

Press Release

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We would hope and expect that New Zealand could be a society where grandparents needing to raise their grandchildren could be financially supported in doing so, not badgered by the state to stay in employment. This is the view of the President of Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers (ANZASW), Jane Maidment .

Yet the current 'welfare reform' or the Social Security (Benefit Categories and Work Focus) Amendment Act is doing just that. Asking grandparents nearing retiring age, who have dedicated their time and support to increase the well being of their grandchildren, to attend employment workshops and actively seek employment to cover costs as their benefit decreases.

Without grandparents raising grandchildren these vulnerable children will be without family members to take care of them and as a consequence they will be put into care. This leaves the potential for thousands of children to be placed in the care of Child, Youth and Family, putting more pressure on this organisation and the government that funds and supports it. In the long run this will cost the government money that they could currently be using to support and encourage grandparents raising grandchildren.

Considering the personal sacrifices already made to ensure the happiness and well being of their grandchildren it is unfair and heavy handed to force these grandparents into employment as it is a difficult and all consuming task they have taken on. Majority of the children that grandparents are raising come from situations that have created behavioural and emotional issues that require constant love, attention and supervision. To take this precious time away from these children because their grandparents must go to work would be detrimental to any progress made and could promote existing feelings of neglect and abandonment.

A lot of these grandparents have sacrificed steady employment, and as a consequence, a steady wage to take care of their grandchildren in their time of need. Some have had to sell retirement homes then taken on a mortgage to purchase a larger home in order to meet the needs of raising grandchildren. Others have cashed in retirement savings to meet costs and legal fees and are now entirely dependent on benefit income. A selfless deed that should be applauded, not compromised. If we force grandparents who are raising their grandchildren back to work, shifting the focus from care to employment we not only risk the current progress made but put up a barrier for any grandparents considering taking on their grandchildren in the future.

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