

Grandparents First



September 2006 Issue 1

Welcome to Grandparents First, a pilot newsletter for grandparents raising their grandchildren.

The Grandparents First newsletter was suggested by grandparents raising their grandchildren who were being interviewed for the Mentor UK Grandparents Project. This project, in partnership with Adfam and Grandparents plus, explores the drug prevention role of grandparents raising their grandchildren. The aim of this newsletter is to provide somewhere for you to share your experiences and help you overcome your isolation – the theme of this issue is drug prevention, but we do intend to cover wider issues. We also hope the newsletter might become the core of a support network and source of support. Please make copies for other grandparents and groups that you know about. It is **your** newsletter, so please send us your comments and contributions on the enclosed survey. We have enough money to produce two editions, but if it is successful we hope to raise more money to keep it going.



Photos taken at an FRG fun day at Gullivers

News update

The Special Guardianship Order, giving family members parental responsibility, was introduced at the beginning of 2006. It

- provides a robust legal framework for the grandparent's relationship to their grandchild without cutting legal ties to the child's birth parents.
- provides permanence; the expectation is that the child will stay with the special guardian until s/he reaches 18 years.

If the grandchild was looked after by the local authority before the order the child, grandparent and child's parents are entitled to

- a needs assessment which can lead to financial support, mediation, counselling, advice and information, training, therapeutic care for the child, and access to support groups.

More details can be found in the Family Rights Group's Advice and Information Sheet No 20. This is available from FRG, Print House, 18 Ashwin Street, London, E8 3DL, or from their website www.frg.org.uk

☺☺☺ **Ahem**

Little Johnny's kindergarten class was on a field trip to their local police station where they saw pictures tacked to a bulletin board of the 10 most wanted criminals. One of the youngsters pointed to a picture and asked if it really was the photo of a wanted person.

"Yes," said the policeman. "The detectives want very badly to capture him."

Little Johnny asked, "Why didn't you keep him when you took his picture?"

(from Grandparents raising grandchildren New Zealand newsletter, November 2005)

A grandparent's story

Linda's story

“Four years ago my daughter passed away after six months in hospital being treated for a substance misuse related stroke. She was only 34 and the mother of four children – 15 year old Stephanie, 11 year old Michael, 8 year old Rose and the baby – six month old Georgia. Before she died I promised Michelle that I would keep her children together and with me.

“Michelle had already been in touch with a drugs agency and social services seeking help for her addiction and for the children. The baby had been particularly at risk as Michelle was using drugs during her pregnancy. Once when Michelle went into rehab the children came to me on a voluntary basis. So, even before Michelle died social services seemed very clear that I should be involved in their care. There were endless meetings – but it all seemed to focus on the short-term problem of making the children safe – nothing about the longer term needs of supporting the whole family.

“And that's what's been the biggest problem. When I agreed to take on the children permanently after Michelle died I thought I'd be getting help from social services, housing and the drugs agency that are meant to have supporting families at the top of their priorities. After all I still had two of my children at home - my 21 year old daughter and my eight year old son, David. How wrong I was! I am still struggling with seven of us living in a two bedroom flat. I have bunk beds in the bedrooms and I sleep on cushions on the floor with Georgia, now a toddler. There is nowhere for the teenagers to go to get away from the younger ones – and from me. In such a small space I have to have strict rules which can be unfair on the older ones. The oldest has started to spend most of her time staying out with friends and getting into trouble. My own children feel usurped by my grandchildren. None of us has had the time or space to deal with the loss of a mum, sister, and for me my darling daughter. I am now on anti-depressants which dull the pain but don't deal with the issues.

“Every Child Matters, the Children’s Act, letters from my MP and doctor and sympathetic individual social workers have made no difference. During the last four years the local authority has sold nearly 200 properties while refusing to re-house me near the children’s schools and my own network of support. They are destroying and eroding my family’s relationships. As a kinship carer I’m treated as a second-class carer. If I were a foster carer I would receive more respect and support, and have more rights – I would not be allowed to foster in this flat. It’s as though my children and grandchildren have no value. Despite bereavement counselling they are struggling to cope.

“But I am keeping my promise to Michelle, and my deep, abiding love for my grandchildren over-rides everything. My children and grandchildren really matter and I will always be here for them.”

(Names and details have been altered)

Your Say

This section aims to report your views and experiences. Please send “your say” to the address at the end of the newsletter

From an open letter to Tony Blair MP from the Kensington Family Support Group Liverpool

“We are the mothers and grandmothers of Liverpool and we are tired. We are the glue holding our families and communities together, yet we remain unseen. Each of us has our own personal story of heartbreak, but the common thread that links us is the plague of drug abuse. Our babies are the lost generation who have become the other, the unspeakable, the “drug addict”. Do not assume that we are lazy or bad examples. We are hard-working, church-going, caring parents.

...Without exception we have gone through our nightmares with no support from our communities. No one wants to know the parent of a drug addict, and often we are too ashamed to even think of asking for help. We have been harassed by drug dealers and neighbours alike. We have stayed awake at night with our withdrawing children, crying, holding them in our arms like babies.

...The Kensington Family Support Group has given us confidence and improved the quality of our lives...Many of us had forgotten our own health while we focused on our addicted children. We are learning to cope with parenting our grandchildren, with the repeated abuses of addicts and societal stereotypes, with the guilt that comes from giving less attention to our other children...More programmes like the Kensington Family Support Group should be funded...to provided relief and education to the families of addicts.”

Your Say cont/

From a consultation with grandparents on their experiences of raising grandchildren

“Drugs and alcohol still carry stigma. Children are taunted at school and do not get invited to other children’s homes. I also feel isolated and am not welcomed into a lot of circles with friends of my own age. Tensions within the family are tangible. Often I have to choose: the drug addicted daughter or her siblings. I feel pulled in all directions.”

“Strain on relationship with my husband due to tiredness and lack of time together. Strain on our other children still at home due to lack of space, huge changes in family life, loss of holidays. Strain and stress on everyone due to shortage of money and worry about future finances. I feel isolated as I don’t know anyone in my situation and I have become estranged from my own friends.”

“Initially I had to reduce my hours from full-time to 16 hours a week. I was then made redundant and now can’t find employment to fit in around caring for my grandson. I care 24/7 and receive £40.00. I feel I should be paid the carers allowance or the foster allowance. When he goes to secondary school in three years his uniform will cost me £200.”

Information and Advice

Grandparents' Association's advice and information line is for grandparents who are raising their grandchildren, have contact issues or have childcare responsibilities. Run by trained volunteers the service can be reached on local call number 0845 6120044 and is available Monday to Friday from 10.30 am to 3.30 pm with some out of hours sessions. There is an answerphone service if the line is busy or it is outside the normal operating times. Alternatively, enquiries can be left on the website at www.grandparents-association.org.uk.

Family Rights Group is an independent charity organisation offering information, advice and support to parents, carers and relatives of children who are involved with or are requesting social care services because of child welfare needs or concerns.

Family Rights Group campaigns on behalf of grandparents raising their grandchildren and runs a number of services for them:

- a free, confidential telephone advice service, tel 0800 731 1696 offering legal and practice advice, open Monday to Friday from 10.00 am to midday, and from 1.30 pm to 3.30 pm.
- An internet discussion forum, where you can 'chat' with others in a similar situation, and be advised by other carers and a FRG adviser. This can be reached through the Family Rights Group website at <http://www.frg.org.uk/main.asp> .
- A contacts database for carers who want to get in touch with others in their local area, or find out about support groups
- A free consultancy service for anyone interested in setting up a support group for relative carers. Email carers@frg.org.uk for information.

Making Connections

Grandparents often tell us they feel isolated; many know no-one else in a similar position; some have said they would welcome the opportunity to correspond with others either through e-mail or post; others would like to set up a local support or campaign group. This section offers you an opportunity to make those contacts by posting a short advertisement. In order to preserve your privacy we will keep ads anonymous and all responses will be sent to you via the Grandparents plus office.

*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 us your contact details. **Ref GF2.0906***

Please email or send us your response to the ad in a plain envelope; please include the reference in your email or on the left hand corner of your envelope. If you would like to place an ad in the next edition please email or post us a maximum 45 words advertisement, with your contact details.

Issue 2 will be published in January 2007. It is your newsletter please send us your comments and suggestions on the enclosed survey.

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