

Grandparents First

Issue 2 February 2007

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Welcome

Welcome to the second edition of Grandparents First, a pilot newsletter for grandparents raising grandchildren.

The response to the first issue was tremendous—a lot of positive feedback and suggestions for articles. A number of local newspapers published a letter about Grandparents First which helped spread the word. Many of you said you wanted more light hearted articles as well as serious information, stories and advice.

We are still hoping that the newsletter will become the core of a network. During December your editor was in New Zealand and visited the offices of Grandparents Raising Grandchildren run by the indomitable Di Vivian. She has built a network of 3,000 grandparents raising grandchildren throughout New Zealand, ensuring their voice is heard by their government. They even have a question in the New Zealand census about grandparents raising grandchildren.

We hope that all this will convince potential funders that a similar network is vital here too.

Thank you for sending in your replies to our readership survey. The winner of the draw is Kathryn Greaves. Congratulations—a Marks and Spencer voucher is on its way to you.

Stop Press—Grandparents plus—BBC Radio 4 Appeal 25 March 2007

Grandparents plus will be the subject of Radio 4's Appeal on Sunday 25 March at 7.55am and 9.26pm. It is repeated on Thursday 29 March at 3.27pm. The actress Patricia Greene, who plays Jill Archer—a grandmother in the radio soap The Archers, will be making the appeal. It will focus on grandparents raising grandchildren. Please tell all your contacts, and especially those who have money to give, to listen to the appeal.

Special points of interest:

Forgotten Families—Report
Honey's holiday with Grandma
Caring for an Adolescent
Learning with Grandparents

News update

Forgotten Families—ignored by drug agencies and social services



At the end of November Adfam and Grandparents plus published a report on the experience of grandparents raising grandchildren as a result of drug or alcohol misuse in the family. This included the views of many grandparents who had responded to our consultation. In addition to a news report on Channel 5 News and local radio coverage, the issue was discussed on BBC Radio 4's Women's Hour. Summaries of the report are available free from Grandparents plus 020 8981 8001 and from www.grandparentsplus.org.uk or www.adfam.org.uk

Call for Enquiry into Family and Friends Raising Children

Some of the problems faced by grandparents raising their grandchildren are included in the government's consultation, *Care Matters: Transforming the Lives of Children and Young People in Care*. But it doesn't go far enough. A response by Family Rights Group, Grandparents Association, Grandparents plus and twelve other organisations has called for a Ministerial Enquiry to come up with solutions that include grandparents raising grandchildren outside the care system. Watch this space.

Parliamentary News

Minister speaks at meeting in Parliament

Beverley Hughes MP joined a grandmother and granddaughter who spoke at a packed meeting in Parliament, attended by grandparents, voluntary groups and MPs, to discuss the low priority given to supporting grandparents and other family members who end up raising their grandchildren

Contact your MP

If you want to get grandparents raising grandchildren on to the agenda write to your MP to tell him about your experiences. If you don't know who your MP is, or how to contact them, ring the House of Commons Information Service on 0207 219 4272. Do tell us what happens.

Having Fun

Recipe for play dough

2 cups plain flour

2 cups water

1 cup salt

2 tablespoons of cream of tartar

Colouring of your choice

Mix together well, store in the fridge, and have fun making models with your grandchildren.

I– Spy

A 4 year old grandson was playing I-Spy with his grandma. "I spy with my little eye something beginning with M." Could she find something beginning with M? NO! His answer—"mvelope".

Honey's holiday with Grandma

I spend every other weekend and every school holiday with my grandma, so we have lots of time together and lots of fun! During the summer holidays Grandma took Shaznay, my best friend, and me to the countryside. At the cottage, the cows hung their heads over the fence and chickens ran around, funny little black hens with fluffy feet. Grandma said the cockerel was a bit loud first thing in the morning. But we didn't hear him! Grandma put a tent in the garden for us to play in, but Shaznay wouldn't go in because of spiders! Grandma said we were "city girls" - it had taken her a while to put the tent up. We went to the seaside, and splashed in the sea, ran in the paddling pool, and slid down the inflatable slide. On cloudy days we went to the farm. We fed a lamb from a bottle, Shaznay let go and the lamb ran off with the bottle! Shaznay and I had a lovely time together, especially reading with a torch under the duvet. Grandma told Shaznay's mum that we "never drew breath" - we did like talking.



Caring for an Adolescent

Raising an adolescent has been described as the most challenging task in the human life cycle. Whilst that may be so, seeing a young person develop into a healthy independent individual is one of the most rewarding experiences of life.

There are several special issues for you as a grandparent:

Your age—the challenges you faced as a teenager and those faced by young people today are very different.

Your energy levels are not what they were—you need more sleep not less!

The language, style of dress, peer and social expectations may be hard to accept.

You have already raised your own teenagers—this is your second time around. You now have the wisdom of hindsight!

You may have had a special relationship with the young person, where they came to escape pressures at home. As the primary carer this relationship may change.

Adolescence involves huge physical and psychological changes. During adolescence the heart doubles in size. Some adolescents can grow up to four inches in a year. This explains the enormous amount of food they consume—a loaf of bread and 10 weetabix after school, followed by two helpings of everything at dinner! Along with that are long periods lying on the couch (often in front of the TV when there is homework to be done).

The ability to think logically is developing (take heart), as is their problem solving ability. However the teenager is the centre of their own world. They imagine they are the focus of everyone's attention and spend much time fantasising, particularly if they have had an early traumatic experience in terms of family relationships. As they journey towards maturity they are better able to accept the reality of the situation particularly if they have the stability of your relationship and on-going care. They need:

Unconditional love, understanding and acceptance of them as a person if not of their behaviour.

Tolerance for their periods of being uncommunicative, secretive and silent.

Privacy. The bedroom should be their domain. If it is a pigsty, resist the temptation to tidy it. Shut the door and forget it. You are however within your rights to insist that all plates, mugs and food be returned to the kitchen.

Independence. You also have a right and responsibility as their carers to know where they are, who they are with, and when they are coming home. Curfews should be negotiated. Explain your reasons and try to get agreement. The 'do it because I say so' approach doesn't work well in the long run.

Discipline. Discipling teenagers is difficult, but it is critical if teenagers are to learn that their behaviour has consequences. When they are in a reasonable mood consult them about what the rules should be and the consequences of not keeping them. You might be surprised. They may set tighter boundaries and consequences than you thought.

This comes from a longer article in a New Zealand Grandparents Raising Grandparents handbook by Jill Worrall. If you'd like a copy of the full article please ring Grandparents plus 020 8981 8001 or email info@grandparentsplus.org.uk

Help and Advice

Q My little 18 month old grandson came to stay last year. He was only meant to stay while my daughter went into rehab to sort out her drug problem. Sadly, that didn't work out, and my grandson's social worker tells me the local authority is beginning care proceedings. I am 55 years old. Am I too old for him to live with me? If he can stay, what sort of order would be best? A Residence Order or a Special Guardianship Order?

A You are definitely not too old for him to stay with you; the local authority should not discriminate against you on grounds of age. Of course this is a big commitment to make at a time in your life when you may have had other plans. But if you are ready to take this step, you should put your name forward to the court and the local authority.

A Residence Order and a Special Guardianship Order are both legal orders which are intended to secure a child's place with particular carers. Special Guardianship is stronger than a Residence Order, closer in some respects to adoption. Below we compare them.

Similarities

Both orders give you parental responsibility for your grandson, without taking it away from anybody who has had it already, such as your daughter.

Difference

With Special Guardianship you can exercise parental responsibility and make important decisions about your grandson. With a Residence Order you have to consult the others who hold parental responsibility, such as your daughter.

If your daughter disagrees with your grandson staying with you, or changes her mind, it would be harder for her to overturn a Special Guardianship Order than a Residence Order. She would have to get the leave of the court before applying to have a Special Guardianship Order overturned. This step is not required if you have a Residence Order.

Finance and support: You can get a means-tested allowance with both orders, although it is up to each local authority whether they pay this or not. With Special Guardianship local authorities do have a general duty to provide finance and support, and they have to assess what your needs are if you ask them to. However you should beware as there is no entitlement for you to get finance and support, even if the assessment shows you need it.

For a more detailed discussion about these orders, please phone the Family Rights Group's advice line, 0800 731 1696, open Monday to Friday, 10.00 to 12.00 and 1.30 to 3.30 or visit the FRG website www.frg.org.uk

Your Say

Please send your letters and comments to the address at the end of the newsletter

Give us the same support as foster carers

"It would be nice to hear from the Government why grandparents are not given the same help as foster carers. My wife and I planned our working careers and finances to give us what we thought would be a suitable cash savings buffer and pension. This is now being seriously eroded because an eleven year old's needs are much greater than retired people"

Grandfather in London

... but remember we are family

"We are not allowed to go public because we are fostering. Some grandparents have the misconception that foster carers have it better. This is not true. If you choose to be a foster carer you are doing it from choice and can opt out at any time and the children are not yours. We wanted a Special Guardianship or Residence Order but as we had to have financial support we were forced to be kinship foster carers. As a result we have been bullied and threatened by social services because they know we have no choice. We also get paid less because we are kinship carers in our sixties. We live a life of hell."

Grandparents in the West Midlands

Teenagers

"How can grandparents (particularly lone ones) get breaks from bringing up a grandchild? How do we cope with teenage grandchildren?"

Grandmother in Northants

(We hope the article on adolescents is helpful—Ed)

Ex- drug users in schools?

"I think we should have a former drug abuser going into schools talking and educating young people on the harm and devastation it causes to themselves and their families—and this should be on a regular basis. The ex-drug user is can really explain, communicate and give information and advice to young people. I would also like to see a support group for young people who have parents on drugs and alcohol , where they could go and talk over their fears and difficulties and concerns for their own future in strict confidence. Grandparents also need financial help with children's school outings and other activities."

Grandmother in Liverpool

Keeping Cheerful

"Our support group has many a laugh at our meetings and especially at weekends away. We have to see the sunny side of our tragedies; they may not go away but we have to forget our troubles sometimes."

Grandmother in Everton

(We hope our Having Fun section fits the bill—Ed)

Making Connections

Mind the Gap—regional seminars

Mentor UK, the drug prevention charity, is holding regional seminars in London (21 March), Manchester (28 March) and Bristol (29 March) at which they will be launching the results of their two year project on grandparents raising grandchildren and drug prevention. There will be presentations on Grandparents First and the Grandparents Raising Grandchildren network. Grandparents will be very welcome. For further information on free places at the seminars please contact Mentor UK at 020 7739 8494.

Mind the Gap
Raising our grandchildren from drug and alcohol

Mentor UK, in collaboration with before and after school care, has been working with grandparents and carers bringing on their grandchildren so that their needs can be met. This project has produced some interesting findings on drug and alcohol.

Working closely with grandparents around England we have produced a series of free on-line resources, including training and advice to support their children's health and safety. We are now looking for grandparents to undertake the findings of this project, and help us to disseminate.

About the Seminars
At the seminars we will discuss:

- Latest about the needs of grandparents who are bringing up their grandchildren
- Latest about how they can improve the services provided to their grandchildren
- How to set up a support group, including national and local networks
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Free Supporter Lunches
We welcome that as many as 100-200 grandparents in the UK are bringing up grandchildren on an every day basis. Please contact us on 020 7739 8494 or visit our website www.mindthegap.org.uk for more information.

More information
For more information on the seminars please contact Mentor UK at 020 7739 8494 or visit our website www.mindthegap.org.uk

Topics to be discussed

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Free places
There are still a limited number of free places available at the seminars. Please contact Mentor UK at 020 7739 8494 or visit our website www.mindthegap.org.uk for more information.

Mentor UK

Local Groups

Many of you asked for information about local groups. Here are a few. If you would like your own group listed please send us information about it.

Derbyshire

SPODA have a dedicated worker for grandparents. There is a free confidential helpline 0800 068 5718, email admin@spoda.co.uk, their website is: www.spoda.org.uk

Nottinghamshire

Hetty's runs support groups or drop in centres for families of alcohol and drug misusers in Sutton in Ashfield, Worksop, Mansfield and Harworth. There is a free confidential helpline 0800 085 0941

Islington

Family Welfare Association Carers Support Group welcomes any grandparents raising grandchildren in Islington. Ring 020 7272 6933 or email Pamela.shepherd@fwaprojects.org.uk

Small ads

I am a grandmother raising grandchildren in Oxford. I am keen to contact others in the area who would like to share experiences and campaign for better recognition of our contribution and improved financial, practical and emotional support.

Ref GF1.0906

We run a small group for grandparents raising grandchildren in Barnet. If you would like to join us please send your contact details.

Ref GF2.0906

Please email or send us your response to the ad in a plain envelope with the reference on the outside of the envelope or on the email. We will then pass it on. If you would like to place an ad please sent it to:

info@grandparentsplus.org.uk or Grandparents First, Grandparents plus, 18 Victoria Park Square, London E2 9PF

Learning with Grandparents

good practice cards



Grandparents plus has been working with groups of grandparents who spend a lot of time with their grandchildren.

Surprise, surprise—we discovered that grandchildren learn a lot from playing with their grandparents—about the world around them and about reading, writing and arithmetic. With support from the Basic Skills Agency we have produced a set of good practice cards for grandparents with fun ideas for things to do together.

We have a limited number of free copies to give away, please ring Grandparents plus on 020 8981 8001 for a copy, or they can be downloaded from our website www.grandparentsplus.org.uk.

Grandparents Story—happy beginnings

Our last edition included Linda's story. Although we had altered names and details to ensure anonymity Linda's was a true story.

She was bringing up four grandchildren and two children of her own in a two bedroom flat. Since then her local authority has been persuaded to re-house Linda and her grandchildren nearby in a four bedroom house with a small garden. As Linda says—she hopes this is the beginning of a new era in her life

This edition of Grandparents First has been produced by Grandparents plus with help from Mentor UK, Adfam, Family Rights Group and The Grandparents Association.



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for children and extended families