

Grandparents First

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Grandparents, childcare and employment



Continued funding from the Big Lottery Fund means that we are able to organise one national plus two regional events a year.

For information on our first event, which will be held in Manchester on Monday 16 January, see page two.

News of a national event to bring Network members together in the spring will follow soon.

What's next for the GRG Network?

Now that the Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Network has received funding for a further three years from the Big Lottery Fund, plans are underway to help us reach even more family and friends carers and develop new services to help and support families across the country.

Continued overleaf...



Planning ahead

Every year, we carry out a survey with members of the Network which helps us plan our campaigns – last year's survey led to the *What if we said no?* report and in 2009 we published *Recognition, Respect, Reward*.

The surveys are needed for the continued support of our funder, the Big Lottery Fund, but also give us a real insight into the issues and challenges you face.

You will see that we have included our 2011 survey with this newsletter, and we would be very grateful if you could complete it and return to us, either by post in the envelope provided or by visiting <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/2011gppssurvey>

"We've had a brilliant response to our surveys in the past, so hope that you will feel able to take part again this year," said Co-ordinator Alison Blaxland.

Please return completed surveys by Friday 6 January 2012.

Susannah Cardy will be joining the Grandparents Plus team in January as Deputy Network Co-ordinator.



Susannah brings a wealth of experience from television, where she worked on many programmes including *The Grandparents' Tale*, which was broadcast on Channel 4, and as a freelance writer.

Susannah also brings her personal experience to the role. She became guardian to her brother-in-law's four children following his death eight years ago, shortly after the birth of her first child.

"We were left with three teenagers and a nine-year-old to raise," said Susannah. "We had just started a family of our own, had busy careers, and were left feeling shocked and isolated. I now want to use my own background to support others."



Continued from cover ...

The first event planned will take place in Manchester on Monday 16 January 2012. Organised with the support of the Valuing Older People Team, the event will be held at the Manchester City Council offices and will include workshops and information including legal advice, welfare benefits and support available locally. "The event is free, but places are limited, so if anyone from Manchester or the surrounding North West area would like to join us please get in contact to book a place," said Network Co-ordinator Alison Blaxland.

Then in the spring of 2012 a National Day for the Network is planned. "We are at the very early stages of planning at the moment," said Alison. "We are looking at various ideas including a social event which would bring together our members and offer them the chance to meet old friends and new. And of course we are hoping to plan an event which would include a celebration for the children, which worked so well at the children's party held during our last National Day."

The funding has also meant a new member of staff to work alongside Network Co-ordinator Alison Blaxland. A new Deputy Co-ordinator, Susannah Cardy, will be joining Grandparents Plus working three days a week. "It's brilliant news as it will double the staff time spent on the project and will give us the scope to do much more," said Alison.

One of the first projects Susannah will be leading on is developing support for families around parenting challenges. "We know from the calls we receive that many of our members would like a bit of extra support, so we are going to be looking at the best way to provide that," said Alison. "We are hoping that some of our members will feel able to get involved and help us develop a service that they would find useful themselves and which will benefit others."

There are also plans to develop and extend the befriending service, helping many family and friends carers who feel isolated, particularly when they first take on the care of children, or those who may not be in touch with local support. "At the moment we direct people to existing support groups, or try and put them in touch with other members locally if we are able to," said Alison. "But in the past it has been difficult to find time to do this effectively, so the extra funding we have will make a real difference."

For more information about the event in Manchester and to book a place please contact Alison at alison.blaxland@grandparentsplus.org.uk or call 020 8981 8001. Also get in touch if you would like more information about the National Day or the new projects that are being developed.

Juggling work and care

Combining employment with caring responsibilities can feel like performing a juggling act. So here's our guide on how to strike a better balance between work and family commitments.

Advice & Information

Grandparents plus

Call 0300 123 7015

Email: advice@grandparentsplus.org.uk

www.grandparentsplus.org.uk/advice

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

Did you know that you might have the right to take some time off work, request a change in working hours or get some financial help to enable you to combine work and caring? Check to see if the following policies could help you.

Time off for dependents

All employees have the right to take a reasonable amount of unpaid time off to deal with emergencies involving someone who depends on them and to make any necessary arrangements. "Some employers allow a certain amount of paid leave to care for dependents," says Jo Raine, Senior Advice Worker at Grandparents Plus. "You can check your employment contract or staff handbook to see if there's a policy about this."

Parental Leave

You will qualify for this if you have worked for your employer for at least one year and you have legal parental responsibility (eg a Residence Order or Special Guardianship Order) for a child under five, or a disabled child under 18. "You can take up to 13 weeks' leave for each child or 18 weeks for a disabled child," says Jo. A maximum of four weeks can be taken in one year for each qualifying child. "Parental leave is unpaid unless your contract says otherwise, but if you are on a low income you might get Income Support," adds Jo.

Always check your employment contract or staff handbook for your employer's own parental leave scheme. They may have extended parental leave to include other workers, for example foster carers, grandparents or employees who have worked there less than a year.

Flexible Working

Some employees have a legal right to request a flexible work pattern. This right applies if you or your partner have or expect to have responsibility for a child under 17, a disabled child under 18 or a disabled adult, and you have worked for your employer for at least 26 weeks. This right extends to foster carers as well as people with a Residence Order or a Special Guardianship Order.

"The right to request flexible working covers the hours an employee works, the times they are required to work and the place of work, such as home or workplace. Employers have to consider such requests seriously and can only refuse for certain business reasons," says Jo.

Benefits

"If you're in work, you may be entitled to certain benefits to supplement your wages," says Jo. "These include Child Tax Credit, Working Tax Credit, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit. Contact our Advice Service to find out if you qualify for any of these benefits.

"If you're thinking of cutting down your hours or even giving up work completely, it's important to consider all the implications," adds Jo. "For example, you might lose entitlement to Working Tax Credit if you reduce your working hours to below 16 a week. We can help guide you through the benefits maze so you will know exactly how your income will be affected by any changes you make."

For more information on your employment rights contact our Advice Service or one of the organisations below.

- Working Families has a free legal helpline providing advice for parents and carers on their rights at work.
Tel 0800 013 0313 – 10am to 3.30pm Mon, Tues, Thurs and Fri, 10am to 1pm Weds.
www.workingfamilies.org.uk
- ACAS provides confidential, independent and impartial advice on employment issues.
Tel 08457 474747 – 8am to 8pm Monday-Friday, 9am to 1pm Saturday
www.acas.org.uk

News & resources...

Grandmother wins six year battle

A grandmother who has battled for six years to receive the same financial support as a foster carer for looking after her granddaughter has won her case in the Court of Appeal.

In a judgement handed down in November 2011 three Appeal Court Judges unanimously threw out a challenge by Kent County Council against a decision made in 2010 in the High Court. The decision was that Kent had a duty to support a grandparent caring for her granddaughter.

The grandmother fought for fair financial support for looking after the 16-year-old girl since she took over her care at the eleventh hour in 2005 at the request of Kent Social Services. The child had been looked after by her mother, but social services had contacted her grandmother just before Christmas in 2004. She was faced with the stark choice – “Care for the child or she goes into care”.

“Local Authorities across the country have been waiting for this decision,” said Nigel Priestley of Huddersfield law firm Ridley and Hall, who represented the grandmother. “They were roaring Kent on from the terraces. It will be a major blow to them that Kent lost 3:0!

“We’re delighted with the outcome. The County Council argued that they had no duty to the child even though their fingerprints were all over the case. This is a landmark case for Kent. It has implications for many children Kent has placed with relatives. Many carers will be losing out. That’s why Kent wanted to appeal the decision. Sadly it shows just how little they value the relatives who are making enormous sacrifices for their grandchildren,” added Nigel.

“We shouldn’t have to find ourselves battling with the local authority for support,” said the grandmother, who cannot be named for legal reasons. “I was asked by the local authority to step into the breach. I have given up a great deal to care for my granddaughter. I accept when people say that blood is thicker than water, but the fact is that when you are 58 years old you are not planning to look after a 10-year-old child.”

Drop-in centre for siblings

A new monthly drop-in centre for siblings separated by care has been launched by Siblings Together and the Leaside Centre in Hackney, London.

Since 2007 Siblings Together has been running camps and projects to provide essential contact for children and young people separated by care, kinship care or adoption. “Our model of working is innovative, creative and nurturing,” said Founder and Director of Siblings Together, Delma Hughes. “We offer young people positive experiences, greatly improving the lives and significant relationships of this most vulnerable and disadvantaged group.”

The new centre, for children aged 7 to 18, has already been visited by children from Essex and Kent as well as London. Children get the chance to try out new skills and take part in activities such as mountain biking, canoeing, horse riding, ice skating, photography, art and music. Run by experienced and qualified staff from the Leaside Centre, children are also able to create their own scrapbooks and photo albums to remember their time at Leaside with siblings and friends. Siblings Together is also planning a special Christmas party and free trips to the London Eye are being planned.

The programme is free for all looked after young people. Volunteers willing to mentor are welcome, including older care leavers who would like to help out at the drop-in centre. For more details visit www.siblings.together.co.uk or call Delma on 0207 231 6925.



New look for FRG website

The Family Rights Group has relaunched its website with a clear and accessible new look.

The website provides information about the law and the social worker’s role. It has an interactive focus, with decision trees that are tailored to people’s individual circumstances.

In addition, there are two discussion forums – one for parents and one for family and friends carers – which give families access to an online support network as well as access to specialist help from an expert adviser.

Visit www.frg.org.uk to try out the new website or call 0808 801 0366 to speak to an adviser.

The change in retirement age – could it affect you?

Under new legislation, the state pension age for women will reach 65 by November 2018.

The rise from 65 to 66 for both men and women will happen more slowly than the Government had originally planned and will be complete by October 2020. In 2028 the retirement age will then be raised to 67, which will affect around 8 million people aged between 42 and 51 who had expected to be able to retire at 66.

Reaching state pension age doesn't mean you have to give up work as you can carry on working and still receive your state pension. The default retirement age, which gave employers the right to dismiss people over 65 because of their age, was abolished in October 2011 so people over 65 now have full employment rights. And if you decide to work longer you won't pay National Insurance once you are over the state pension age and you are also likely to pay less income tax.

Visit www.direct.gov.uk to find out more about the changes and how they will affect you.

Legal service launched for grandparents

A new service offering specialist legal advice to grandparents has been launched by leading solicitors Ridley and Hall.



The Grandparents Legal Centre offers advice on grandparents' rights, legal orders, grandparents as carers and contact issues. The service is headed up by Nigel Priestley, who has taken the lead in bringing Judicial Review proceedings on behalf of children placed with kinship carers to ensure that local authorities fulfil their legal obligations towards family and friends carers and the children who are living with them.

For more information or advice visit www.grandparentslegalcentre.co.uk or call 0843 2897130.

“A visionary of our time”

The annual lecture in memory of Lord Michael Young, one of the founders of Grandparents Plus, took place in October.

Organised jointly by Grandparents Plus and The Young Foundation, the lecture was delivered by The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Rt Hon Iain Duncan Smith MP. The theme of the lecture, which marked the 10th anniversary of Grandparents Plus, was “Family and kinship in an ageing society”.

“Lord Young was a visionary of our time,” said Mr Duncan Smith. “His approach to public service reform was a lesson to us all.”

Regarding family and friends carers, Mr Duncan Smith said: “We want kinship carers to be looked at on a case by case basis. The Jobcentre has the power – indeed the responsibility – to not impose full time work search and availability requirements on the carers of younger children. There are specific safeguards on this in the Welfare Reform Bill.

“I have specifically asked my colleague Lord Freud, The Minister for Welfare Reform, to look at the kinship carer issue as we have been approached by a number of people on this.”

Helplines & groups

National

Grandparents Plus Advice and Information

Tel: 0300 123 7015 (10am–3.00pm)
www.grandparentsplus.org.uk

Family Rights Group

Tel: 0808 801 0366 (10am–3.30pm)
www.frg.org.uk

The Grandparents' Association

Tel: 0845 434 9585
www.grandparents-association.org.uk

Yorkshire

The Bridge Project, Bradford

Runs two groups for family and friends carers raising children due to their parents drug use. Groups meet monthly, one on Tuesday and the other on Friday, at the Bridge, 35 Salem Street, Bradford BD1 4QH. For more information call Mary on 01274 723863 or 01274 758095.

East Midlands

George Hardwick Foundation Carers Centre, Grimsby

Support for grandparents who are raising their grandchildren because of substance misuse issues. A support group meets at the centre weekly, at 154-160 Victoria Street, Grimsby. Contact Jacqui for more information – email Jacqui@georgehardwickfoundation.org or call 0845 3025525.

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 grandparent's story:

“I started to suffer from anxiety and depression”



Combining a full-time job with the needs of two young grandchildren proved difficult for Keazzi.

“The children came to me about four years ago,” remembers Keazzi. “Their mum had left them with a friend and didn’t return for them, so they went to stay with their maternal grandmother. She didn’t want them to live with her, so social services rang my son and he rang me to pick up Tyriq, my grandson. But when I went to pick him up I asked what was going to happen to Paige, his younger sister, and was told that she would be going into care. So I took both of them with me at the same time.”

“Eventually they said they had no obligation to help me as it was a private arrangement.”

Keazzi was visited by social workers from the authority where the children had been living with their mum, to make sure they were ok. “I registered Tyriq for school – he was six, and had hardly been before – and social services told their mum to do a parenting course so that the children could eventually go back into her care.” But when their mum didn’t turn up for contact visits social services advised that, in the best interests of the children, Keazzi should apply for a Residence Order.

Financially, things were difficult for Keazzi and she had to keep up her full-time job as a receptionist. “When the final Residence Order came through my solicitor knew I had no financial support but because the children were from one local authority and I lived in another, both social services said the other authority was responsible and eventually they said they had no obligation to help me as it was a private arrangement.”

The children had arrived with just a few secondhand clothes and no toys, although they received some donations from a local Sure Start children's centre. For their first Christmas with Keazzi their mum spent a lot on toys for them. "There was a drum kit and just about every noisy toy you can think of."

As she was working full-time Keazzi was able to claim Child Tax Credit and also had Child Benefit transferred to her. She was able to get some clothes for Tyriq from an older nephew, but had to buy new things for Paige.

"I was given time off work to go to court and if the children were sick," says Keazzi. "I worked from 8.30 until 4.30, leaving the children with a childminder, but mentally and physically it was too much." Keazzi had been with the company for some time, so asked about flexible working, or changing to part-time hours. "They refused, and I started to suffer from anxiety and depression – I'd never felt anything like that before. My doctor gave me medication for the depression and I took time off – he signed me off and felt that I was being bullied."

When the company moved offices the situation escalated. "It got to the point where I felt so stressed," says Keazzi. "The children were hard work and I realised I couldn't do both – I'd either have to leave work or give up the children." Keazzi chose the children.

The children were still in contact with their mum, as Keazzi felt that would be best for them. But whenever they went to stay with her they were difficult to cope with when they came back. "If they were playing outside they would just wander off. They'd been left to run riot. I couldn't leave them and could only let them play outside if I was with them. It undid everything I'd done."

For a while, the children didn't see their mum. "Their behaviour started to improve but after they saw mum things stopped working." However, now the children are older they see their mum every weekend, although social services have made it clear they cannot live with her. "If I didn't want them with me they would be adopted," says Keazzi. "I've always told them the truth – Tyriq is now 10 and understands but Paige doesn't, she's only seven. When their mum tells them that she's going to get a big house with a garden for them Tyriq tells her that they can't go back. I've explained that they are safe, staying with me and can still see mum. Tyriq can be a bit disrespectful to his mum and can have a bit of an attitude now he's getting older, but he doesn't cheek me."

After a few months out of work, spending time to support and care for the children, Keazzi started work again as a part-time receptionist at a children's centre. "They have been brilliant," says Keazzi. "They are so supportive of me."

Having put her own plans on hold to care for her grandchildren, Keazzi has just started to build up her own business as a beauty therapist. "I used to work in the beauty industry before," says Keazzi. "Now I rent a room in a hairdressers for treatments – I spend the mornings there and go on to the children's centre in the afternoon." As business get busier, Keazzi has reluctantly decided to leave the children's centre to concentrate on building things up. "The flexibility will make things easier – if I need time off for the children I can just sort it out and work around them.

"The children are settled and getting on very well at school and home life is good, although at times we do have our financial difficulties, we are much happier in ourselves," says Keazzi.

Have you combined working and raising children who are not your own? If the answer is yes, we would like to hear about your experiences for some campaigning work we are planning early next year. Please contact Agnes Gautier for more details – email agnes.gautier@grandparentsplus.org.uk or call 020 8981 8001.

"I'd either have to leave work or give up the children."

Would you like to share your story with other family and friends carers?

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

Doing it all?

Grandparents Plus has launched a new report looking at how the lives of grandparents in Britain have changed over the past decade.

Using data from the British Social Attitudes Survey (BSA) from 1998 and 2009, the report found that today's grandmothers are older, increasingly dependent on the state pension and more likely to be separated or divorced than 10 years ago. And with the state pension age set to rise, they are more likely to be faced with struggling to juggle work and care.

Doing it all? Grandparents, childcare and employment found that eight in ten women aged over 75 in Britain are grandmas compared to seven in ten in 1998. Four in ten grandmothers, or 39%, are relying on state pensions compared to 25% of grandfathers, and 45% of grandmothers are living alone compared to 38% in 1998.

"Grandparents are getting older," said Sarah Wellard, Policy and Research Manager at Grandparents Plus. "There are now more grandparents aged over 75 and fewer under 65 than in 1988." Grandmothers are more likely to be retired than in 1998, while grandfathers are more likely to still be working. "The proportion of grandmothers living in households where the main source of income is from employment has fallen from 33% to 27% since 1998," said Sarah.

There are an estimated 13.6 million grandparents in Britain today, 7.6 million women and 6 million men. Three in ten of all adult women are grandparents, and 25% of men." By the age of 65 the majority of adults are grandparents," said Sarah. "And 28% of grandparents with grandchildren under the age of 16 are in the 'sandwich generation', with their own parents still alive."

Increased life expectancy is likely to lead to more four generation families, and the report found that 72% of grandparents whose own parents are still alive look after their grandchildren – putting increasing demands on a generation who are now expected to balance work with care.

"As the state pension age rises, there is growing pressure on grandparents to combine work with caring for their grandchildren, and sometimes for elderly relatives too," said Sarah. "If older people remain longer in the workplace there is a risk of a serious 'care gap' emerging in the provision of informal care for children and older people."

Doing it all? Grandparents, childcare and employment is available from www.grandparentsplus.org.uk or by calling 020 8981 8001.



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**Grandparents
plus**

We champion the wider
family who care for children

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