

Grandparents First

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Kinfest 2011



New service starts

A new service offering advice and information to grandparents and other family members or friends who have stepped in to bring up a child who is not their own has been launched by Grandparents Plus. Set up following feedback from Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Network members, the service offers comprehensive benefits advice plus information and signposting on a range of issues.

Continued overleaf...



Grandparents
plus

Call 0300 123 7015

Email: advice@grandparentsplus.org.uk

www.grandparentsplus.org.uk/advice

(Telephone lines open 10am-3pm Monday-Friday)

Can we help?

The advice and information service offers:

- advice on all aspects of welfare benefits and tax credits
- advice on employment, housing and debt
- information on a range of other issues including pensions, social care and education
- signposting to other appropriate organisations.

In the spotlight: child benefit

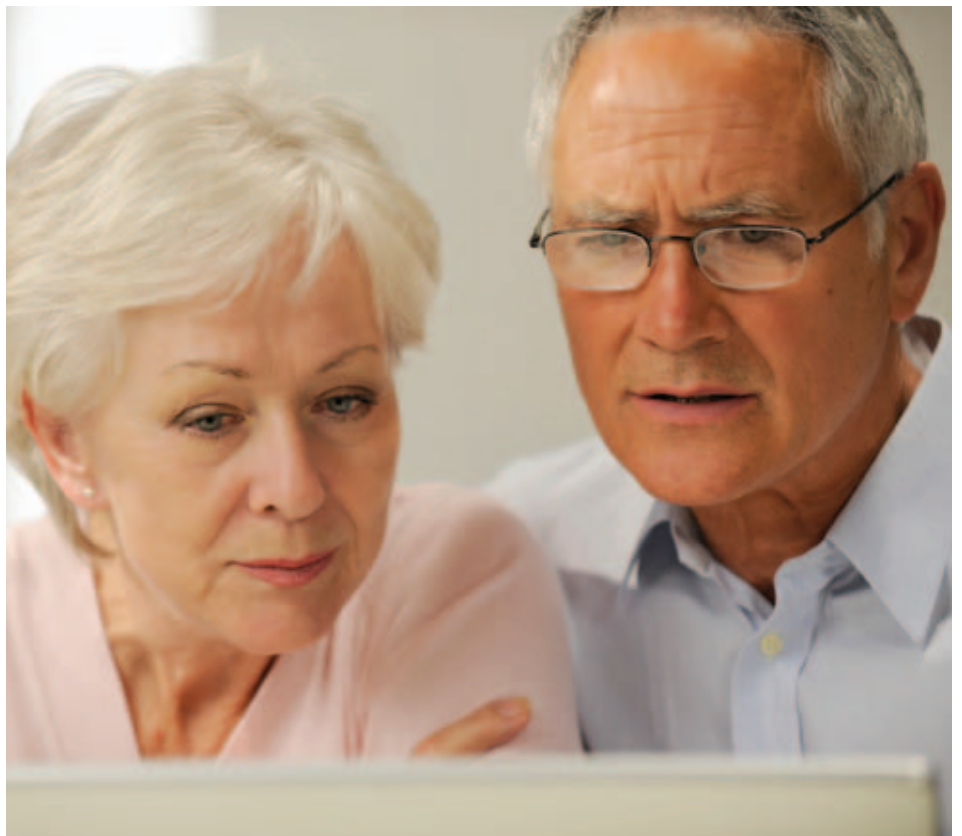
Q: My grandson has been living with me for the last six months. My daughter doesn't live with us but she still receives child benefit for him. She buys him clothes every now and again but hardly ever gives me money towards his keep. It would really help if I could get the child benefit for him, but I don't know if I'm entitled to it?

A: There are limits laid down in law for how long people can keep getting child benefit once a child is no longer living with them. Your daughter will have lost her entitlement to receive child benefit for your grandson once he had lived away from her for 56 days over a 16 week period unless she continues to contribute to the cost of supporting him. To satisfy this condition she must contribute at least the amount of child benefit payable for him.

Even if your daughter is contributing to your grandson's maintenance, any claim you make will have priority because he is living with you – but you may need to provide evidence of this.

Q: Although my grandson lives with me I haven't claimed child benefit because I don't want to upset my daughter.

A: This is a tricky situation for you. However, remember that child benefit is paid specifically for the extra costs involved in bringing up a child. Your daughter may be open to prosecution for fraud if she receives the money and the child isn't living with her, unless she contributes to the cost of supporting him.



Continued from cover ...

Maria Bremmers and Jo Raine have joined the team at Grandparents Plus to set up and run the service, which launched in April.

Organised as a job share so that the service will be able to cope with demand during periods of annual leave and illness, the advisers aim to deal with enquiries within three working days and wherever possible the same day.

Maria has worked within the children's voluntary sector for the past 15 years around a range of issues including disability, health, education and autism. She was recently part of the Government external reference group guiding the first ever Adult Autism Strategy and outside the office Maria has a teenage daughter who keeps her on her toes.

Jo previously worked for five years as an adviser for Citizens Advice. She has also worked for many years in supported housing, after doing an MSc in Housing. She has two children whose grandma plays a big role in their lives.

The advice and information service will be open to take calls between 10am and 3pm from Monday to Friday on **0300 123 7015**. The Grandparents Plus website has been updated to include new factsheets, relevant information and signposting, and enquiries can be emailed to advice@grandparentsplus.org.uk.

"It can be very difficult for grandparents and other family members who have stepped in to care for children to find out what benefits they are entitled to, and what other support may be available for them," said Jo. "It's also difficult to keep up with all the changes that are taking place to the welfare benefits system.

"If people contact us we can check whether they are receiving the benefits they're entitled to. We can also give advice on dealing with any problems such as delays in processing benefits, overpayments or negative decisions."

"The new service works alongside existing support offered by The Grandparent's Association and Family Rights Group," said Chief Executive Sam Smethers. "In addition we hope to reach families who are not receiving any financial help or support by working with agencies such as Citizens Advice and other helplines."

Staying safe in cyberspace



Having grown up using computers, it's not surprising that young people now organise their lives online.

The social network is growing fast. In January 2011, Facebook had more than 600 million active users. If it were a country it would be the third largest in the world, just behind China and India. It's changing the way we communicate, what we tell others and how we feel about ourselves. And although there are many benefits, such as support for isolated families, many grandparents and family carers are unaware of the risks that young people can face online.

So how can we keep children and young people safe when they know far more about the internet than we do? And how can we find out more so we understand the risks and know what to do about them?

The Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP) Centre features some sound advice on their website. Broken down into sections for parents and carers as well as advice for children appropriate to their age group, the ThinkUknow website outlines the things children and young people need to know to stay safe online. Advice for parents and carers includes:

- Help your children to understand that they should never give out personal details to online friends they do not know offline.
- Explain to your children what information about them is personal - such as their email address, mobile number, school name, sports club, arrangements for meeting up with friends and any pictures or videos of themselves, their family or friends. Small pieces of information can easily be pieced together to form a comprehensive insight into their lives and daily activities.
- Make your children aware that they need to think carefully about the information and pictures they post on their profiles. Inform them that once published online, anyone can change or share these images of them.
- It can be easy to forget that the internet is not a private space, and as a result young people sometimes engage in risky behaviour online. Advise your children not to post any pictures, videos or information on their profiles, or in chat rooms, that they would not want a parent or carer to see.
- If your child receives spam or junk email and texts, remind them never to believe their contents, reply to them or use them.
- It's not a good idea for your child to open files that are from people they don't know as they won't know what they contain. It could be a virus, or worse – an inappropriate image or film.
- Help your child to understand that some people lie online and that therefore it's better to keep online mates online. They should never meet up with any strangers without an adult they trust.
- Always keep communication open for a child to know that it's never too late to tell someone if something makes them feel uncomfortable.

Visit www.thinkuknow.co.uk for more information and resources you can use to talk to children about staying safe online.

News & resources...

Changes at the top

Sam Smethers, Chief Executive of Grandparents Plus for the past two and a half years, will be taking maternity leave from the charity at the end of June.

Sam, who is expecting her fourth child, will be on maternity leave for up to a year. In that time, Grandparents Plus will be headed up by interim CEO, Denise Murphy. Previously, Denise was Head of Residential & Day Services for Older People at Hackney Social Services and UK Director of RSVP (Retired & Senior Volunteer Programme) for CSV (Community Service Volunteers). In addition, Denise is a Trustee of Counsel and Care and a member of the Grandmentors Advisory Board.



New challenge: Denise joins Grandparents Plus in June.

Denise, who joins Grandparents Plus on 20 June, said: "I am delighted to be given this opportunity to work with the Grandparents Plus team to further promote the importance of kinship care. This will be an exciting challenge for me and I look forward to meeting all those currently involved with Grandparents Plus."

"I've thoroughly enjoyed the past few years," said Sam. "It's been a privilege to work with such wonderful staff and to meet some inspirational families. I'm sure Denise is going to do a great job and the charity will keep up the good work over the coming months. I'll be back next year..."

Free holidays for kinship carers

For many family and friends carers, the idea of a holiday is a distant dream. But thanks to special offers available from The Grandparents' Association, families may be able to get away for a much-needed break.

To qualify, families need to meet the following criteria:

- not had a holiday for four years or more as a family
- be on a low income
- care for a child or children between the ages of 3 and 18
- able to take a holiday during school term time
- think your grandchildren deserve a break.

If you can answer yes to all the above and think that you may be able to take advantage of this opportunity please contact Sue Stewart at The Grandparents' Association for a chat.

The holidays are for Haven or Butlin's caravans on various sites around the country. They come with a pass for activities and a small amount of money to help with travel costs. Sue will also be able to supply a letter to take into school asking for permission to take the time off.

"I only have a few summer caravans left," said Sue. "But if you are willing to go away later in the year you would have a better chance of availability."

For more information contact Sue at The Grandparents' Association – email sue.stewart@grandparents-association.org.uk or call the Leeds office on 0113 2429922.

Too Old to Care?

A conference to launch Grandparents Plus' campaign for older carers will take place in Westminster on 29 June.

Our new campaigns officer, Peter Hulme (pictured), has been busy organising the conference to raise awareness about the problems facing older carers as part of the campaign funded by Comic Relief.



The one-day conference will mainly be aimed at professionals in local authorities, to improve their knowledge and awareness to support family and friends carers. The speakers will include Tim Loughton (Minister for Children & Families) and we'll show two exciting new videos featuring Network members Anthony and Christine MacDonald and Brian and Kathleen Mitchell on the joys and challenges of raising their grandchildren. Limited free places will be available for kinship carers aged over 65. Contact Peter for details.

Visit www.grandparentsplus.org.uk/conferences-and-seminars or contact peter.hulme@grandparentsplus.org.uk for more details.

Network in the North East

Calling all grandparents and family and friends carers in the North East – Grandparents Plus is organising a free regional event on Monday 13 June.

Taking place at the Assembly Rooms in the centre of Newcastle, the event aims to bring together family and friends carers from the area for a day to meet others and share experiences, highlight local support, raise awareness of kinship care and inform the development of local policies. Advice will be available from Solicitor of the Year Nigel Priestley, as well as Grandparents Plus' advice and information worker, Maria Bremners, and the Family Rights Group and the Grandparents' Association.

"We are putting the event together with local groups in the North East, including Newcastle PROPS, Escape, More Than Grandparents, Bridges Stockton and Families First," said Network Co-ordinator Alison Blaxland. "We hope the day will be really interesting and informative for everyone."

For more information please contact Alison on 020 8981 8001, or email alison.blaxland@grandparentsplus.org.uk. Places must be booked in advance so please get in touch as soon as possible.

Portsmouth pilot

Would you like help dealing with your grandchild's school? Maybe some help in finding good groups to go to, or accessing support for your grandchild?

The Grandparents' Association has launched a pilot project in Portsmouth, where grandparents can get information and support including help with writing letters, documents and court paperwork, plus befriending and confidence building.

"The project has two knowledgeable Grandparent Support Advisor volunteers who can give ongoing support over a few weeks or months, with extra support and information from The Grandparents' Association when needed," said Project Manager Louisa Wearn.

"If this is something that would be of interest to you but you don't live in the Portsmouth area then please contact me anyway to see if there is any other way we can help, as we would like to set up similar support across the country in the future," added Louisa.

For more details contact louisa.wearn@grandparents-association.org.uk or call 023 92 294726 for a chat.



Facing up to Facebook

New resources to help families explore the many questions and concerns around social networking sites have been produced by BAAF.

Although aimed at adoptive families, *Facing up to Facebook* and *Social networking and you* provide information, raise important questions and offer essential advice for anyone raising a child who is not their own. *Facing up to Facebook* provides a practical explanation of social networking sites and examines the challenges faced around online contact, privacy and identity protection. *Social networking and you*, written for adopted and long-term fostered teenagers, offers advice on staying safe online and addresses concerns about unexpected contact with birth family members.

Facing up to Facebook costs £14.95 and *Social networking and you* is £3.95, both plus p&p, from BAAF Publications. For more information on these and other resources visit www.baaf.org.uk or call 020 7421 2604.

Helplines & groups

National

The Grandparents' Association

Tel: 0845 434 9585

www.grandparents-association.org.uk

Family Rights Group

Tel: 0808 801 0366 (10am—3.30pm)

www.frg.org.uk

Grandparents Plus Advice and Information

Tel: 0300 123 7015 (10am—3.00pm)

www.grandparentsplus.org.uk

North West

Grandparents Group, Barrow-in-Furness, Cumbria

Support group for all grandparents raising grandchildren. Contact Tracy. Stoker@actionforchildren.org.uk or call 07889 603843.

South West

Parents Again Support Group, Plymouth

Support for all grandparents raising grandchildren. Contact Gordon at gordonrawlins@myguide.net or Tina at sdhowlett99@tiscali.co.uk for more information.

London

Family Action, Islington

Support group for all kinship carers. Contact Carol on 020 7272 6933 for more information.

A full listing of support groups can be found on our website – www.grandparentsplus.org.uk

Include your details...

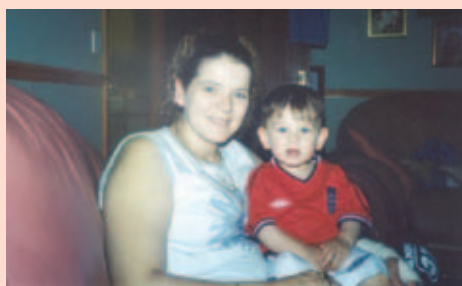
If you run a group and would like to include your details please email info@grandparentsplus.org.uk

A child's view:

“The worst thing is that I have to share my room...”



Ellie and Jilly's lives changed forever when their cousin, Kai, came to live with them.



Kai with his mum.

Ellie was almost seven when her auntie Amanda died suddenly. “I was really close to her,” says Ellie. “I was really sad when she died.” Ellie had a younger sister, Jilly, who was just 18 months old and a little too young to understand what had happened and why everyone was so sad. And Amanda herself had left behind her own son, Kai, who was just four years old.

Ellie and Jilly's mum, Karen, had promised Amanda that if anything happened to her she would raise Kai alongside her own girls with husband Dave. Naturally Karen had no idea that tragedy would strike when Amanda went into hospital for a routine bowel operation and was left devastated when Amanda died just three days later.

“Amanda was only 35 when she passed away,” says Karen. “She died just 10 minutes before Kai, her precious only son, arrived at the hospital. The sudden surge of emotions – loss, grief and the fierce need to protect my beautiful little nephew – left me winded.”

Kai went home with Karen, Dave, Ellie and Jilly that night, and the family had to organise new routines. Karen cut down her hours at work, Kai needed to change schools so he could go to the same one as Ellie, and the family applied for a Residence Order.

“She died just 10 minutes before Kai, her precious only son, arrived at the hospital.”

To adapt to their new situation, Karen looked online for advice and support. Finally she came across a Facebook group for kinship carers which had just 14 members. Now, there are more than 200 members who share their experiences, frustrations, highs and lows with each other.

“It’s a safe place to let off steam and say how you’re really feeling,” says Karen. “If I was to moan to friends or people at work they’d think ‘on no, here she goes again’, but within the group people can really understand and support each other.”

Many of the Facebook friends took part in the first Grandparents Plus national lobby day at Westminster, with the children meeting others and making friends of their own. This led to families planning a holiday together, with the first ‘Kinfest’ holiday taking place in Skegness last August. Things went so well that another holiday is being planned for this summer (see page eight for more details).

The success of the ‘Kinfest’ holiday led to the children making lots of new friends but the distance between them all – ranging from Scotland to south east England – meant it would be difficult to meet regularly. So they decided to use Facebook themselves, as Ellie explains.

“I made friends with Dharma and Caitlen, and it was Dharma’s idea,” says Ellie. “We got together at Kinfest and set up the groups with my mum.”

Karen is the adult administrator on the groups, which share the same ‘handprint’ logo as the adult group. There are two groups for children and young people, one for those who are sharing their parents with other family members, known as Kinship “Foster” Sharers, and one for the children who have joined the family called Kinship “Foster” Kids.

All the groups are secure, with only members being able to read the content. All requests to join are sent to Karen who checks they are genuine before they can access the group’s discussions. Adults are not allowed to join.

Both Dharma and Kai are members of the Kinship “Foster” Kids group. Ellie and Caitlen are Kinship “Foster” Sharers members, as is Jilly. Although it is early days for both groups, they hope more friends will join so they can be honest about how they feel when someone joins the family to “share” with them or how they feel when they join a kinship family.

“The worst thing is that I have to share a bedroom with Jilly,” says Ellie. “She makes the room messy. If I go out for the day it all gets messed up.

“But it’s fine sharing mum and dad with Kai. I’m 12 now, Kai is 10 and Jilly almost 7. He’s made a lot of friends and it’s ok.”

Karen remembers Ellie’s words when Kai first came home with them. “She understood what had happened and said that she didn’t want auntie Amanda to be dead,” says Karen. “I told her that we would have to look after Kai and that he was going to live with us. ‘He can play with my toys,’ was her reply.”

For details of the support groups visit www.facebook.com and search on Kinship “Foster” Carers for the adult group, Kinship “Foster” Sharers for children who are sharing their parents, and Kinship “Foster” Kids for children who are living with kinship carers. Alternatively, contact Karen direct at www.facebook.com/karen.steele56 for more information.



Ellie with Jilly.



Friends for life: Ellie with Caitlen and Dharma.

“We got together at Kinfest and set up the groups with my mum.”



Mum and dad: Karen and Dave.

Would you like to share your story with other kinship carers?

If you are interested in sharing your experiences please call Alison for a chat on 020 8981 8001.

Fun for all the family!

After the success of the first 'Kinfest' holiday in 2010, plans are underway to make 2011 bigger and better than ever.

Last August, 12 families took over a holiday park in Skegness on the Lincolnshire coast. All the families had come together through their experiences as kinship carers, and the holiday was a result of a "wouldn't it be funny if we all went on holiday together?" remark.

"Luckily, the holiday was a massive success with everyone getting on really well," said Shelly James, one of the organisers. "As well as the families who stayed at the holiday park others dropped in for the day if they were in the area, and both adults and children made lots of new friends."

This year the families will be heading back to Skegness for a week from Saturday 6th to Saturday 13th August. This time they are staying at the Southview Leisure Park, a Park Resort, and with 14 families already booked it looks like it will be another week to remember.

"We learnt a lot from last year," said Shelly. "We're getting goody bags ready for all the children, and they will all have a security wrist band with the handprint logo and space for a mobile telephone number. All the caravans and tents will have sparkly stars so everyone knows who's with the group, and we're producing baseball caps and car stickers."

There are also plans to do a balloon launch, and on the final evening there will be a special event to present trophies to all the children.



It's not too late to get involved in Kinfest 2011 – for more information visit the Kinship "Foster" Carers Facebook group, contact organiser Karen Steele at www.facebook.com/karen.steele56 or call Shelly on 01865 779899.



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Grandparents plus

We champion the wider family who care for children

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