves grandparents being denied contact with their grandchildren, however, it can manifest in different ways including withholding, or threatening to withhold contact with the grandchildren unless they agree to provide financial or other support in exchange, limiting grandparents access to children or allowing only fleeting contact with grandchildren<sup>1</sup>.

This is about the rights of children and their right to healthy, safe relationships with their immediate and extended family members, all of whom inform and shape their identity and provide additional security.

A child can be impacted in different ways when a safe and loving family relationship is abruptly removed, including feeling forgotten and abandoned. This experience for a child is often one they are not able to voice, due to the stance of parents, and feeling conflicted. The effect of adverse childhood experiences can be traumatic, impacting on future life experiences and subsequent generations.

Many grandparents have spent years in turmoil, and as we listen to them in support groups, they share how they have been torn from relationships with their grandchildren. A grandparent shared that, "I never saw her from the age of two. 20 years lost, and these years will never come back". In such cases a child misses an attachment rooted in love and a bond that should be their entitlement.

*Why are we having this conversation?*



*How many children are we talking about then?*

We don't have the exact figures but we know that the numbers have increased and when we take siblings into consideration and how the whole family can alienate grandparents, resulting in removing contact with all the grandchildren, the numbers are likely to be huge. It has been estimated that at least 2 million children in the UK are denied contact with their grandparents.<sup>2</sup>



*How many grandparents are affected?*

We do not know the true extent, but at the last count it was estimated that over 2 million grandparents are denied contact with their grandchildren.<sup>3</sup>

*What about the Government department responsible for this area?*

The Ministry of Justice statistics demonstrate 2,000 grandparents applied for Child Arrangement Orders in 2016, that was up from 1,600 in 2014.



*What happens when parents deny contact with grandchildren?*



**Grandparents in the UK do NOT have an automatic right to see their grandchildren when contact is removed.**

Grandparents can apply to a court for a Child Arrangement Order, whereby a court will decide contact arrangements which can be indirect e.g. letter, gift or direct contact.

Unlike parents, grandparents cannot apply directly to the Family Court, they must first apply for a Court Order. If this is granted, then they can then apply for a Child Arrangement Order.



# The Legal Position

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## ENGLAND, WALES, SCOTLAND AND NORTHERN IRELAND

### England and Wales

The Children Act 1989 (even in its amended form) makes no specific reference to grandparents. Successive governments have considered whether grandparents should be given the facility to apply for a section 8 order in their own right and have decided this is not appropriate; The Family Justice Review Report 2011 at paragraph 4.41-4.48 concluded that, notwithstanding the importance of grandparents, the requirement for them to seek leave should remain. This is still the position. Most cases require a grandparent to make an initial application for permission to file a section 8 application which creates a two-stage process.

There are some situations where a grandparent can make an immediate application, but these are limited. The reasoning behind the two-stage process is to filter out inappropriate applications as a protection against interference in the child's care, comfort, and security.

### Situations faced by grandparents

- **Acquire Parental Responsibility**

This is where there is a need for the grandparent to acquire parental responsibility. It could be that the grandchild has been living with the grandparent for some time and he/she feels unable to make important decisions on behalf of the child. For example, there has been a visit to a hospital and the hospital has queried their right to make a decision for the grandchild; In *B v B (A Minor) (Residence order [1992] 2 FLR 327)* a grandmother applied to the Magistrates Court for a residence order in respect of her granddaughter who had lived with her for some time to enable her to have parental responsibility. Her application was supported by the mother. The application was refused on the "no order principle" Section 1(5) Children Act 1989. This decision was overturned on appeal stating that a residence order should be granted where there was a need to acquire parental responsibility.

- **When parents divorce or separate**

This is where the parents separate and the grandparent has been refused any contact with the grandchild or for some other reason they lose contact with them. Research demonstrates that when parents separate around **42% of grandparents lose contact with their grandchildren.**

- **When parents refuse grandparents any contact with their children**

It could be there has been a falling out within the family, and the grandchildren are caught up in the dispute. The end result is that the parents refuse the grandparent any ongoing relationship with their children.

- **Involvement of Social Services**

This is when an application comes before the court as a result of Social Services becoming involved with the family. The parents may be unable to care for their children safely and Social Services call upon grandparents to become a kinship carer for children, which can be short term or long term.

There are currently 200,000 kinship carers in the UK, with at least half of them being grandparents and yet this significant relationship is not recognised in the Children Act 1989. Approximately 14 million grandparents across the UK are saving the economy an estimated 7 billion a year on childcare. When parents can no longer take care of their children, grandparents are often the ones to step up, with at least half of kinship carers in the UK being grandparents.<sup>6</sup>

## Scottish Law

According to the Scottish Government, as many as 69% of families rely on grandparents for childcare. There is an expectation for grandparents to seek mediation to seek resolutions, however, this is a voluntary process.

If mediation is not successful (or not attempted) the final course of action for grandparents is to raise a court action to obtain a residence or Contact Order. The 1995 Act sets out a number of parental responsibilities and rights designed to promote the welfare of all children in Scotland.

Grandparents do not hold any automatic parental rights and responsibilities to their grandchildren under Scottish law. They can, however, apply for a contact or residence order if they are able to show they 'claim an interest' in respect of their grandchildren.

The court when considering whether to grant a contact or residence order will be guided by three main principles:

- 1 The welfare of the child.
- 2 The court will always take the child's opinion into the account and will take into account the child's age and maturity level.
- 3 A contact or residence order will not be made unless the court believe it would be better for the child for an order to be made than if it was not.

Grandparents informing this report have a shared experience of facing challenges when seeking contact with grandchildren resident in Scotland.

## Grandparents in Ireland

In Ireland Grandparents can get a right to access separately from the parents and this is dependent on the judge. If parents or guardians refuse to comply with an access or custody order, they can be fined up to €2,500, go to prison for up to 12 months, or both.

[https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/birth\\_family\\_relationships/grandparents\\_rights.html](https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/birth_family_relationships/grandparents_rights.html)

Ireland are leading the way in the Parental Alienation Change Campaign and with support from political leaders, we believe the UK should follow this lead.

- 97% of Irish Councils passed resolutions to recognise and address Parental Alienation.
- Numerous questions have been raised in the Irish Parliament.
- The Irish Government has undertaken international & local research on Parental Alienation and an open public consultation on the matter. The publication of this work and recommendations are due to be published in April/June 2023.

Government public consultation on PA

<https://www.gov.ie/en/consultation/c7235-open-consultation-on-parental-alienation/>



## The Role of Mediation

Grandparents can try and get help to see their grandchildren through an informal, family-based arrangement with both parents and/or mediation. Mediation is where someone independent helps the grandparent and their family to work out an agreement.

The Ministry of Justice response to ITV's Tonight programme on 21/11/22: "Grandparents can apply to the courts to decide arrangements for a child's upbringing, such as where and who they live with, but where possible we want to support families to resolve issues out of court and our £5.4million mediation funding will help this". However, mediation is a choice and therefore not mandatory. **All grandparents must seek mediation before a court process and very few are successful in achieving this, due to the other party refusing to take part in mediation.**

The last resort for grandparents is legal redress, leading them to apply to the court for a Court Order. Any application to the court will involve a cost both emotionally and financially. Many grandparents are now acting as Litigant in Person (representing themselves) due to high costs; however, this can lead to many disadvantages due to not understanding the process. The work of GUFC has highlighted the urgent need for grandparents to have access and awareness of support and guidance when considering the legal route.

The child's welfare is paramount and the court always consider any safeguarding concerns which involves the role of Cafcass (Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service) who will provide the court with a safeguarding letter/report which details outcomes of the safeguarding checks. This includes any child welfare issues raised by the grandparent and the other party: The role of the court is pivotal to grandparents as they decide whether a grandparent can spend time with their grandchild and if so what type of contact.

**A significant finding of this report is that where there are no safeguarding issues, grandparents within a court process generally have gaps of over a year or more before any contact with their grandchildren.**



## Contact with Local MPs

Many grandparents are continuing to contact their local Members of Parliament, and we have also contacted MPs during the writing of this report. It is heartening to hear politicians share that they have members of their constituency that visit their surgery facing these issues. However, there remains little action, and we welcome sympathy, but that is not enough. We have been provided with over 50 letters addressed to MPs to inform this report, however, we are not able to display them all. The letters below, reflect the majority of responses and clearly do not answer the questions raised by constituents.

### **30th September 2022 Lord Bellamy KC Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice:**

The Government understands the important role that grandparents often play in children's lives, and the stability they can provide in families. The Government also appreciates the difficulties that some grandparents face in continuing relationships with their relationships with their grandchildren, as a result of such family issues.

It is important to retain the focus of the current law on the child's welfare as the paramount consideration in all court decisions about their upbringing, including when family members are in dispute following parental separation.

In most cases, grandparents do not have an automatic legal right to see their grandchildren but, should grandparents be excluded from the lives of their grandchildren, they can seek leave of the court to apply for 'spending time with' or 'living with' arrangements through a Child Arrangement Order.

This permission requirement is not intended to be an obstacle to genuinely motivated applications but acts as a filter to sift out those that are clearly not in the child's best interest. That was the conclusion reached the Independent Family Justice Review Panel in 2011. Experience suggest that grandparents (or other close relatives) will not usually experience any difficulty obtaining the court's permission to make a child arrangement order application where the motivation for doing so is a genuine concern for the child's welfare.

The Government wants to encourage and support grandparents, like parents, to settle their differences outside of the court process, wherever possible. Support may be available through the Family Mediation Voucher Scheme, which offers up to £500 financial assistance for eligible families to mediate around issues involving children. This support is not limited only to parents, grandparents may access it too. If Ms Sanghera wishes to enquire about their eligibility, full details can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/family-mediation-voucher-scheme>. However, I understand that this is not always possible.

### **One grandparent shared the response she received to a letter to her local MP:**

Thank you very much indeed for your e-mail of 4th March on the very worrying issue of grandparents' access to their grandchildren. I know from within our own family we have someone who has not been able to see their grandchildren now for 20 years and it is heart-breaking for them and sadly the estranged wife (the mother of the children) has poisoned the children's minds against the father because he left for another woman and has himself not been able to see the children either for 20 years, despite there being no allegations or suggestion of any abuse of any kind.

Ministers are well aware of this issue as I have raised it on a number of occasions before when cases like this have come forward and I know they are looking at what more can be done.

If you wish, I am more than happy to contact the Justice Secretary again but as I say this is not a new issue and one which I know the Government have been looking at solutions to for some time as previous correspondence I have had on behalf of other constituents has shown.

Thank you again for getting in touch and please do let me know and I will write to Ministers outlining your case.

# Learning From Other Countries

## FRANCE

In France it is enshrined in law that grandchildren have a right to a relationship with their grandparents if they choose to.

### Excerpt from French Law

c) Persons other than parents (e.g., grandparents, stepparents, siblings etc...)

For grandparents<sup>65</sup> see Art. 371-4 French CC: The child has the right to have personal relationships with his grandparents. This right can be suppressed only for very serious reasons. The provision concerns all ascendants (ancestors) of the child, so great grandparents also have a contact right with the child. Only the relatives that are concerned have standing to bring a claim before court. Generally the courts presume that personal relationships between the child and the child's grandparents are in the child's interests. Lower courts are free to discern (without possibility of appeal on this issue) whether to grant contact rights to the grandparents; The Cour de cassation does not control this discretion. For a case of denial of contact rights to a grandparent because of a very difficult family past, see CA Lyon, 14.03.2000, Dr. famille 2000, No. 126 annotated BERTHET.

## EUROPEAN UNION

2018 European Union Court Ruling

This finding related to the case of Neli Valcheva who was struggling to maintain contact with her grandson, whose parents divorced and who lives in Greece with his father. The European Court of Justice ruled that EU law does not limit access rights solely to parents, it also included grandparents.

'The notion of rights of access refers... also to the rights of access of other persons with whom it is important for the child to maintain a personal relationship, among others, the child's grandparents.'

Neli Valcheva requested contact on one weekend a month and for two to three weeks a year during school holidays. After getting little help from the Greek authorities, Valcheva turned to the Bulgarian courts, who ruled the case was outside their jurisdiction and should be dealt with in Greece.

The ECJ stated that 'as a general rule, the court of the child's habitual residence', in this case Greece, should rule on access rights.

## ISRAEL

The law makes it possible for the parents of the divorced father to petition the courts for access time, independently of the father.

In 2012 Israel approved a law giving legal standing for grandparents to seek access to their grandchildren over the objections of the custodial parent.<sup>7</sup> Amendment 17 to the Legal Capacity and Guardianship Law states:

"The court may, if it finds it in the interests of the minor, authorise an application by grandparents regarding the contact between them and the minor. An application shall be submitted to the court in the form of an application for dispute resolution and shall be directed to the Support Services Unit of the court".



# REAL LIFE EXPERIENCE

"We were removed from his life overnight"  
Grandfather and grandmother, aged 69.  
Grandson aged 12.

"We have been involved in our grandson's care since he was born in 2010. He and his mother, our daughter, lived with us from when he was 2 weeks old until he was 7 years old. Our daughter was escaping an abusive relationship which she left, they lived with us until she moved out to be with her current partner. Our grandson's father has had no contact with him since he was 2 weeks old.

Our daughter has a history of mental ill health which we have fully supported her with on an ongoing basis. Our grandson has severe disabilities and severe and complex special needs. We were involved in the 24-hour care of our grandson and supportive of his mum on a full-time basis. The nature of our involvement meant that we were granted a direct payment from the local authority in 2016.

As a result of our daughter moving in with her current partner a joint care agreement was set up by the paediatrician at our grandson's school between us and our daughter. The agreement was that our grandson would stay with us 3 days and nights per week to give him family stability and routines. This agreement worked well, and our grandson thrived; it also meant that our daughter had valuable respite time in order to help her cope with his significant needs".

## Then things changed

"Our involvement with our grandson stopped on the 30th of December 2020 following a minor argument, that escalated into the Police being called by our daughter and her partner. This led to all contact being stopped with our grandson, from that day to this. The Care Agreement has subsequently been totally ignored and our daughter also, without our knowledge, cancelled the Direct Payment".

## Police involvement

"Following visits from the Police, at our daughter's instigation, we were informed that we should not contact our daughter or grandson. If we did, we would be accused of harassment and/or stalking. As law abiding citizens our whole lives, this was a terrifying situation to find ourselves in, at nearly 70 years old".

## Concerns for our grandchild

"We have grave concerns regarding our grandson's health and wellbeing, both physically and psychologically, as we were removed from his life overnight. We have been in his life from birth, and he is now 12 years old. People who know the family have said that he still asks and gets very distressed about not being able to see us. He has no understanding about why.

We have now decided that we can no longer wait. With support from a Grandparents support group, we have been collating information for a Court process which we are reluctant to take but feel we have no choice".

## Court Process

"As part of the court process, we must show evidence that we have tried mediation with our daughter before attempting a court process. To our surprise our daughter agreed to mediation and after this we were allowed to Skype our grandchild on a regular basis. This was meant to be for a short time with a view of actual direct contact after 6 or so sessions. We are now on session 19 as our daughter keeps prevaricating on the direct access starting. We do not question this even though we and our grandson are desperate to get together. We are fearful to question in case the direct contact is stopped".

# Government Action

Anyone reading the headlines of several broadsheet newspapers over the last years could be forgiven for thinking that there is an imminent change of law to give grandparents greater rights in relation to their grandchildren. This is far from the truth, as no such change has taken place or is expected, despite consistent pressure from interested groups. This has been in the form of many grandparents writing to their MPs, House of Lords debates, full parliamentary backing in 2018 from all parties and (lest we forget) an increase in applications from grandparents to the courts.

**Disappointments  
are born out of  
expectations**



The Telegraph by Chief Political Correspondent Christopher Hope and Victoria Wood 2018  
<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/05/06/grandparents-could-given-legal-right-see-children-divorce/>

**2010 Support for All: The Families and Relationships Green Paper**<sup>8</sup>  
The Labour Government response:

Grandparents who wish to obtain a Contact Order in respect of their grandchildren have to seek the leave of the court before doing so. The Government intends to remove the requirement for grandparents to obtain the leave of the court before making an application for a Contact Order and would be interested in views as to how far this acts as a barrier for other family members, particularly step-family members.

## **2011 Independent Family Justice Review**

The Green Paper was not carried forward by the incoming Coalition Government, however it did support the continuation of the Independent Family Justice Review established under the Labour Government in March 2010. The review stated: “We recognise the importance to children of relationships with their grandparents and recommend that this be emphasised in the process to come to an agreement about their future care. However, we continue to feel that the requirement for grandparents to seek leave of the court before making an application is not overly burdensome and should remain”.<sup>9</sup>

The Coalition Government agreed with recommendation to retain the need for grandparents to seek leave of the court.

## **2017 Prime Minister Questions**

Nigel Huddleston MP raised the debate in requesting the government consider giving grandparents a right of access:

“Divorce and family breakdown take an emotional toll on all those involved, but the family dynamic that is often overlooked is that between grandparents and their grandchildren. If access to their grandchildren is removed or blocked, some grandparents call it a form of living bereavement. Will the Prime Minister therefore join me, Dame Esther Rantzen and thousands of grandparents across the country in calling for a change to the law to give grandparents access rights to their grandchildren, as is the case in France?”

In response to a debate entitled "Grandparents' Rights: Access to Grandchildren", the then Minister for Courts and Justice, Sir Oliver Heald gave a public commitment to the House that should a Conservative Government be re-elected at the 2017 General Election, then “We will introduce a Green Paper later in the year on family justice, which will provide the opportunity to look at these issues and a number of others that hon. [honourable] Members touched on”.

## **2019 Prime Minister Questions**

The then Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Ministry of Justice, Lucy Frazer QC:

“The Department is considering whether further measures are needed to help grandparents maintain relationships with their grandchildren following parental separation and will announce its plans in due course”.

The proposed Green Paper was then dropped by the Ministry of Justice in March 2019. They instead said that “significant reforms” to private (and public) family law were planned. It was unclear whether this would include the issue of grandparents requiring leave to apply for a Child Arrangement Order.

## **March 2022**

Jasvinder Sanghera CBE wrote to senior Ministers across relevant departments including The Ministry of Children & Families, Education and Justice and to date she has not received a response.

## **July 2022**

Cafcass, the independent advisors to the Family Courts acting in the interest of children meet representatives from Grandparents United for Children. This led to several discussions and meeting with the Cafcass senior leadership team, including the Chief Executive Officer. The outcomes include developing actions to improve awareness and support for the increasing number of grandparents that have Cafcass involvement. Grandparents were also invited to be apply to be part of Cafcass engagement group.

## **August 2022**

The Office of Children’s Commissioner received a letter in early from Grandparents United for Children, highlighting the experiences of children impacted by having grandparents removed from their lives. This led to further discussions and a request for the Commissioner to initiate research into the experiences of children forced to separate from grandparents.

## **October 2022**

Jasvinder Sanghera CBE met Prime Minister Rishi Sunak MP to share the contents of this report and The Savana Comres Survey, advocating on behalf of grandparents and seeking a government response. A further report was submitted in December 2022 and grandparents continue to write letters to MPs.

Over the past 12 years, grandparents have met with consistent disappointment in response to these issues across the political spectrum. We now need determined action and a commitment to transform this debate impacting on the lives of millions.





# REAL LIFE EXPERIENCE

"Estrangement, the ripple effect"  
Grandmother aged 75

"I have an only child a son aged 56 who has been married since 1993 to a possessive and domineering wife. They have three sons who are 21, 20 and 18 years old.

From 1993 until 2006 my relationship with my daughter-in-law gradually became distant and strained and irretrievably broke down around 2006. My son has never wanted to discuss our estrangement. It's as if he finds it easier to ignore it rather than try to heal the rift. This is despite my trying to meet them halfway with mediation and trying to find out exactly why they rejected me.

Although I know my grandsons, we have a very tenuous relationship due to hardly ever seeing them through their childhoods. It is only because I religiously wrote to them and showed an interest in what they were doing at school etc. and wrote about my interests that they retained some connection with their grandmother".

**Over the last three years I have come to terms with the situation, but with estrangement no matter how much you come to accept it you still go up and down emotionally.**

"Family is a fundamental and very important part of life. In my case I have a deep abiding love for my son no matter what. It's just there, it's in my DNA! I also believe he loves me, and our deep former bond still exists, but to maintain compatibility between he and his wife our relationship was sacrificed".

"My grandsons are young and will find their own way in life, and as they're grown up, my presence in their lives is no longer paramount.

I cannot turn back time in my case, but grandchildren should have the automatic right to know their grandparents and all the positives it brings. To have the presence of grandparents in their lives gives them a sense of family, as well as a feeling of emotional security and wellbeing. We can teach them so much about life and we can give them precious time in which to listen to their concerns and their dreams. If they know they are loved by us, it can help in their development into compassionate human beings".

**My whole family has been affected by my estrangement with my son and daughter-in-law. It's what I call the ripple effect.**

"Generally, people don't know how to act when confronted by family estrangement and tend to take sides or simply refuse to talk about it. Often, it's a bit of both. Commonly, people believe you 'must have done something' and find it very hard to comprehend that isn't necessarily so.

It greatly affects the alienated parent in ways of emotional and physical ill health, of feelings of despair and of being abandoned by the people they love the most".

# Research, Findings, Evidence and Observations

Grandparents play a significant role in the practical care and support of grandchildren. In addition to this they often provide financial and emotional support to their children and grandchildren. This is a role that has generally been taken for granted by families and governments as grandparents legally have little recognition and few rights.<sup>10</sup>

Grandparents Day is celebrated annually in the UK on the 3rd October. It was established in 1990 by the charity Age Concern, which is now known as Age UK. This day is an opportunity to celebrate the special bond between grandparents and grandchildren.<sup>11</sup>

In 2021, Pope Francis established a World Day for Grandparents which takes place annually on the fourth Sunday of July, to recognise that “grandparents are often forgotten, and we forget this wealth of preserving roots and passing on”. He emphasised the importance of grandparents and grandchildren getting to know each other and the link that grandparents have between the different generations in passing on the experience of life to grandchildren.<sup>12</sup>

Research is consistent in demonstrating that involvement of grandparents in grandchildren’s lives is associated with improved mental health, improved resilience, and pro-social behaviour in grandchildren.<sup>13</sup>

The loss of contact with grandchildren is devastating for grandparents, families, and children. There are often many reasons cited for this loss and often it is due to family feuds, divorce, parenting styles, differing religious and cultural beliefs, financial conflicts and geographical distance. Those taking part in this report agree that the impact on grandparents has many negative effects, especially intense chronic grief, increased anxiety, lowered quality of life.<sup>14</sup>

- 1 adult in 3 over 50 years old is a grandparent
- 1 in 3 working mothers have help from grandparents
- Almost 2/3 of all grandparents look after their grandchildren regularly

# Parental Alienation - A Living Bereavement

Parental alienation is a form of domestic abuse, where one parent or main caregiver effectively takes 'exclusive possession' of the child and, through repetitive psychological abusive and coercive controlling behaviours, systematically erodes the other parent from the child's life. Parental alienation tears families apart and has a major adverse effect on children's mental health and security.<sup>15</sup>

The study 'I Feel Erased' 2022<sup>16</sup> examined the lived experiences of grandparents aged 63-83 years old, who had no contact with their grandchildren due to parental alienation and identified four main themes in relation to their experience:

## The race against time:

Grandparents experienced time through three incompatible time frames: a) the child b) the legal system and c) the end of lifetime frame. A child's time frame has a fast pace. Time spent apart from grandparents may impact their ability to remember them. Alongside this the legal system's time frame is incompatible with the child's timeframe and is insensitive to the meaning and value that grandparents apply to time. The final time frame relates to the grandparent's mortality and the time left to spend with their grandchildren. Grandparents live with the fear of not seeing their grandchildren again before they die.

Disregard for the grandparents' victim status: Grandparents reported that they are considered irrelevant to the conflict between the alienating parent and the target parents and are therefore denied victim status in public, family, and the parental alienation community.

## Health and functioning implications of alienation from children:

Grandparents reported long and short-term implications of forced separation from their grandchildren which included an impact on their health, functioning, mood and wellbeing.

## Reflections on being a grandparent suffering from parental alienation and insights at this stage of life:

The final theme identified in the research related to grandparents' reflections on forced alienation from their grandchildren and the thoughts and insights gained from these experiences. The most striking thought for some grandparents was the shattered sense of family.

The research suggests that the combination of the adverse mental, physical, and emotional consequences supports the idea that grandparents who experience parental alienation could be perceived as victims of abuse.

Bounds and Matthewson (2022) explored parental alienating behaviours experienced by grandparents with limited or no contact with their grandchildren. Alienated grandparents reported being exposed to 13 parental alienating behaviours used by the alienating parent. This study evidenced that parental alienating behaviours also affects grandparent-child relationships. Further research is needed to better understand the impact of parental alienation on grandparents and the wider family system.<sup>17</sup>

A recent systematic review assessing the associations between midlife and older adults caregiving, volunteering and loneliness has reported that grandparents who spent 12 hours a week looking after grandchildren were 60 per cent less likely to say they felt lonely than those who did not. Caregiving for grandchildren may stimulate older people's brains, make them feel more integrated in society, and give them opportunities to share their life experiences and feel needed.<sup>18</sup>

# Independent Savanta ComRes Survey

In support of this campaign and following a speech to Parliament, and in furtherance of their continued campaigning, Lloyd Platt & Co commissioned and funded an independent survey to collate information and evidence to assist this report in March 2022.

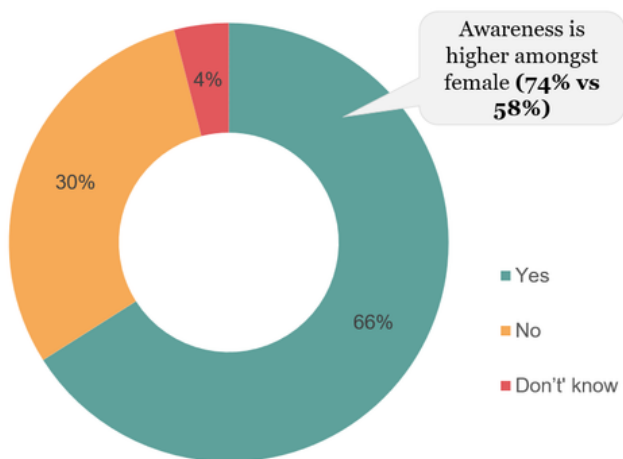
This survey consisted of a random sample of **1082** grandparents from across the UK. This is the first in-depth survey that examines a wide range of factors experienced by grandparents and their awareness of the issues across the UK.

## Awareness of the Issue

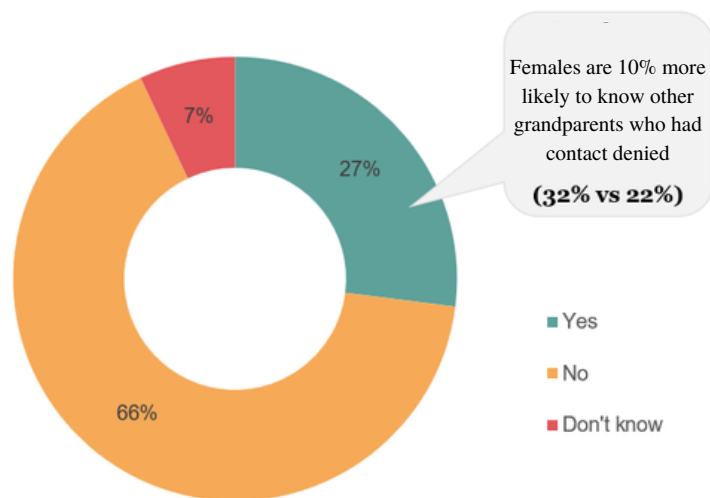
Almost 9 in 10 grandparents think it should be the right of every grandchild in the UK to have their grandparents involved in their lives. Two thirds feel there is not enough awareness of the pain caused to both grandparents and grandchildren by not having each other in their lives.

Awareness of grandparents aged 30 to 39 is two times higher than the one of those who are 40 and over.

**GRANDPARENTS NOT FACING THIS ISSUE**



**TOTAL OF GRANDPARENTS**



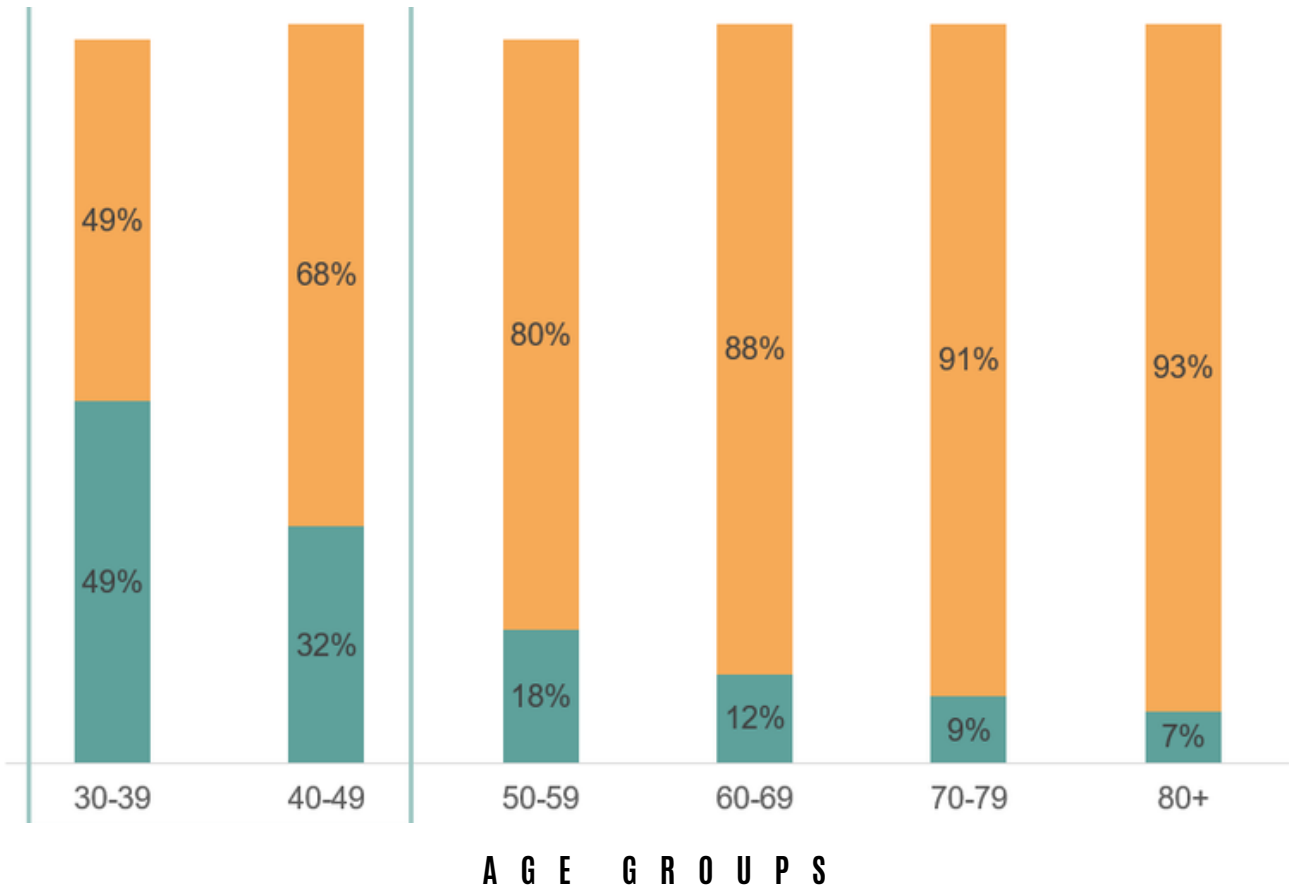
Two thirds of grandparents who are not being prevented from seeing their grandchildren are aware of this issue, and a quarter of grandparents know someone who has been in that situation.

Awareness was higher amongst females and females were more likely to know other grandparents who had contact denied.

## Grandparents Affected

15% of grandparents completing the poll had been prevented from seeing their grandchildren. From these, young grandparents aged 30-49 were more likely to be prevented from seeing their grandchildren.

**HAVE YOU EVER BEEN PREVENTED FROM SEEING ANY OF YOUR GRANDCHILDREN?**



A personal disagreement or argument is the main reason why a third of grandparents have been prevented from seeing their grandchildren. This survey identifies the main person preventing grandparents from seeing their grandchildren as being a son's wife/partner.

Before they were denied contact with their grandchildren, most grandparents were spending time with them and felt financially or emotionally involved. Most grandparents have been prevented from seeing 1 or 2 of their grandchildren. Over half of grandparents had been in touch for more than a year with their grandchildren before contact was stopped and almost **50% have been prevented from seeing them for over a year.**



#### LENGTH OF RELATIONSHIP BEFORE CONTACT WAS INTERRUPTED



Among those, **33%** had had contact or a relationship with at least one of their grandchildren for over 4 years before contact stopped

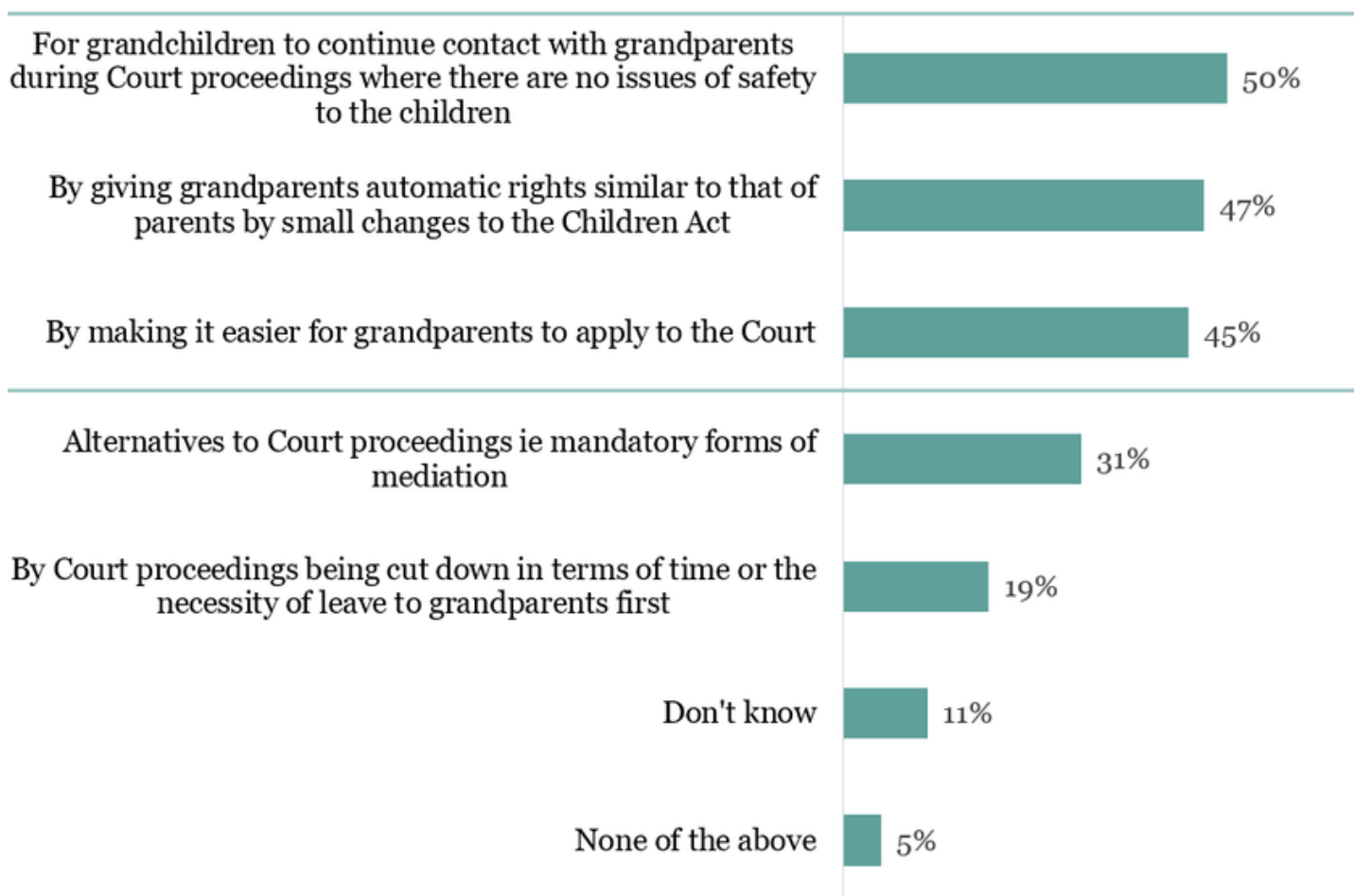
- Prefer not to say
- Over a year (More than 12 months)
- Up to a year (12 months or less)
- Never had contact

Despite being denied contact with them, nearly 8 in 10 grandparents have tried to maintain contact with their grandchildren with a majority trying talk, write or send them presents. A significant majority of grandparents were never penalised for attempting to contact their grandchildren. However, from those that had been penalised, **20% received police intervention or a police caution or threat of prosecution, including police visiting their home.** 15% received a solicitor’s letter threatening proceedings and 11% had court proceedings taken against them.

**The most appealing action that grandparents felt the UK government should take, is to allow grandchildren to continue contact with grandparents during court proceedings where there are not issues of safety to the children.**

The second most appealing action was to give grandparents automatic rights similar to that of parents, by small changes to the Children Act 1989. This was followed by making it easier for grandparents to apply to the court.

### ACTIONS THE UK GOVERNMENT SHOULD UNDERTAKE





# REAL LIFE EXPERIENCE

"Shunned by our children"

"Our family have been active members within the Jehovah Witness community for 40 years.

In 2019, after much soul searching and deliberations, we decided that we no longer felt able to stay within this community and subsequently left the Jehovah Witness movement.

We are now shunned by all the Jehovah community, including our own 3 children, who are still active members. This means that we are no longer allowed to speak to or have any contact with our 6 grandchildren.

Prior to this, we had been actively involved with all our grandchildren, who's ages range from 4 to 14 years. We were a close family, enjoying family meals, trips out, holidays and constant telephone calls. I (grandmother) was even at the birth of all the children, bar one. We would bake with the children, and we regularly had family parties for the Children. The grandchildren would phone, text or send videos most weeks".

**We both have serious health issues, and the Police involvement has been frightening and distressing.**

## Devastating Pain

"We have gone from these close and wonderful relationships with the children to no contact whatsoever. We have tried and tried to reach out to our 3 children in a respectful manner; the Police have been called on us 4 times despite us being respectful of the families".

## Police Involvement

"The last time the police were called because we had driven past our daughter's house and waved to our grandson. We both have serious health issues, and the Police involvement has been frightening and distressing, it has had an impact on our health and wellbeing from the start.

As a last resort we decided to try mediation with a view to reluctantly going to apply through a court process. The mediation was surprisingly agreed to by our daughter but sadly, she cancelled it on the day it was meant to happen".

## Court Process

"We did attempt the court process and were granted permission by the court to apply for a Child Arrangement Order but were faced with a barrage of unfounded accusations in the court. For example, our son in law stated that we had said that we would kidnap the children which was totally untrue. Our health was severely impacted. The stress became too much; heart conditions and 2 TIA strokes in addition to other health problems led to us withdrawing from the process.

The stress was added to by the knowledge that our children had access to considerable support from a strong Jehovah Witness legal team and we were trying to forge ahead with no legal help.

We are distraught and are no longer actively pursuing contact due to police fears and our health but are willing to share our story, in the hope that it will help others to realise that they are not alone".



# Change.org Petition

At the time of writing 36,227 people signed the change.org petition. Signatories included grandparents currently being denied contact, friends and family of grandparents affected who had seen first-hand the impact on grandparents and grandchildren who had been separated.

Thousands of people signing continue to share their experiences by leaving comments and all are currently being collated from geographical locations, including from diverse diverse cities and rural villages, indicating how these issues cut across geographical boundaries and of class, and culture. A random sample of 227 comments were examined and identified 24% as being grandparents currently being denied contact with their grandchildren. This sample identified the following themes related to experiences of grandparents:

- 7% had been or are currently engaged in a court process, none of these grandparents were positive about their experience.
- 35% referenced grandparent alienation for contact being denied.
- 20% referenced their concerns of emotional harm caused to the child.
- 15% spoke of the emotional harm caused to them.
- 11% referenced concerns of physical harm to the child.



The petition continues to be signed and we urge you to read the comments on the [Change.org](https://www.change.org) website. Here are some comments.

## The Voice of Grandparents Affected

"I am a grandmother to two granddaughters who have different mothers, yet I'm being prevented from seeing both girls by these two women. I am devastated as all I want is to spend quality time with them both".

"My heart is broken I haven't seen my grandchildren for over 4 years. I look for them whenever I go out and wonder if their parents have turned them against me. We were so very close".

"I have barely seen my grandsons for the last six-years. My daughter and son-in-law say they are not preventing me from seeing them but constantly come up with reasons I can't e.g. my grandsons are busy with other plans every day even during their school holidays. I am not allowed to have their mobile numbers so I can't even text them. It is heart-breaking as I have adored them since the minute they were born".

"We are desperate to see our stolen grandchildren. Stolen from us by my daughter. Our precious grandchildren whom we virtually brought up from birth, being cruelly stopped from seeing us, their loving grandparents. We know they want to see us".

"My wife and I are currently going through the court process to seek long term relationship with our grandson. We've been here before. This is our second and final time of going through hell".

## The Voice of Grandchildren Affected

"I missed many years with my grandparents due to an over controlling stepfather and as a child there's not much you can do. So, I agree that something needs to change so grandparents can see their grandchildren and also importantly grandchildren can see their grandparents".

"I grew up not knowing my grandparents. When I was 14, I turned up independently on my Nan's doorstep. She recognised me immediately, saying I was just like my mum. I had literally jumped on a train in the spur of the moment. I made sure I regularly saw my nan after that".

"I had my own experience of a grandmother I didn't know about until after she had died, because of religious views".



## A Snapshot of Views on The Rights of Children

"Children have a right to relationships with grandparents. It's a unique loving relationship and shouldn't be denied".

"I believe grandparents play a vital role in children's lives and provide stability. Children have a right to have access to their grandparents. Also, grandparents are key to picking up on concerns around their grandchildren's wellbeing and safety, where schools, etc have failed to. This is, of course, with the proviso that there are no legitimate grounds for grandparents not to have access".

"The welfare of all children is paramount ... cutting children out, denying access to grandparents causes significant harm to the wellbeing of the child".

"People have the right to know their families and family history, to build healthy relationships & a supporting network - all of which starts in childhood. Extended families, including grandparents can bring experience and dynamics to a child's life that parents cannot. They can provide relief to struggling parents, and respite for children of separated parents".

"It's really important for children's welfare that they experience their wider family. Heart-breaking to think that people are shut out due to disharmony in the family".

## THE LAW AND NEED FOR CHANGE

"I strongly believe a grandparent/child relationship is extremely special and should be recognised with legal rights".

"I believe contact between children and grandparents should be a legal right on the part of the grandparents, except in certain circumstances where such contact may or would put a minor at risk. There is a wealth of knowledge to be gained by children in allowing grandparents to spend time with them and speak of life in the past, other family members the grandchildren have not met etc. etc. Grandparents are an excellent resource when it comes to bringing up children especially when you consider all the knowledge they will impart to their grandchildren".

"We need to open the statute books, legislate and give grandparents a legal right to see their own grandchildren all over the United Kingdom except when that might be detrimental to or compromise the safety of a child".



# The Real-Life Experiences of Grandchildren - In Response to BBC The One Show

In 2014, Dame Esther Rantzen appeared on the BBC programme The One Show, to talk about the issue of grandparents who are denied contact with their grandchildren, of whom some are now adults and have been invited to share some of these responses. However, most of the children provided their contact details as they wished for help in locating their grandparents. We have been given permission to share these experiences to inform this report and to raise your awareness.

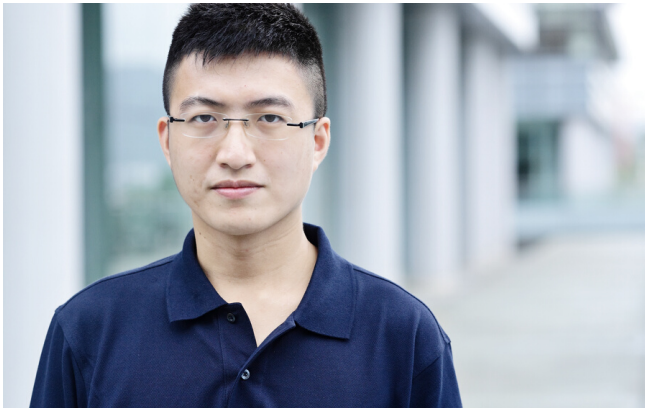


"My grandfather died when I was 16, again we were not allowed to attend the funeral. I remember asking my mum if I could see him before he died. I was not allowed".

"As parents, they have absolute power over who the child will see. As a child you are powerless to insist that you see your grandparents, however much you may want to".



"These feelings have stayed with me all my life, and I'm sure they always will. I feel a sense of deep loss, guilt and regret. I truly hope that my grandparents still knew of our love for them, and that we were powerless to do anything. The scars run deep".



"Please use this example, if you feel you can to convey to both parents and grandparents. For the parents how the abuse of power can lead to emotional scarring that can last a lifetime, and to the grandparents that their grandchildren will undoubtedly always love them and have them in their hearts".

"I implore the parents of any child to think again if wishing to distance their children from loving grandparents to think again. It is not only the grandparents that suffer, but also the child".



"My parents separated when I was 5, but we continued to "function" as a family for several years. I have wonderful childhood memories of my paternal grandparents, they were fun and had so much to offer. My grandfather was a vet and he used to take us on his rounds, as young boys that was a very exciting adventure!"

"I love my mum to pieces, and maybe she had her reasons for the decisions she made".



"The experiences that I shared with my grandparents each summer are the most memorable, looking back through the photos. From early morning walks to evening board games, I absolutely adored spending time with my grandparents.

However, things changed when I was 9 or 10. That's when my parents' relationship became a bit rocky. I'll spare you the details because I don't like to think of it myself...My grandmother still sends letters and occasionally we speak on the phone. I do miss them very much, and hope that someday I will be able to go visit them again and share more wonderful memories with them.

P.S. It's not just hard on the grandparents, it's hard on the grandchildren too".



"I am 27 years old and am just getting to know my grandparents on my father's side. Something happened when I was younger that stopped me from seeing them, I, nor my grandparents are aware of what happened. I met my partner, now fiancée, three years ago and she has allowed me to gain enough confidence to go and meet them, much to my mother's displeasure.

unfortunately, my granddad was severely ill with cancer and sadly passed away. I now am living with deep regret that I never really got to know him, the few times I met him were amazing and I feel like I have missed out on so much with him.

I am still going to visit my nana and am so happy that I am finding about my family, I just wish I had done it sooner. My mother does not see eye to eye with my father's family and is now treating me bad, I am getting ignored and made to feel so bad just because I am getting to know them. I feel like I am getting punished when I haven't done anything wrong".



# REAL LIFE EXPERIENCE

"I don't have time on my side"  
Grandmother aged 86

"Three years ago, my daughter and I had several disagreements and conflicts which lead to her stopping my contact with my two grandchildren, now aged 12 and 9 years.

The disagreements had no bearing on the children in any way shape or form, it was a conflict between the adults, and I have tried repeatedly to resolve it, to no avail. There are not and never have been, any safeguarding issues, I have been in both the children's lives from the day they were born to the date my daughter stopped their contact with me.

I have written several letters to my daughter, over time, in efforts to resolve whatever the issue is. I have driven past the school and house, but I haven't stopped. I did slow down once and beckon to my granddaughter to say hello. Following this my daughter called the Police stating that I was harassing her".

## **Voluntary attendance at police station**

"I was asked by the Police to attend an interview at the Police station which I attended with a close relative for support. This was a terrifying experience. The interview was recorded, and I was told that it would then go to the CPS for them to decide whether I would be taken to court but I could be waiting months as the CPS had a significant back log of work to catch up on.

The officer interviewing me told me that I had broken the law, although he had empathy for my situation, his hands were tied. He suggested that I should wait until the grandchildren reached 16 before I contacted them again. I left the Police station even more terrified that I was going to go to court and be charged with harassment".

"By this time I had found out about Grandparents United. They, along with Jasvinder supported me and advised me not to accept the caution as I had not done anything wrong; if I had accepted the caution, it would be indicative of me having done some wrong or as the Police Officer stated, broken the law.

Grandparents United for Children contacted the Police on my behalf and the whole case was subsequently dropped".

**I am fearful and extremely worried that as I am in my 80's and not in great health that I won't see them again before I die.**

## **Where I am now**

"I am currently in the process of asking for permission to apply for a Child Arrangement Order in respect to my 2 grandchildren, now aged 12 and 9 years. I have not been allowed to see the children for 3 years now approximately and I feel that my only recourse is to now seek the help of the Court Process and the Justice system.

I also wish to apply for the Child Arrangement Order so that with the input of Cafcass, I feel that the children's voices will be heard, and it is the children who are at the heart of this sad, sad situation above all else, I wish them to know that I tried desperately to re-establish contact and that I love them and my daughter dearly".

# Building on Past Foundations

This report has required us to extend our reach to many people affected but also organisations that campaign for change. This led us to the work of Ready Generations who share our mission in recognising the significant relationship of grandparents in the lives of grandchildren and the importance of legacies not only for today, but for future generations.

## Grandparenting -The Circle Around the Nest, Sue Egersdorff, Founder - Ready Generations

**At the height of the pandemic, we published a research piece Care to The Nest, which considered the power of the grandparent/grandchild relationship, particularly through periods of anxiety and most acutely, separation.**

What we learned, should be of no surprise to anyone. The reciprocal relationship between grandparents and grandchildren is both fundamental and empowering to both. It is a natural bond of intuitive, internalised love which represents the unspoken order of things in the human cycle of life. It is a relationship that is life enhancing, progressive and a strong contributory feature of wider family resilience, community cohesion and societal wellbeing.

It has been said by many that the test of a strong society is how it sees and responds to the needs of its most vulnerable citizens.

**It was Nelson Mandela who said: "There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children."**

Babies, children and older people may not identify themselves as vulnerable, but they are when society fails to recognise their inherent right to dignity by prioritising the human connections that support them to thrive.



In this case, the voices of children and their grandparents, alienated from each other for whatever reason, are often dismissed or not heard at all as services become too stretched to give time to the act of respectful listening, becoming consumed with reactive and transactional responses that overlook basic human rights and conditions. The impact is that the rights of alienated children and grandparents to be heard, to contribute to finding solutions and add value for themselves and others, is overlooked in systems that claim to have their best interests at heart. Everyone can be collaborative in creating a meaningful future when they feel truly heard and seen by those who hold the power and control at any particular moment in time.

So, what constitutes their interests? Our research suggests that we need to strip away the professional noise to get to the essence of the grandparent/ grandchild relationship. In Ghana, they use the Sankofa Bird to illustrate the interlinking concepts of past, present, heritage, culture, identity, wisdom and love. In images, the bird gently carries the child, looking back to the past and facing to the future to help the child understand who they are.



It was Churchill who mirrored this analogy when he said:

*"The farther back you can look, the farther forward  
you are likely to see."*

We argue that the wellbeing of family and ultimately society, rests on the twinned notions of connection and identity which together enable a sense of fundamental safety and belonging. Without this, children are cut adrift from an important part of their being and unable to fully piece together their place in the world and the sense they make of themselves. This can lead to feelings of exclusion, anxiety and fear. Grandparenting that is nurturing and present, offers a mirror for the child to see her place securely, take care of herself and know where to turn for guidance. Relationships that are reliable and constant, where individuals are able to consistently be there for each other are significantly enabling for both the giver and receiver.



Globally, we face a dramatically changing demographic as we live longer. Statistics from Age UK predict that by 2030, one in five people in the UK (21.8%) will be aged 65 or over, 6.8% will be aged 75+ with 3.2% aged 85+ (Age UK 2019). The 85+ age group is the fastest growing and is set to double to 3.2 million by mid-2041 and treble by 2066 (5.1 million). Many of these people will be grandparents, great grandparents and even great-great grandparents. Consequently, the significance and duration of the grandparenting role is expanding rapidly and could viably extend to well over 50 years. Whether involved or absent, its impact, is therefore enduring not transitory.

For those individuals who find themselves alienated from their grandchildren and who want to play an active and supportive role in their development and progress, these are daunting statistics. Beyond individual human rights, is also an issue of social policy and cohesion. This ageing population represent a tribe of elders with the capacity and capability to provide a preventative cushion for families and communities. Fierce in their desire to support children and work for the collective good, they are a key component in the building of active, human eco-systems with huge potential to bring disparate elements together to effect positive change. Together they become a primary agent for social advancement. The question is whether there is the political will and insight to shift current legal systems to replace them with something much closer to who we are and want to be. Most important is facilitating systems that allow our children to witness how families can work even when faced with immense challenges.

## Hendon Grandparents Group - Born from real life experience - Lorraine Bushell, Founder

"21 years ago, my son and daughter-in-law gave us the exciting news that they were expecting twins. My husband and I at that time had 5 children between us, but no grandchildren. You can imagine how delighted we were.

I took time off work at the end of my daughter-in-law's pregnancy to assist her with shopping, take her out and make sure she was well looked after. When the babies were due my husband and I took my son and daughter-in-law to the hospital and everything was wonderful".

"Our twin grandsons arrived safely, and we went back to the hospital with champagne and flowers.

Suddenly my daughter-in-law became hostile towards me, she did not allow me near the children, I was barely able to see them. I had no idea what had brought about this sudden change. Eventually, it came to light that my daughter-in-law thought I had a cold sore and that I might infect the babies. I was so shocked and hurt and couldn't believe this animosity towards me. I had a slight blemish on my lip but the specialist had told me it was nothing to worry about. It was definitely not a cold sore and there is no way I would have wanted to hurt the babies".

This was the beginning of the story which has continued for over 21 years. I now have 3 grandchildren, because my son and daughter-in-law had a daughter some 15 years ago. I was distraught by the whole situation, I had never encountered a situation of being ostracised and unwanted. My initial excitement turned to despair; I couldn't understand this animosity and my son seemed helpless and unable to allow me to see my grandchildren.

"Not knowing where to turn, I found The Grandparents Association (no longer in existence) There was a helpline which I phoned and spoke to a lovely lady who was so kind and sympathetic and understood my pain. I felt I wanted to be part of this Association. I made enquiries and went for training and decided to start a group in my local area which was Solihull. The Solihull group grew, and more and more grandparents came.

Some years later I decided to start a 2nd group which initially was for Jewish grandparents, there was no support in the Jewish Community and people believe that Jewish families are so close that something like alienation doesn't exist. I can tell you...it does. Again this group grew and grew and I decided to include everyone in my group so we became a multicultural group of grandparents. Once the Pandemic hit, I started having meetings on Zoom, the wonders of technology.

Success stories, sadly, are few and far between, sometimes if a couple gets divorced, the grandparents get to finally see their grandchildren, but in so many cases, this situation goes on for many years. My own grandsons are 21 years of age. I've failed to make contact with them although I have tried. I wouldn't know them if I walked past them in the street. I only hope that one day, when they finally break the apron strings, their curiosity will bring them to me. It is so sad that they and I have missed out on getting to know each other, spending time together, having fun and enjoying each other's company".

## The Grandparents Quilt of Love and Hope - Born from real life experience - Susan Cramer, Maker

"I created this national project at the beginning of 2020 out of the sheer frustration of feeling nothing was being done about the worldwide problem of estranged/alienated grandparents. This distressing phenomenon is considered to be both elder abuse and child abuse as it prevents both generations from enjoying a mutually loving, nurturing relationship".

"The idea for a quilt came from the cover of a book written by members of a Canadian support group. Those members had created a large quilt made of squares all with the motif of a heart. I thought I would go one better and ask for squares that reflected the idiosyncratic feelings about the loss of a relationship with a beloved grandchild.

At first, the squares for the patchwork quilt came in alarmingly slowly. Each came with a letter explaining the circumstances of their family estrangement. After a year, I finally had enough patchwork squares contributed from all parts of the country to make a start on sewing them together. People had been so creative and got their poignant ideas symbolically across in a little square just 15cm x 15cm. I did feel the weight of the huge responsibility to do a good, competent job on behalf of all estranged grandparents whether they contributed or not. I never sew as a hobby so I had a little trepidation about my skills being up to the job of making a large quilt.

It took a few months to finish the quilt but then the problem became: Where to display it?"



"I WORKED AT MY SMALL KITCHEN TABLE FOR A COUPLE OF HOURS EACH DAY FOR WEEKS AND WEEKS."

## The Travelling Quilt and Role of Churches

"The idea began to catch on and the quilt had its first display in Salisbury Guildhall eighteen months after I first thought of the idea. The quilt then went on to Durham and then to Worcester. From Worcester, the quilt went to two venues in Wales and then it went to Cambridge. Now it is in London and there is a planned tour of several churches there.

Most of these displays have engendered an article in the local newspaper and the feedback has been terrific. Many people who have seen displays have been moved to tears and have said the quilt is heart-rendering. It has also been mentioned that they did not know this problem exists and that is perhaps because it is shrouded in embarrassment and shame. This should not be the case!

My hope now is that the quilt will keep travelling for years from one venue to the next so it can be seen by the public. However, we grandparents are well aware our remaining years are few and we are desperate to see our grandchildren so we can tell them they are loved, missed, and thought of every day. I believe from what I have read in the letters I received, that grandparents fear their grandchildren will think we rejected them and turned our backs on them.

This is an absolute tragedy for children and the question is now: how and when will this end?"

# What does all this tell us?

We suspected the problem was significant – 36,227 signed our petition calling for a change. For the first time ever, we have quantitative evidence whereby the results indicate a problem even greater than we had suspected detailing significant themes.

**Extrapolating from the sample to the population, over 2 million grandparents have at some stage been prevented from seeing one or more of their grandchildren.**

In over one third of these cases the main person blocking access is the wife/partner of a son.

Over 1 million grandparents have been locked out of their grandchildren's lives for over a year.

## THE PROBLEM IS PARTICULARLY CONCENTRATED IN GRANDPARENTS UNDER THE AGE OF 50

Shockingly over 250,000 grandparents have never been allowed to see their grandchildren. Over 150,000 grandparents have been warned by the police to stop trying to contact their grandchildren. This report heard from grandparents who had sent birthday cards to their absent grandchildren and then contacted by the police after claims of harassment.

The stories shared in this report have evidenced the pain and devastation caused to grandparents and grandchildren when contact is denied.



## THE LAST RESORT: LEGAL REDRESS

Our research over the past year demonstrates how grandparents struggle to understand the legal system and face immense challenges acting as a Litigant in Person, so many spend their entire life savings on legal representation and court costs.

A grandparent on a 5th Enforcement Order and 5 years alienated said:

*"There are at present few if any consequences for the resident parent if a Contact Order is not adhered to. There is little enforcement of these orders, so parents are not being dealt with severely by courts".*

### **Breach of Court Orders: Lack of Enforcement**

Most importantly, if grandparents are successful in obtaining a Court Order and the resident parents decides not to turn up at the agreed time and/or blatantly disregards the Court Order, grandparents are back to square one and must go back to court to make an application for an Enforcement Order. Some grandparents are on their fourth or fifth Enforcement Order, as little is done to enforce them, leading to longer absences for children.

There are many ways to improve this position that include awareness of the Judiciary and Cafcass on the issues of grandparents' experiences when making applications for Child Arrangement Orders, to legislating to ensure a fairer process.



## CHILDREN ARE PARAMOUNT

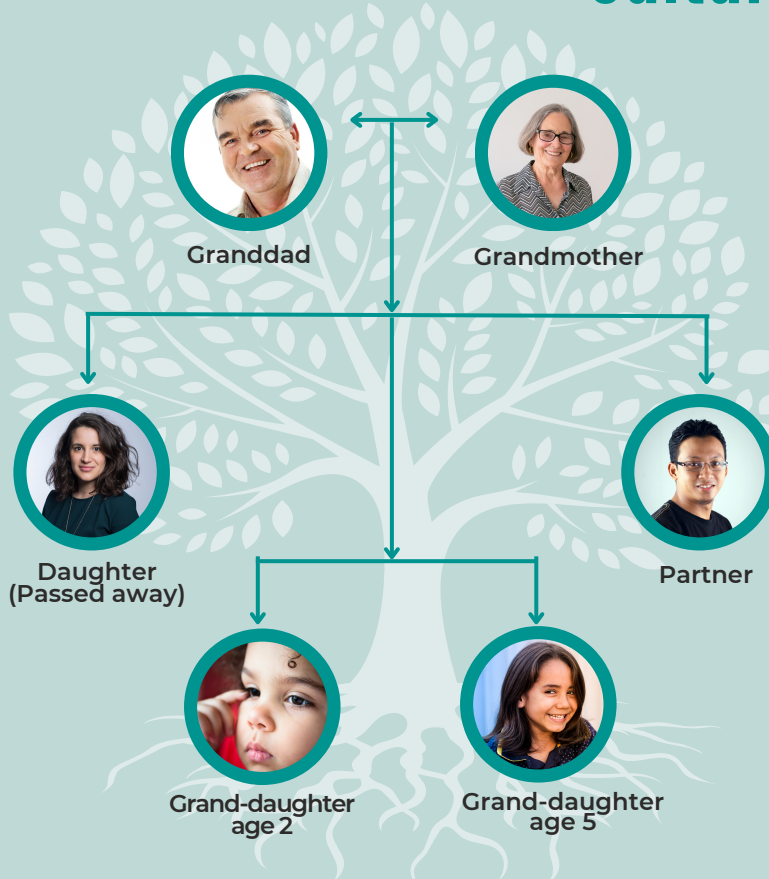
The accounts of grandchildren who are separated from their grandparents shows the lack of power and choice that they have in this situation. These children experience their grandparents disappearing from their lives overnight. This report highlights how, as adults many grandchildren live with the deep regret of not being able to spend time with their grandparents, due to no fault of their own. We have been provided with real life examples of how for some grandchildren, sadly, by the time they are old enough to make contact themselves, their grandparents have passed away and the opportunity lost.



# REAL LIFE EXPERIENCE

## Cultural Heritage

Grandparents offer a link to a child's cultural heritage and family history, but they can also play a key safeguarding role, as with the significant child murder cases of Arthur Labingo Hughes and Star Hobson's tragic stories, it's been reported that both grandparents raised concerns.



"Our daughter died instantly in a car accident in 2019 aged 30. At the time of her death her part time live-in partner is shown as the father on the birth certificates of both girls aged 2 and 5 at the time. Right up to the time of her death we had seen the girls almost every day of their lives, with our daughter using our family home as a refuge from an abusive and controlling relationship.

Soon after our daughter's passing, her partner stopped us from seeing our grandchildren. We learnt that the children were put on a section 47 report because the police considered that the girls 'were at risk of harm from the father'.

In the UK family court system, a grandparent does not have an automatic right to contact with their grandchildren, and this has to be approved by the court. My wife and I started a joint contact application and due to Covid a telephone hearing was set. Sadly, one week before this hearing and 15 months after our daughters death my wife passed away. She had been suffering with cancer for a number of years but had found strength and positive therapy from seeing the girls but her health had started to go downhill after our daughter's death and the ensuing events".

"After nearly a year and after further telephone hearings a pre-trial hearing was set as an 'attended' hearing now that Covid restrictions had been applied. My daughter's partner did not attend this hearing, was not represented, would not communicate with me or my legal representative, merely emailing the court to inform that he had moved and would not be telling anyone his new location and would not be attending any future hearings.

Two further attended hearings later after a surreal Covid limited hearing where there was just myself and a judge in the whole courtroom, the judge said to me that he had 30 years on the bench and suggested under the circumstances I was wasting my time and the Court's time. In his summing up the judge said he was taking the unusual action to refuse the grandparent's application on the basis that the very application itself would cause the grandchildren harm.

Despite local child services support by suggesting facility for contact, and my family's ongoing concerns about the girls situation, I do not plan to take any further approach through the family court at this time".

# Living Bereavement

**One grandparent who did not wish to be named, shares her thoughts on living bereavement:**

I would like to write some comments in order to help raise awareness about the millions of good people world wide and in the UK who suffer deliberate alienation from their loved ones, when circumstances change.

I feel very privileged to have young grandchildren but after their mother (my daughter) died some years ago, her husband remarried and since then the once close, loving, mutual relationship held with them is gradually being distanced and diminished through no fault of mine and with no clear reasons given.

The interactions we have now feel less normal and more rehearsed and constrained. Yet the children have regular contact with the paternal family and have had to accept a new step-family.

Our biological links and loving concern for them are treated by the parents with indifference. The pain of losing a child is still unbearable and this is now being compounded by the lack of access my grandchildren have with me, so it is like a living bereavement.

My thoughts on grandparents' alienation:

- Research shows that children who have suffered trauma over the loss of a parent at a young age never really get over it and may develop mental health problems as adults. They need help to process their grief and loss and also maintain contact with their blood family, to fully understand their cultural heritage and 'where they come from' etc as evidenced by the many ancestry programmes on TV.
- It is good when a loving step-parent i.e. the new co- parent, is granted parental responsibility and takes on looking after the children as they grow. However this care should allow for an all-inclusive widening of new and existing family relationships for the sake of the healthy development of the young minds in their charge.
- Where the pre-existing loving relationship with grandparents is suddenly disrupted or taken away from the children, they are too young to protest or may fear retaliation, this only serves to compound their grief and stores up problems for the future, in terms of suffering from further loss of attachment issues. It may go against the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and also the Human Rights Act to have the right to family life.
- The deliberate disruption of a child's attachment to grandparents can be psychologically damaging for both sides and is tantamount to emotional abuse, yet the actions of parents are always protected by the Children Act.
- In cases of children who are at risk of harm from parents, 'kinship arrangements' can be made in law by social services with other members of the wider family to have parental responsibility for the children rather than placing them in local authority care. So the precedent exists for recognising the value of grandparents in bringing up children.



- Where there is deliberate intention by parents to alienate young children from loving grandparents, they should not have to go through a two stage process in order to proceed to court for a Child Arrangement Order. The costs for this are punitive and form yet another barrier to regaining access to their grandchildren. The law on kinship arrangements should be extended to cover and facilitate reasonable inter generational contact, for the proven health benefits this brings to all age groups.
- The adversarial context of family courts, which may be appropriate for bitter divorce cases involving financial settlements, may not be suitable for making Child Arrangement Orders. Barristers may not be fully briefed on the 'softer' issues and being a Litigant in Person is daunting and bruising and is not for the faint hearted. Even with a Court Order in place, these are abused and broken by parents without penalties being applied, leading to further costs as cases go back and forth to regain contact between alienated parties.
- Recent high profile cases of very young children murdered by the very people (parents) who are 'in charge' of them while the concerns of the grandparents were not taken on board by the agencies, shows up the deficiency of the law and the Children Act. Who was responsible for the best interests of the children there?
- I am aware that there are major issues at home and abroad taxing the minds of governments at the moment, but this will always exist. There is an urgent need to put education and health of young children at the top of local government agendas backed up by minor changes of legislation to The Children Act. After all, as everyone from government to individuals always agree, our next generation deserve better.

## Conclusion:

- There is a putative connection in human nature between the 3 female generations of the species, whereby the mother carries in her womb her daughter whose developing womb already has the eggs of a potential future grand daughter at the same time. This forms an indivisible maternal bond.
- My time with my grandchildren is here and now and I am the repository of knowledge about their mother. By the time they grow up and realise this, it may be too late to reach out to me, as I am growing old. This causes me great sadness.
- We must all now put research-based evidence, knowledge and collective thought into deliberate meaningful action to stop the misery and destruction of young minds and old hearts over something which is not of their doing.
- I hope that there is an amendment to the Children Act in the near future to give loving concerned grandparents equal rights to interact with grandchildren and vice versa. In an increasingly fractured world, it is in the best interests of children to know and be supported by the stability of good relationships in order to carry this forward to adulthood.

# Recommendations: A Call for Action

We urgently need decisive government action and for all those who made promises to revisit them and make progress. We call upon the Prime Minister, opposition parties and government departments which includes, the Ministry of Justice who in 2018 publicly stated consideration of a change in law to establish, a “presumption” that grandparents can see their grandchildren after parents separate. MPs from all parties to provide their support in backing an amendment to the Children Act 1989 to enshrine in law the child’s right to have a relationship with their grandparents and other close members of the extended family.

We also call for the involvement of the Judiciary, Cafcass, the Children’s Commissioner, as key responsible bodies, able to change this landscape in the best interest of children.

This campaign is about the rights of children to continue having safe, established contact with significant members of their family, namely grandparents, and to protect children from adverse childhood experiences.

We seek a fairer and more equitable system whereby those with parental responsibility cannot simply unilaterally remove safe and loving contact with grandchildren.

The following recommendations have been informed by extensive research and dialogues with both grandparents and grandchildren.

## **Recommendation 1:**

The Children Act 1989 - makes no specific reference to grandchildren or grandparents. We seek an amendment to include references to these significant relationships.

## **Recommendation 2:**

The Children’s Commissioner undertakes research in the form of a review or survey to hear the unrepresented voice of children impacted by having their grandparents abruptly removed from their lives.

## **Recommendation 3:**

Cafcass Separated Information Parents Programme includes the experiences of grandparents.

The Cafcass website includes awareness of grandchildren separated from grandparents and signpost support available.

## **Recommendation 4:**

The Judiciary, which includes court staff, judges and magistrates are made aware of the increasing challenges and Court Orders sought by grandparents, including understanding that respondents make unsubstantiated false allegations and seeking to slow court processes to frustrate contact.

## **Recommendation 5:**

Government reinstates 2018 plans agreed by parties receiving full parliamentary backing of all MPs to consider a presumption in law for grandparents to have access to their grandchildren.

**Recommendation 6:**

The Ministry of Justice provide updated numbers related to applications for Contact Arrangement Orders, including repeated breaches of Enforcement Orders. This is an area that requires immediate improvement so that children do not experience gaps in contact.

**Recommendation 7:**

Cafcass state an increase in numbers of grandparents applying to the Courts. There is now a need to explore the numbers of Court Orders, last recorded in 2016. This is clearly outdated.

**Recommendation 8:**

Applications for a Child Arrangement Orders, whereby Cafcass evidence no safeguarding concerns, that contact, be it indirect or direct, continues and is prioritised. This will prevent long gaps for children thereby acting in the best interest of the child.

**Recommendation 9:**

The government and/or Judiciary support plans for a national helpline for grandparents considering a legal process, often acting as Litigant in Person.

**Recommendation 10:**

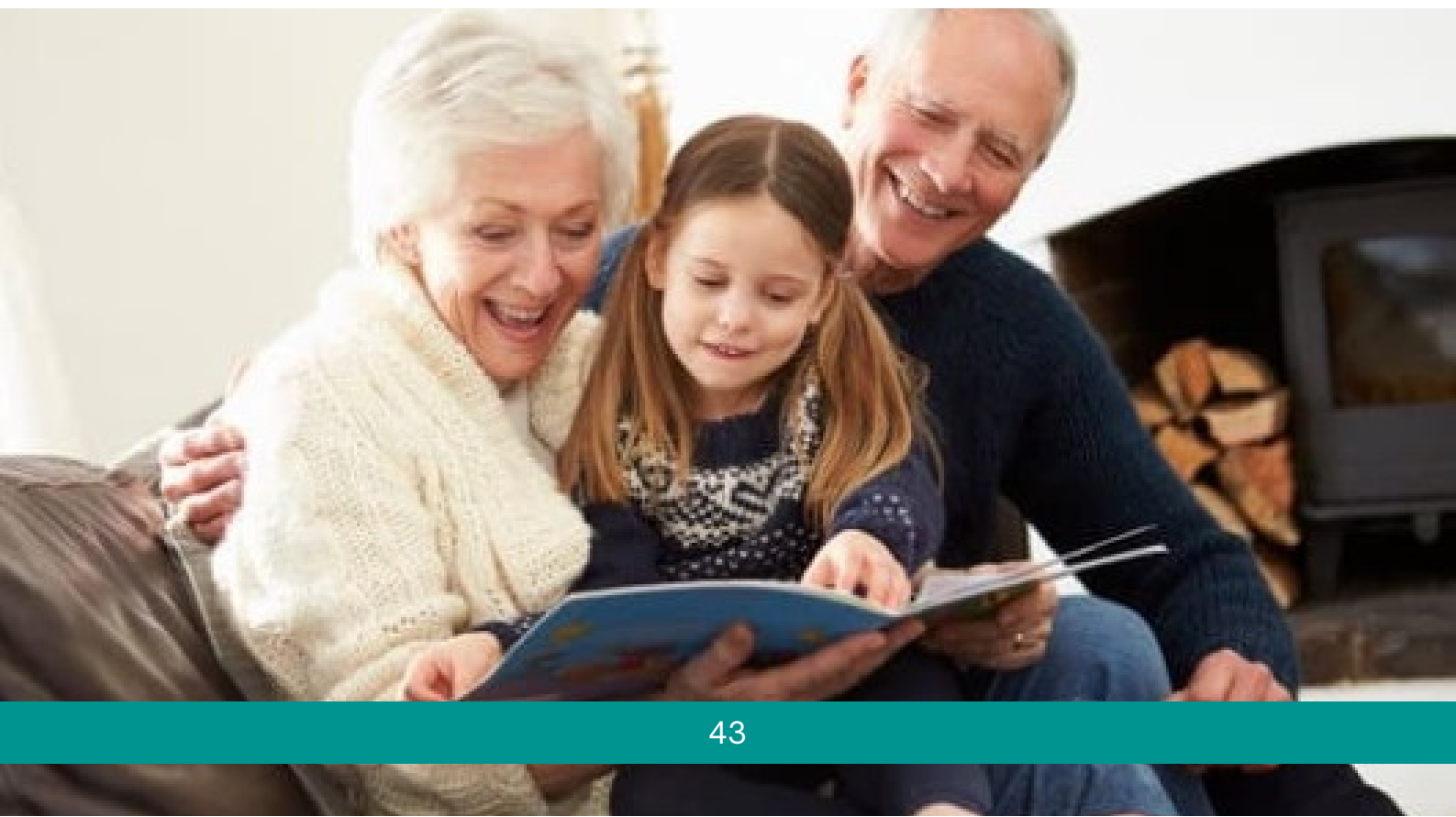
The National Chief Police Council lead for children engages or delegates a lead to liaise with Grandparents United FC, to discuss the challenges faced by grandparents.

**Recommendation 11:**

The Church of England to consider a national day for grandparents, and for the travelling quilt displaying the heartbreak of grandparents, in line with Pope Francis World Day for Grandparents in recognition of the significant role of grandparents.

**Recommendation 12:**

That wider interested groups, including Local Authorities and the education sector raise awareness of estranged and alienated grandchildren and grandparents, including identifying opportunities to display the travelling quilt.



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# Useful Contacts

## Berkshire Grandparents Support Group

<https://adoddle.org/app/projects/2385/berkshire-grandparents-support-group>

Berkshire Grandparents Support Group was founded by Debi Richens in 2018. The group provides a safe supportive space for grandparents and close family members who have little or no contact with their grandchildren due to difficult family situations,

## Grandparents Apart

<http://grandparentsapart.co.uk/>

Grandparents Apart UK (GAUK) is based in Scotland started in 2001. The group is dedicated to helping grandparents keep in touch with their grandchildren following divorce or separation of the children's parents.

## Hendon Grandparents Support Group

Supports alienated grandparents who have lost contact with their grandchildren. Lorraine Bushell runs groups in London and Birmingham at [hendongrandparents@gmail.com](mailto:hendongrandparents@gmail.com)

## Parental Alienation UK

<https://parentalalienationuk.info/>

Parental Alienation UK are advocates for children's safety and wellbeing. They provide information and support any parent or grandparent who is being erased from their children's lives.

## Support through Court

Grandparents going through the civil and family courts can access free and confidential helpline support via the Courts national helpline. They offer information, as well as practical and emotional support. Please note that that they cannot give legal advice. Operating hours: Monday to Friday 9.30am to 4.30pm (closed 12.30-1.30pm) Tel: 0300 081 0006

Lloyd Platt & Co – Divorce and Family Solicitors  
Call them on: 020 8343 2998 or email: [lloydplatt@divorcesolicitors.com](mailto:lloydplatt@divorcesolicitors.com)

The Charity Kinship supports kinship carers across the UK  
Join the playgroup Nana Made Me in Birmingham on Facebook  
Grandparents Plus - call them on 0300 123 7015  
Family Lives - call them on 0808 800 2222  
National Family Mediators Association - call them on 0300 4000 636

## National Grandparents Register

<https://nationalgrandparentsregister.org/>

Are a team of grandparents denied access to their grandchildren and unlike most websites, this one is run and owned by them. Email: [info@nationalgr.org](mailto:info@nationalgr.org) Tel(+44) 079471628

FOR GRANDPARENTS: To direct you to a support group near you or help create one in your area (anywhere in the world - you are not alone, we can assure you) and to also give you the opportunity of registering your details for when your grandchild is ready to find you.

FOR GRANDCHILDREN: To use this Register, wherever you are in the world, as a conduit to connect to your rightful grandparents as and when you are ready and able to find them.

After 15 years of estrangement from my own children and learning to accept the situation as best as I can, it occurred to me that the only thing left to keep hope alive was to find a way for grandchildren to make contact when they are older and curious about their heritage. It also crossed my mind that some grandchildren may have been told that their grandparent(s) were 'bad' or even 'dead'. I decided that having a website would allow all estranged grandparents to be listed, anywhere in the world, ready to be found by their respective grandchild anywhere in the world. Having run my own business for many years, I was able to create a website easily and simply hoped it would be well-received by other estranged grandparents. Considering the lack of promotion since its launch at the end of last year, I have been overwhelmed by the response, with grandparent registrants in double figures already plus offers of help and support. There is still much to do with the site, with promotion aimed at grandchildren being key and I look forward to the future with interest and optimism.  
*Sandy Grayson, February 2023*

## Cafcass

<https://www.cafcass.gov.uk/about-cafcass/>

Cafcass represents children in family court cases in England. They independently advise the family courts about what is safe for children and in their best interests. They put their needs, wishes and feelings first, making sure that children's voices are heard at the heart of the family court setting. Operating within the law set by Parliament (Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000) and under the rules and directions of the family courts, they are independent of the courts, social services, education and health authorities and all similar agencies.

## Grandparents United For Children

We developed Grandparents United For Children to support grandparents who have lost contact with their grandchildren. This resulted in developing an email address in 2022 to support those that wish to receive guidance and support, due to being estranged from their grandchildren. This support is confidential and we support all grandparents affected and able to also offer guidance and support to all those considering or currently engaged in a legal process. This support is currently delivered by volunteers who are committed to giving their time to this cause.

If you are a grandparent, family member or friend that wishes to receive guidance related to absent grandchildren, please email: [trish.grandparentsunited@btinternet.com](mailto:trish.grandparentsunited@btinternet.com)



**What do the following celebrities have in common?**

**They were either raised by grandparents or estranged from them.**

Elton John

Sir Eric Clapton

Oprah Winfrey

Sir Mo Farah

Jamie Foxx

Bill Clinton

Jack Nicolson

Barack Obama

Maya Angelou

Pierce Brosnan

Davina McCall

Catherine Cookson

James McAvoy

Sir Ed Davey MP

50 Cent

Al Pacino

Willie Nelson

