

**grandparents**  
VICTORIA



# THE ROLES THAT GRANDPARENTS PLAY

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REPORT OF A SURVEY CONDUCTED BY GRANDPARENTS VICTORIA  
2019

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# About Grandparents Victoria

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Founded in 2002, Grandparents Victoria (GPV) is a statewide, not-for-profit organisation that represents the views of grandparents, including grandparents acting in the roles of kinship carers in raising their grandchildren. GPV believes that:

- All children must be protected and given every opportunity and all possible support to fulfil their potential
- The needs of families are becoming more complex and the support grandparents can offer to their own family and to other families is significant
- Grandparents have unique understanding and attitudes that should influence decisions about child wellbeing, and that through acting together grandparents can become strong advocates
- Grandparents must engage in public discussions and act to ensure the wellbeing of all children.

GPV aims to:

- **Link** grandparents across the state
- **Identify, articulate and promote** the needs of grandchildren and grandparents
- **Represent** the views of grandparents, and influence policy and practice affecting families
- **Share** ideas and information about what works well in supporting families.

## Surveys

Surveys are used by GPV to ascertain the views of grandparents on a range of issues. Since 2003, 22 surveys have been conducted, with two of these conducted nationally and 20 within Victoria.

### Foundation Surveys

- 2003 GPV – Grandparents speak their minds (Victoria)  
2004 GPV – Grandparents speak (National)

### Kinship Care Longitudinal Study 2011-18 (eight surveys)

This is an ongoing study which revisits kinship care families annually to track changes in the lives of the carers and the children they are raising. The eighth report of this study was released in late 2018.

### Snapshot Surveys

- 2010 GPV – Grandparents survey about **GPV members**  
2012 GPV – Grandparents speak about **the role of grandparents**  
2012 KCV – Kinship carers speak about **education**  
2013 KCV – Kinship carers speak about **relationships with extended family**  
2014 GPV – Grandparents speak about **play**  
2014 KCV – Kinship carers speak about **transition out of kinship care**  
2014 KCV – Kinship carers speak about **the value of support groups**  
2015 KCV – Kinship carers speak about **passports for children in kinship care**  
2015 KCV – Kinship carers speak about **urgent support required for kinship carers**  
2017 KCV – Kinship carers speak about **the outcomes for children in kinship care**  
2017 GPV – Issues to be addressed in **the upcoming state and federal elections**  
2019 GPV – Grandparents speak about **their role in the family and the community**

## About this survey and its respondents

The Grandparents Victoria/Kinship Carers Victoria (GPV/KCV) Board decided to conduct this survey to explore the various roles that grandparents fulfil in response to an increase in media interest in the subject. Of the 50 grandparents surveyed:

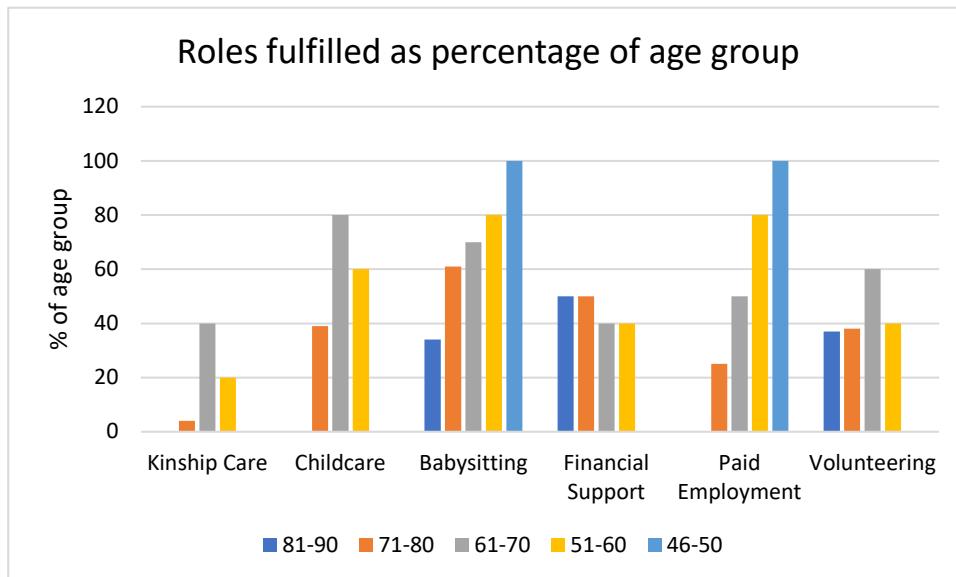
- 46 **were** from metropolitan areas, one was from a provincial centre, and three were from rural areas
- 44 were female and six were male
- 30 had partners and 20 were single
- 44 reported being in good health, while six reported that they were in ill health
- four had 12 or 13 grandchildren, 38 had three to eight grandchildren, seven had two grandchildren, and one had one grandchild.
- Respondents fell within the age range of 46 to 88
- **The survey size was small, with 12% of the respondents being kinship carers. Nevertheless, GPV believes that the findings are transferrable across the whole grandparent cohort.**

## Age as a determinant of the grandparent role

The survey found that the roles grandparents fulfilled within their families and across the wider community varied across different age ranges. The majority of respondents were aged in their 60s and 70s. The youngest participant in the survey was aged between 46 and 50<sup>1</sup> and the oldest was an 88-year-old woman.

Some of the findings were as could have been predicted, such as the decline in the rates of respondents' participation in paid employment as they aged, and the high levels of childcare they provided across all age groups. Others, such as the high rates of respondents volunteering into later years, were more surprising. The table below outlines the number of respondents in each age group who performed the various roles identified.

Age range	Roles fulfilled					
	Kinship Care	Childcare	Babysitting	Financial Support	Paid Employment	Volunteering
81-90 (6 respondents)			1	3		4
71-80 (28 respondents)	1	11	17	14	7	19
61-70 (10 respondents)	4	8	7	4	5	6
51-60 (5 respondents)	1	3	4	2	4	2
46-50 (1 respondent)			1		1	



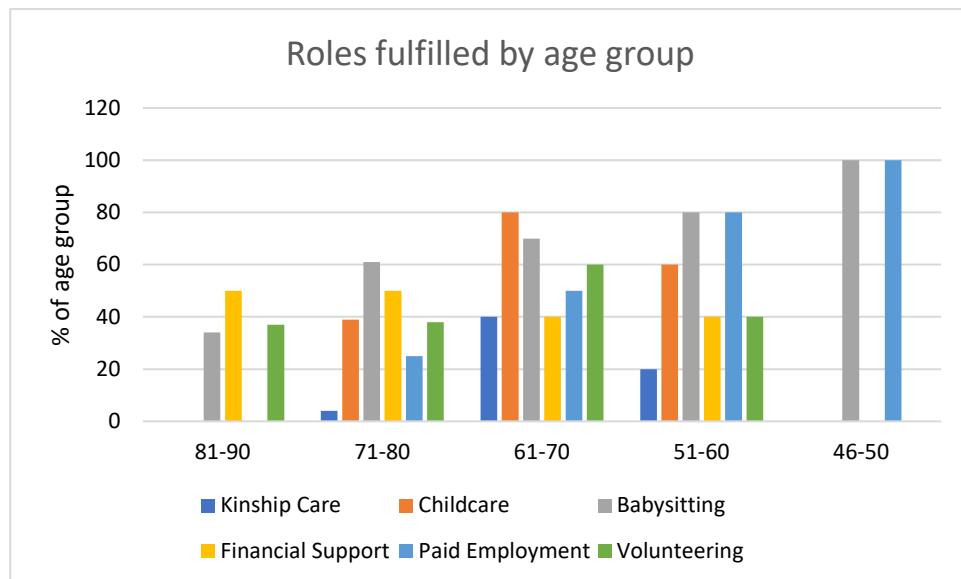
Surprisingly, with the exception of the youngest age bracket, the rate of financial support provided to younger generations remained relatively steady across age groups. This happened despite the significant drop in participation in paid work as grandparents aged. In order to provide financial support to their children and grandchildren, older respondents must be expending funds from either savings or their pensions.

As was expected, as the age of grandparents increased, the rate of their participation in paid work declined. In contrast, grandparents' rate of volunteer work increased sharply through the ages 51-70, but then began to decline again as respondents reached their mid-70s and beyond. It was notable that while grandparents' rate of volunteering dropped off in later life, it did not cease completely.

Also as was expected, rates of babysitting for social occasions also declined as the age of the respondents increased. This is presumably because the grandchildren are also getting older, and do not require as much supervision.

Childcare provided by grandparents while parents work was limited to the age ranges of 51 to 80. This is likely to be because during this period the respondents were working fewer hours, whilst the children were younger and therefore required more supervision.

<sup>1</sup> Exact age not given

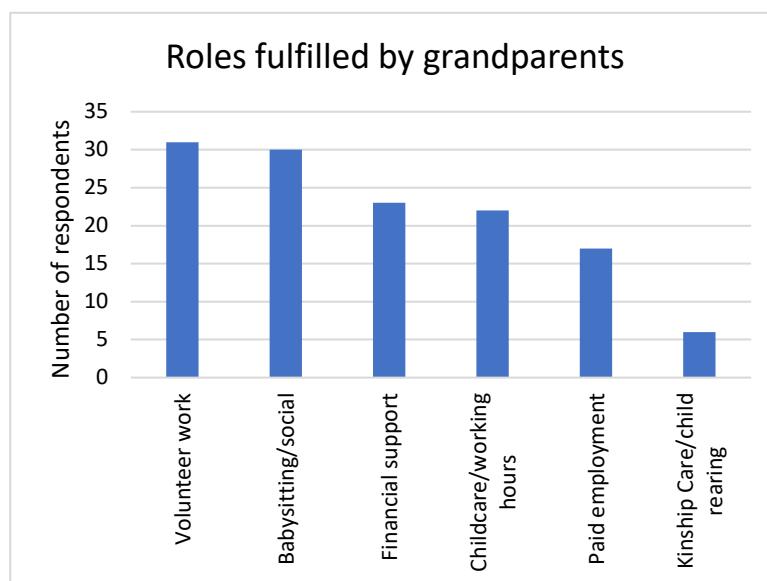


Unsurprisingly, the highest density of grandparenting responsibility came during the period from ages 51 to 70. During this period grandparents are working, with some beginning to transition out of the workforce. However, their grandchildren still require adult supervision, leaving grandparents to take on childcare responsibilities – both while parents work and during social occasions – at the same time as grandparents are still working. As grandparents age, so do their grandchildren, and therefore this need for childcare decreases.

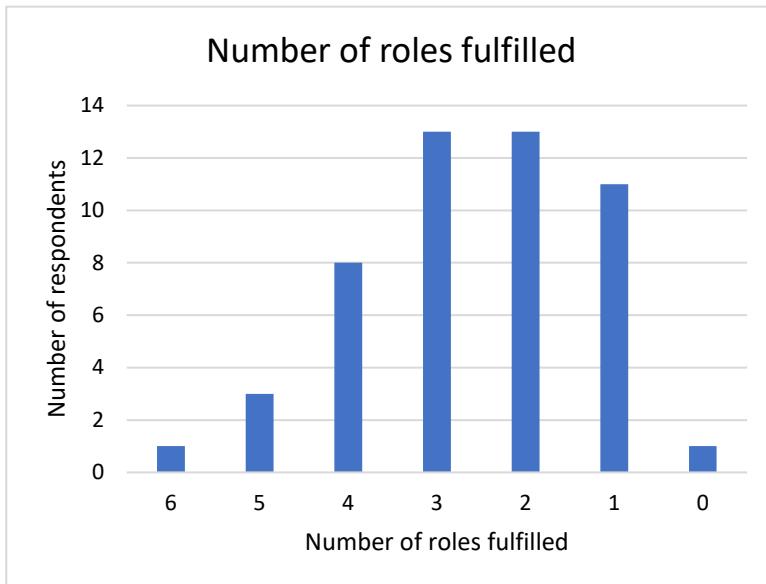
## The roles grandparents fulfil in both families and community

Six main roles respondents fulfilled within their families and across the wider community were identified. Several respondents also reported having additional minor roles that fell within these categories, such as house cleaning, caring for ill relatives or providing emotional support. The following table lists the main roles, accompanied by the percentage of respondents who fulfilled these roles.

Family	Wider community
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Babysitting during social occasions – 60%</li> <li>Financial support for their family – 46%</li> <li>Childcare during working hours – 46%</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Volunteer work – 62%</li> <li>Paid employment – 34%</li> <li>Kinship care: 24/7 child rearing – 12%</li> </ul>



The majority of respondents undertook a combination of at least one to four of these roles. One grandparent reported that he/she fulfilled all of these roles, whilst one reported that he/she did not fulfil any of them.



The one respondent who reported that she did not fulfil any of these main roles within her family or the community was a woman aged in her 80s, who presumably had fulfilled some or all of these roles in the past. The one person who reported that they fulfilled all of the roles was a man in his late 60s.

## The roles grandparents fulfil within families

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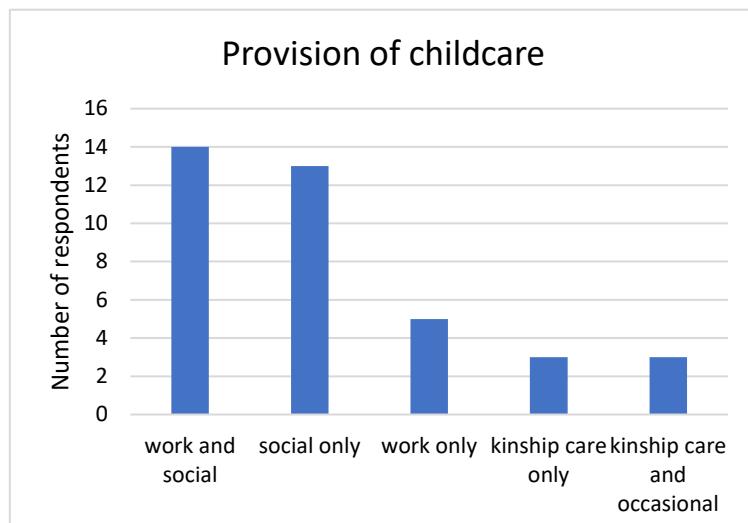
Multiple roles that grandparents fulfil within their families were identified. However, the two most significant were providing childcare and financial support. The roles identified were:

- Cooking and cleaning
- Caring for family members experiencing illness
- Providing support for grandchildren at school functions and sporting events
- Listening to others “off-loading”
- Providing childcare while parents work and on social occasions
- Providing financial support.

### Childcare

Seventy-six percent of respondents (38 of 50) provided childcare, ranging from occasional childcare to full-time child rearing.

- 14 provided care for children while parents work as well as for social occasions
- 13 provided care for children only during social occasions
- five provided care only while parents work
- three provided 24 hours a day, 7 days a week (24/7) care for one or more of their grandchildren as kinship carers
- three provided 24/7 care for grandchildren, whilst also providing occasional care for others.



### **Childcare whilst parents work**

Forty-four percent of respondents (22 of 50) indicated that they provided childcare whilst the children's parents worked. Fifteen respondents who provided childcare during working hours were able to give an estimate of the hours per month they cared for the children:

- three indicated that they cared for the children fewer than 15 hours per month
- five indicated that they cared for the children 16 to 20 hours per month
- four indicated that they cared for the children 21 to 50 hours per month
- three indicated that they cared for the children 50 or more hours per month

The average number of hours per month of childcare provided by grandparents while the parents worked was 28. This figure was skewed slightly upwards by one grandparent who provides 96 hours per month of childcare.

Seven respondents did not give an estimate of how many hours per month they provided childcare. Several of these respondents noted that they provided only occasional childcare during working hours, but could not point to a specific number of hours per month over which they did this, as the childcare was provided in more of an emergency arrangement made only in situations such as during school holidays or if the child(ren) was/were absent from school due to illness.

Four respondents noted that while they had once taken care of their grandchildren whilst the parents worked or attended social occasions, they no longer needed to do so because the child(ren) was/were now grown up. Other grandparents noted that they would willingly provide care for their grandchildren during working hours, but were unable to do so due to the distance they lived from the grandchildren.

Of the nine grandparents who reported that they did not provide any childcare or financial assistance to their families, two were kinship carers, two had grandchildren who are all adults, and two cited reasons of distance (in addition to which one also noted financial hardship). Three respondents gave no reasons for not providing assistance to their families.

Two respondents who reported suffering ill health nevertheless continued to provide childcare while the children's parents were working.

### **Reimbursement for provision of childcare whilst parents work**

Respondents were keen to point out that while caring for grandchildren during working hours was a role worthy of reimbursement, there should be conditions on this to stop such payments becoming a drain on public funds. Suggestions for mitigating these costs included:

- Means testing and sharing the cost between parents and government
- Case-by-case assessment, taking into account the hours involved and whether the arrangement was ongoing or sporadic.

### **Childcare during social occasions**

Sixty-four percent of respondents provided some form of occasional childcare when parents were attending social functions. Other grandparents indicated that they did not provide occasional childcare, either because the children were now grown up, or because distance made this impractical.

### **Kinship care**

Six respondents were providing the highest level of childcare by taking on complete responsibility as kinship carers for raising one or more of their grandchildren. This role requires a 24/7 commitment. Of these six, all were in good health. Three had partners, whilst three did not. Two of these grandparents were still employed part time whilst four were not in paid employment. Three provided some level of care for other grandchildren to allow parents to attend work or social occasions, while three did not. Three provided some level of financial support to their families. Two had lost contact with one or more of their grandchildren.

Two respondents noted that they had previously raised their grandchildren full time, but no longer did so.

## **Financial support**

Forty-four percent of respondents (22 of 50) reported that they provided financial support to their families. While not all respondents indicated what the financial support was used for, examples that were provided included:

- Educational expenses, including fees and extra-curricular activities such as music, dance and sport
- House payments
- Household bills
- Renovations
- Car payments

The monthly amounts of financial support provided by grandparents varied from \$100 to \$1000. One grandparent reported that she had given her family up to \$7000 a month in financial support. Occasional financial support usually took the form of emergency funds or one-off expenses, and could not be converted to a specific monthly figure.

Some of the 28 respondents who did not provide financial support pointed out that:

- Taking on the responsibility of caring for a grandchild full time or providing childcare was their way of easing the financial burden on their children
- As they were in financial difficulties themselves, they were not in a position to assist.

## **How grandparents feel about their role within their family**

Survey respondents were invited to share three words that described the way they feel about the roles they fulfil. Only 88% (44 of 50) answered this question:

- 68% (34 of 50) respondents offered only positive words
- 18% (nine of 50) respondents offered a combination of positive and negative words
- 2% (one of 50) offered only negative words
- 12% (six of 50) did not offer any words.

Respondents offered 34 different positive words to describe their feelings about their roles within their families and their relationships with grandchildren, and eight different negative words.

Taken together, the positive words indicated a sense of usefulness and inclusion. Respondents most frequently used the words:

- “happy”
- “very happy”
- “love”
- “loving”

Terms with negative connotations, which described dissatisfaction with the state of their relationships with grandchildren, included:

- “insufficient”
- “sad”
- “exhausting”
- “stress”

These negative words were mostly used by respondents who had reported challenges with their family relationships, including two respondents who were kinship carers and two who had lost contact with one or more of their grandchildren. Additional factors that led to using negative descriptors included financial stress, ill health, and the balancing of work commitments with providing childcare for their families.

Financial concerns featured prominently in responses to a question about what issues were currently in need of greater attention (discussed in more detail on page 8. This demonstrates that grandparents feel some frustration about the need to supplement their children's incomes in order to cover everyday costs.

# The roles grandparents fulfil in the wider community

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When considering what roles they fulfil beyond their families, respondents reported that they engaged in:

- Volunteer roles – 62% (31 of 50)
- Paid employment – 34% (17 of 50)

Eight respondents reported that they engaged in both paid work and volunteer work. Ten respondents reported that they neither work nor volunteer.

## Paid work

Seventeen respondents reported that they were still in the paid workforce.

- four respondents remained in full-time work of 30 to 40 hours per week
- 13 reported that they still worked on a part-time or casual basis as required. Five grandparents who were in part-time paid work did not give any indication of how many hours per month they worked. Of the other eight, the average number of hours worked was 29 hours per month.

Two respondents who reported suffering ill health were still in some level of paid employment and also provided occasional childcare for social occasions.

## Volunteer work

Sixty-two percent (31 of 50) respondents reported that they engaged in volunteer work.

- nine did not give any indication of how many hours per month they engaged in volunteer activities
- seven volunteered for 20 or more hours per month
- 15 volunteered for between four and 20 hours per month.

One respondent who reported suffering ill health said it prevented her from working or volunteering, and that she did not provide any childcare. Another aged in her 80s enjoyed a volunteer role, but did not provide any level of childcare.

Of those 10 grandparents who neither worked nor volunteered, two were kinship carers, three were unwell, two were aged over 80, and one provided childcare while the child's parents were working. For two respondents no reason could be determined as to why they did not work or volunteer.

A snapshot of the issues addressed by the respondents in their volunteer roles is provided below. Five respondents did not specify what areas they volunteered in, whilst four grandparents listed more than one organisation for which they volunteered, covering multiple areas of support.

Primary Focus	Number of respondents involved
Women	1
Children	3
Families	5
Older people	3
Wider community support	18
Close neighbourhood support	1

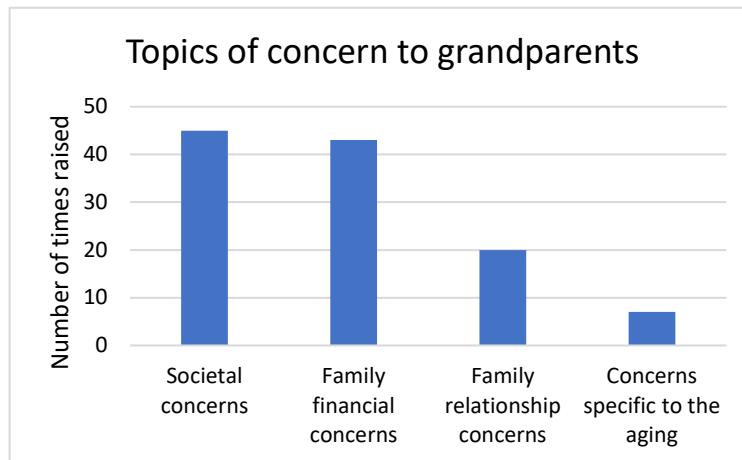
Organisations with which the respondents were involved included:

- schools
- hospitals
- local tourist attractions/museums
- service organisations such as Rotary / Zonta
- research organisations
- church/religious organisations

## Grandparents identify the challenges facing families and the community

Respondents were invited to name three issues facing their families and the community that they felt needed attention. Four grandparents did not answer this question, whilst others gave one or two responses. In total, 115 responses were received.

The vast majority of the respondents chose to focus on issues that affected the wider community in general, whilst also having a significant personal impact on themselves and their families. These included economic concerns and the changing nature of family dynamics. Other respondents chose issues affecting them more personally, such as the need for a police station in their local area or other specific changes that would impact on their personal situations. A small number of grandparents chose to focus on global issues such as climate change. The issues raised fell into four broad categories, as shown in the graph below.



Issues raised	
<b>Societal concerns</b>	<b>Family relationships concerns</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Substance abuse (12)</li><li>▪ Education, including the use of technology in schools (10)</li><li>▪ Mental health care (7)</li><li>▪ Employment (6)</li><li>▪ Lack of respect in the community (3)</li><li>▪ Climate change (1)</li><li>▪ Obesity (1)</li><li>▪ Racism (1)</li><li>▪ Casualisation of labour (1)</li><li>▪ Closing the gap for Aboriginals (1)</li><li>▪ Transport (1)</li><li>▪ Increased police presence (1)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Domestic Violence (6)</li><li>▪ Emotional support for/from families (6)</li><li>▪ Parenting skills (3)</li><li>▪ Children born to single-parent families (2)</li><li>▪ Time spent together as a family (1)</li><li>▪ Participation in community activities (1)</li><li>▪ Limiting screen time for children (1)</li></ul>
<b>Family financial concerns</b>	<b>Concerns specific to aging</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Cost and availability of childcare (12)</li><li>▪ Homelessness/affordable housing (11)</li><li>▪ Financial stress, including cost of living (11)</li><li>▪ Healthcare cost and availability of healthcare (2)</li><li>▪ The welfare system (2)</li><li>▪ Support for kinship carers (2)</li><li>▪ Cost of school extracurricular activities/holiday programs (2)</li><li>▪ Equity in child maintenance payments (1)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Loneliness (3)</li><li>▪ Access to technology (2)</li><li>▪ Aged care (1)</li><li>▪ Relevance (1)</li></ul>

## Appendix 1 – Roles undertaken by respondents

Respondent #	Respondent age	Kinship care	Childcare	Babysitting	Financial support	Paid employment	Volunteering
1	76-80						
2	71-75						
3	71-75						
4	76-80						
5	76-80						
6	61-65						
7	71-75						
8	66-70						
9	76-80						
10	81-85						
11	71-75						
12	56-60						
13	76-80						
14	76-80						
15	76-80						
16	86-90						
17	76-80						
18	66-70						
19	66-70						
20	81-85						
21	56-60						
22	71-75						
23	71-75						
24	71-75						
25	51-55						
26	71-75						
27	56-60						
28	66-70						
29	71-75						
30	81-85						
31	71-75						
32	71-75						
33	71-75						
34	56-60						
35	76-80						
36	86-90						
37	66-70						
38	71-75						
39	81-85						
40	66-70						
41	71-75						
42	71-75						
43	71-75						
44	71-75						
45	76-80						
46	76-80						
47	61-65						
48	46-50						
49	66-70						
50	61-65						