

Grandparents First

The newsletter for Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

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On the road again!

Grandparents across North Nottinghamshire have been invited to join the Network at a special day of advice and information, organised with local charity Hetty's.

Taking place on **February 23rd**, the day will build on the success of the launch event in Liverpool last year, although on a much smaller scale.

"We're lucky to have Big Lottery funding to hold 12 events over three years," said Co-ordinator Alison Blaxland. "This will be the first, with the next event planned for Tower Hamlets in London for April/May this year."

There will be a full report from the day in the next issue.

For information on future events please contact Alison—details on page 3.

Grandparents news in the spotlight

An Institute of Education report published this month found that children who are looked after by their grandparents while their parents are at work are less ready for school than those cared for by nurseries or crèches.

The controversial report sparked lots of press interest, with comments by Grandparents Plus featured in *The Times*, *The Guardian* and local radio stations.

Quoted in *The Guardian*, Chief Executive Sam Smethers said: "Of course families rely on grandparents because it's seen as the next best thing to parental care. Something like 1.7 million families use grandparents.

"We need to make sure grandparents can benefit from children's centres and Sure Start—not enough is done in these centres to reach grandparents.

"How can you put a value on the love and support grandparents give children and the value that has for children over their whole life? It's not just about measuring the educational returns."

Sam also spoke out on the thorny issue of National Insurance contributions for grandparents of working age who stop work to look after their grandchildren, following an early day motion calling on the Government to introduce a National Insurance credit for grandparents who provide 20 hour or more childcare per week. It is thought that as many as 500,000 grandparents are affected.

"It is time to make grandparental care count. Under the Government's pension reforms if a mother stays at home to care for her child she will get a weekly credit towards her state pension but if she goes back to work and her own mother gives up work to care for the child, the grandmother will get nothing. Yet she is the one who could be facing the imminent prospect of poverty in retirement. That cannot be fair and we want the Government to look at this again," said Sam.

John Robertson MP is now pursuing the issue as an amendment to the Welfare Reform Bill.

Need help? New hours for advice line

Family Rights Group has extended the opening hours of its freephone advice line. It is now open from 10.00 am to 3.30 pm Monday to Friday.

The advice line is staffed by experienced and expert advisers who come from a legal, social work or advice service background. You can telephone or email for advice if a local authority's children's services are involved with the care and protection of your grandchildren, or if you are raising one or more of your grandchildren.

People who have used FRG's advice service have reported a high level of satisfaction with the advice they have received. Callers to the advice line have described it as "extremely helpful and supportive" and "the first time I have felt anyone has listened to my side of the story".

You can call Family Rights Group's advice line on 0800 731 1696 Monday to Friday, 10.00 am to 3.30 pm, or email advice@frg.org.uk.

News and resources

The love of a nan and granddad

*The love of a nan and granddad,
Should be special for every child,
Where rules can be sometimes broken,
With freedom to run wild.*

*The smiles of a nan and granddad,
Should be shown to each grandchild's face,
So they know time shared together
Is a very special place.*

*The home of a nan and granddad,
Should be a place of warmth and love,
Like a hand to hold on tight to,
Inside a one sized glove.*

*The tears of a nan and granddad,
Should be shed for tears of joy,
Not dropped on weary faces
For each troubled girl or boy.*

*The prayers of a nan and granddad,
Should be heard in the dead of night,
To help all the troubled grandchildren,
And help them see that life's alright.*

*The life of a nan and granddad,
May seem a long and winding road,
But if we do right for these children,
It lifts the burden from our load.*

*The hearts of this nan and granddad,
Set out to do their best,
So when our days are over,
We shall then sleep with peace and rest.*

By Jan and Neil, two grandparents who have been looking after their four grandchildren for the past three years. Written in a "few and far between" quiet moment!



Journeys

Helping your grandchild
What to do if their parents use drugs

This moving and practical publication tells the stories of grandparents, whilst giving support and information on what can help and where to go.

These powerful real life accounts aim to help break the stigma which many face. Adfam distributes *Journeys* booklets to family members for free.

If you are bringing up your children because of parental substance misuse, please ring 020 7553 7640 or if you are online go to the section on *Journeys* and follow the instructions: <http://www.adfam.org.uk/index.php?content=shop2&include=yes>

If you would like to know more about the Family Changes project which support grandparents in this situation contact Jan Fry on the number above or by email: j.fry@adfam.org.uk.

Helping children COAP

COAP (Children of Addicted Parents and People) is a website for young people affected by someone else's addiction. Set up by Emma, whose own mother had an addiction to alcohol and pain killers, the website includes two peer-led support forums for young people to share their experiences and support each other. "The drive behind COAP is to provide children with something that I did not have as I was growing up," says Emma. "I felt like I had no one to talk too who understood. And I don't want others to feel like that."

www.coap.co.uk



Useful helplines

The Grandparents' Association 0845 434 9585
www.grandparents-association.org.uk

Family Rights Group 0800 731 1696 (10am–3.30pm)
www.frg.org.uk

A grandparent's story

“My daughter is a heroin addict with all the personal destruction that can come from that,” says Julian, who was working as a teacher when he took on the care of his grandson.

Our story begins with a visit from the police at 1am. They had our grandson, who had been found alone on a still busy street. Our daughter was panic stricken at finding him gone and had found the police station where he was, but they would not return him to her, so she asked that he be left with us. Some days later, while we were out, our daughter persuaded our son to let her have our grandson back. She then tried to avoid the police and social services; when found, our grandson was put into care.

Our daughter, apparently convinced we wanted to take her child away, suggested to social services that we were unsuitable carers. An appearance at a Magistrates Court followed where we argued for our right to look after our grandson. The case went to the family division of the High Court and we were visited by a police officer who looked around our house and commented that there was a lot of ironing to be done! Apparently this made us unsuitable carers – our grandson would be better off with his existing stranger carers!

At the High Court we made our case to foster him, but social services argued we were too old – although adoption was offered. We were too old to foster but not to adopt! We argued that adoption would be too distressing for his mother and would leave us in an impossible position regarding our daughter.

The court decided that our grandson should be placed with us. But we now had to determine the type of care order for which we would apply. We were advised against a Residence Order as that would leave social services with little responsibility towards our grandson, so we applied to foster as kinship carers which would tie social services to supporting us, including with the expense of bringing him up.

Another court case followed with a different judge. This went in our favour, in spite of social services arguing that we were too old but when we asked for some financial support social services told us that the amount would be at their discretion. As relatives we could not expect payment at the usual level!

We were determined to contest this, and heard about the Munby judgement. In a nutshell this states that all children in care are entitled to the same level of support. We put this to social services and were informed that Munby did not apply in our case. We then took the political route, writing to the then Children's Minister Margaret Hodge. We received a reply stating Munby did apply which we copied to social services and others. Within a week we received a letter from social services informing us that we would receive the full allowance after all.

Since the settlement of the situation I am happy to say social services have been very supportive which has been extremely valuable to us and our grandson. But to social workers and those who make policy, we say: yes, we need support but trust us, be flexible, respond to our needs rather than trying to impose a 'one size fits all' pattern of care. We are not stranger carers and are not making a career of care – we need social workers who are partners and support which is not intrusive.

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Would you like to share your story with other grandparents? If you are interested in sharing your experiences please contact Alison at Grandparents Plus on 020 8981 8001 or by email alison.blaxland@grandparentsplus.org.uk

Grandparents overseas

Today around the globe, more grandparents than ever before are responsible for the lives and futures of their grandchildren, with up to half of the world's 15 million children orphaned by AIDS being cared for by a grandparent. Help the Aged is working to support families such as Thi Dung and her 14-year-old grandson, Van, in Vietnam.



Thi Dung is 61 years old. She had three children, two sons and one daughter. Her sons have both died of an AIDS related illness – one just five months ago and the other in 2003. Her daughter lives at home with her mother because her husband works a long way from home. Her grandson, Van, who has been orphaned by AIDS, lives with Thi Dung.

“My son married when he was very young: he used to argue a lot with his wife. Eleven months after she had her son, in 1995, she left. My son became addicted to drugs then he became HIV positive. I looked after both of my sick sons and my grandson and my husband. My

grandson's father died in 2003. My husband died in 2005. And my other son died five months ago in 2008.

“I wake up my grandson and prepare his breakfast. Then I make sure he goes off to school. When he gets back from school, I can't help him with his homework because it is too difficult for me, but I do make sure that he does it. I also play with him. He says he loves staying with me. He says I am better than his own mum; that he cannot sleep without me. He always wants to spend time with me. He has problems with his eyes, but we cannot get him an operation. He is a very good boy.”

Thinking of the future, Thi Dung says: “I hope to help my grandson. I hope he can get a job. I want to keep him here with me, but if he needs to take an opportunity away from here, I would let him go so that he could better himself and improve his prospects.”

“My grandma helps me with my homework and she also makes lunch for me,” says Van. “She is a very good cook and makes very tasty dishes. She wakes me up in the morning for school, makes sure I have clean clothes and helps me get ready. She takes care of me when I am ill and takes me to the doctor.”

Van's hobbies include playing the organ and watching Chinese kung fu movies. “I really like Jackie Chan,” he says. “He's a very good actor. I also like watching the Justice League. I never miss an episode.”

Reprinted with kind permission of Help the Aged. For more information on their work please visit www.helptheaged.org.uk

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The Grandparents' Association

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