

Grandparents First

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News from the Network

Great news – Grandparents Plus has received funding from the Big Lottery Fund for a further three years to develop our Network for all grandparent and family and friends carers.

"We are really delighted and so pleased that the Big Lottery Fund has decided to make such an amazing commitment to our vital work," said Alison Blaxland, Network Co-ordinator.

"We're working on plans for the future and will be asking all our members for their views in a survey which will be sent out later this year – please look out for it and let us know your thoughts."

Turn to page four to read more about our Newcastle event, which was held in June, plus news of events being planned later this year and in 2012 .

Keep families together

Grandparents Plus has launched a new campaign calling for children who can't live with their parents to be placed with family and friends wherever possible and to give carers the support they need to keep families together. The campaign, which was launched in June, particularly highlights the problems faced by older carers who can sometimes be regarded as "too old to care".

Continued overleaf...



Campaign for family and friends carers

We champion the wider
family who care for children

Who would you choose for me?

WATCH AND SHARE!

As part of the campaign we have launched an exciting new video called *Who would you choose for me?*

This interactive video tells the story of a young girl who can't live with her parents because of alcohol abuse and neglect. You get to decide whether she should be allowed to stay with her grandparents or be put up for adoption. The film shows you how the girl's life would have turned out as a result of your decision.

Please share the film by email and on Facebook by following this link: <http://bit.ly/watchcampaignvideo>

It's a great way of raising awareness about the campaign.

TAKE ACTION:

IF YOU ONLY HAVE A MINUTE:

Follow the e-action on our website to ask your MP to back the campaign: www.keepfamilies.together.org.uk

IF YOU HAVE LONGER:

Tell your story to your local Councillor.

Write to your local authority to share your story and tell them what support you need. Local authorities have a new legal responsibility to develop a policy to support family and friends carers like you by 30 September 2011. They should be consulting family and friends carers when drafting these policies. Have a look at the 10 questions for local authorities on page three to get an idea of what should be included.

Remember your councillor is there to represent you. However, they may not fully appreciate the difficulties you face so this is your opportunity to tell them. Visit www.writetothem.com to find the details of your local councillor.

STOP BENEFIT CUTS THAT WILL AFFECT KINSHIP CARERS

The Government has announced plans for a substantial cut to welfare support for disabled children – see page four. The Children's Society has organised a petition against these changes. Visit <http://epetitions.direct.gov.uk/petitions/915> for details.



Who would you choose for me? The video lets viewers decide between grandparents and adoption.

Continued from cover ...

The campaign was launched with the publication of a new report, *Too old to care?*, which revealed the heartache of families torn apart because social workers can make ageist assumptions about grandparents' ability to raise their grandchildren.

"This research reveals the hidden contribution made by older grandparent carers," said Sarah Wellard from Grandparents Plus. "It is worrying to discover that many who need support are too scared to ask for it and of those who do, most don't get the help they need."

The report, backed by Comic Relief, is based on in-depth interviews with older grandparent carers. It shows how they can face prolonged legal battles, lack of support and financial hardship as they fight for their grandchildren.

"I didn't want social services to be involved because I worked with them for 30 years and they often make the wrong decision."

One great-grandmother, who is looking after three great-granddaughters, was told by social workers that she was not entitled to any respite care because she was a grandparent. "I didn't have anyone who could say to me 'Sit down, I'll take the girls for an hour'."

Another grandmother, who has been raising her eight-year-old grandson since birth, said of the local authority: "When they come near us from time-to-time it's very scary because obviously we don't want him to be taken away."

"We found a range of problems, yet we know that older people do make good parents for children," added Sarah. "They have a wealth of experience and can provide children with love, a sense of identity and belonging and crucially maintain relationships with the wider family."

For more information on the campaign visit www.keepfamilies.together.org.uk or contact Grandparents Plus on 020 8981 8001.



Campaign for family and friends carers

Family and friends care: Ten key questions to ask your local council

Does your local authority have a policy on family and friends care?

New statutory guidance for family and friends care means that all local authorities should have a policy in place by 30 September 2011. These are the ten key questions they should be able to answer:

1. Do they have a policy in place? Is it easy for you to access – it should be easy to find (for example on their website).
2. Is there a named person responsible (the ‘responsible manager’) for family and friends care policy?
3. Is the support they provide determined by the needs of the child, not their legal status?
4. Does the policy include information about sources of financial information and advice, including benefits advice and support for family and friends carers and how to apply for financial help under section 17(6) of the 1989 Children Act? Is it clear how decisions are made and what criteria apply? Where support is offered, a written agreement should be drawn up setting out the level and duration of the support and the mechanism for review.
5. Does the policy identify services available to family and friends carers to support contact arrangements and set out what they will do to support contact arrangements where necessary?
6. Does it include information about family group conferencing including how they can be used after an emergency care order has been made?
7. Does it include information about local support groups or support provided by local or national voluntary organisations?
8. Does the policy include information about the fostering service for family and friends foster carers and ensure that they receive the same practical and financial help as other foster carers.
9. Does the policy include advice and guidance on special guardianship, residence order and adoption so that family and friends carers fully understand the implications of applying for such an order?
10. Does the policy include a clear complaints procedure for the service?

Next steps

- Ask your local authority about their policy and practice on family and friends care
- Lobby your local councillors and MP to make sure they are aware of the issue
- Feedback their responses to our Campaigns Officer, Peter Hulme and/or to your local group. Peter can be contacted by email - peter.hulme@grandparentsplus.org.uk or by phone on 020 8981 8001.

Key contacts for help and advice

- Grandparents Plus advice line 0300 123 7015 or email advice@grandparentsplus.org.uk
www.grandparentsplus.org.uk/advice
- Family Rights Group advice service 0808 801 0366, email advice@frg.org.uk
www.frg.org.uk
- The Grandparents’ Association helpline 0845 4349585
www.grandparents-association.org.uk
- National Association of Kinship Carers, email nakinshipcarers@gmail.com or post on <http://groups/nakc/home>

News & resources...

Disabled children could lose out in welfare reform

Are you looking after a disabled child? Changes proposed in the Welfare Reform Bill mean that many disabled children may be up to £27 a week worse off than under the current system – that's £1,400 a year. The Government estimates that 100,000 disabled children will lose out but it's feared the number could be much higher.

If you already receive Disability Living Allowance (DLA) at the higher rate for any children you look after you won't be affected by the changes. However, if you get DLA at the lower or middle rate, and receive Child Tax Credit too, you may not get any increases in your Universal Credit for a few years after it is introduced in 2013/14.

"For new claims under Universal Credit, although severely disabled children will receive a slight increase from current rates, many others will receive less than half of their current rate due to the replacement of the disability element of Child Tax Credit with a 'disability addition' for a child," said Jo Raine, Advice Worker at Grandparents Plus.

"There are also concerns that many people who could claim DLA may be missing out because they are unaware that they are entitled to it," added Jo "With changes being proposed it's vital that you get advice now to avoid missing out in the future."

A child could qualify for DLA if they need help with washing, dressing, feeding, toileting etc, if they need supervision to prevent a danger to themselves or others, or if they have difficulty walking. A free factsheet is available – visit www.disabilityalliance.org for more information.

The Children's Society has also organised a petition against these changes. See page two for details of how to support it.

We would also like to hear from you if you are looking after a disabled child and may be affected directly. Please contact our Advice Service on 0300 123 7015.

To the North East and beyond!



Grandparent carers from across the North East gathered together in June at the Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Network event.

Around 50 people joined us on the day, which was organised with support groups in the area including Newcastle Props, More Than Grandparents, Sunderland and Escape.

Speakers included top solicitor Nigel Priestley of Ridley and Hall, Meg Boustead, Head of Safeguarding at Sunderland Social Services and Kay Duffie, Chair of the North East Carers Forum.

Held in the lovely setting of the Assembly Rooms in central Newcastle, the event included the showing of a DVD by Bridges Stockton featuring the voices of grandparents from their support group plus a short film from Grandparents Plus' 'Keep Families Together' campaign in which a family share their story.

"The event was the final day organised with our original Big Lottery funding," said Network Co-ordinator Alison Blaxland. "Now that we have heard the great news that the Big Lottery Fund will support us for a further three years we can start thinking about the future.

"Plans include another National Day in spring 2012, which will build on the success of the events held in previous years," said Alison. "We are also thinking about other local events which will start with a day in Manchester later this year for Network members from the North West.

"Finally, as mentioned on the front cover, we are planning to send out a survey later this year so that Network members can help us shape the services we offer."

For more information about future events or plans for the Network contact alison.blaxland@grandparentsplus.org.uk or call 020 8981 8001.

New arrival

Congratulations to Sam Smethers, Chief Executive of Grandparents Plus, on the safe arrival of baby Alexandra on 24 July.

Many of you who met Sam at the Newcastle event in June will remember her baby bump – baby Alexandra weighed in at 8lb 2oz and is Sam's fourth baby.

"We're all doing well and despite the tiredness I am thoroughly enjoying it, especially seeing all the kids together," said Sam.

Sam will be returning from maternity leave next year.



Explore the options



Did you know that, as a family and friends carer, you may be entitled to maintenance from one or both parents who don't have day-to-day care of their child?

Child Maintenance Options offers a free, impartial information and support service that can talk you through all of your choices. They're there for parents, grandparents and carers, as well as family and friends who want to help.

"Child maintenance is regular financial support towards a child's everyday living costs," says Janet Wojtkow from Child Maintenance Options. "Families can set up their own arrangements or can apply to the Child Support Agency (CSA), for example if they can't agree, don't know where the parent is, or in cases of domestic abuse or violence." Child Maintenance Options can also help families following the death of one or both parents.

For more information visit the website at www.cmoptions.org or call 0800 988 0988 from 8am to 8pm Monday to Friday and 9am to 4pm on Saturdays.

Would you be happy to share your story with Child Maintenance Options? They are looking for people to tell their stories to help and encourage others in similar situations. Email alison.blaxland@grandparentsplus.org.uk or call 020 8981 8001 for more information.

Britain's 'lost children'

In July, the issue of adoption hit the headlines when Martin Narey, former Chief Executive of children's charity Barnardo's and newly appointed Government advisor on adoption, published a report in *The Times*.

"Adoption is the ultimate intervention in the life of a child and one that, we know, can and does transform lives, particularly when the adoption is made at an early age," wrote Narey. "But adoption generally becomes a possibility only when a child has been taken into care, that is, removed from his or her birth parents. And that process can often begin too late and then take far too long."

The Narey Report included a recommendation that: "Where the best interests of the child are clear and adoption seems to offer the best prospects of permanency it should not be delayed by the assessment of family and friends carers when there is clear evidence of their unsuitability." This comment led Oonagh Murphy-Jack, Project Manager at Grandparents Plus, to respond about her experiences of being raised by her aunt and uncle.

"Nobody wants to see children languishing in care unnecessarily waiting for good homes. However, adoption should not be prioritised over kinship care. Decisions should always be about what is best and right for the child, not what is quickest, easiest or more cost effective. A kinship assessment or finding relatives may take a little longer, but if this means that as a result the children end up where they should be, then so be it," said Oonagh.

To read Oonagh's full response or to comment on this story please visit www.grandparentsplus.org.uk/family or adoption or call 020 8981 8001.

Funding success for FRG

More good news - the Family Rights Group has just signed a contract with the Department for Education to fund its advice service until April 2013.

As a result, FRG can give confidential advice on the phone to more families than ever before - 6,500 families a year in 2012/13. A new look, easier to use family and friends care discussion board has just been launched, plus a discussion board specifically for parents. Both are moderated by FRG's expert advisers.

Visit www.frg.org.uk or call the advice service on 0808 801 0366.

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

North West

Second Time Around, Carlisle

Group for grandparents, great aunts and uncles raising grandchildren or looking after them regularly. Meets on alternate Wednesdays at Carlisle West Children's Centre. Contact Sheila on 01228 223419, Lesley on 07745 276872 or Charles on 07853 243825 for more details.

North East

Bridges Stockton

Group and individual support, counselling and respite breaks for grandparent and family carers affected by drug or alcohol misuse. For more information email bridges@btinternet.com or call 01642 605222.

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 view:

“The gap between generations can be difficult”



Before Frances' daughter lost her battle against illness she asked her mum to take care of her young son.

“Emma had kidney problems, so she had been warned that her lifespan could be shortened and that she might not live to see her son, Michael, grow up,” says Frances. “The weekend she died Michael was staying with friends and he never went back to his own home. Emma was no longer with Michael's dad and although she had said in her will that she wanted Michael to live with me his dad took him. He lost everything in one night – his mum, home, school, friends and neighbours. He moved miles away to live with his dad, step-mum and two younger half-brothers.”

“He lost everything in one night – his mum, home, school, friends and neighbours.”

Understandably, Frances was distraught. “The day after Emma died Michael was in a terrible state,” says Frances. “He was so upset and said he didn't want to go to his dad's and wanted to stay with me.” Frances spoke to a solicitor but decided not to challenge Michael's dad in court as she felt it wouldn't be fair on Michael, who was just seven years old.

Frances was also caring for her elderly mother at the time, and ended up moving to the Isle of Wight because her mother had family there and she thought it would help to move away from the town where she and her husband Terry lived. “We were surrounded by memories of Emma. She had lived close to us and we had helped out a lot because of her illness – Michael often went to bed in his own home and woke up in ours if Emma had been ill in the night,” remembers Frances. “Looking back, I think I made some decisions then that I wouldn’t make now.”

Things came to a head after Michael had been to stay with Frances and Terry during the Easter school holidays. “He sobbed his heart out when he had to go home,” says Frances. “I looked at a photo of Emma and said, ‘I don’t know what else I can do, Emma. It’s up to you now,’ because I felt desperate.” Within a few days Michael’s dad was in contact and told Frances that his marriage had broken up and he needed somewhere for Michael to live. “I said he could come to us, but once he was settled I wanted him to stay with us and his dad agreed.”

To start with things were difficult. Frances still cared for her elderly mother and Terry, who is now 80, found the gap between the generations difficult as things were so different from when he raised his own children. The family moved to Devon as Frances had never really settled on the Isle of Wight, and at this time Terry became very ill with lung problems. Frances feared she would lose him but thankfully Terry recovered and the family could concentrate on helping Michael come to terms with what had happened in his life.

“Michael would hide, and say ‘I’m a good boy’. Later we found out that he often got sent to bed straight from school, and could only go to friend’s parties if his younger brothers went too. So the 18 months he lived with his dad did damage him,” says Frances. “He had some counselling from social services when he lived there but that ended because they felt his dad and step-mum weren’t prepared to work with them.”

Settled with Frances and Terry, Michael’s school referred the family to a charity for counselling which really helped. “The primary school was excellent,” says Frances. “He settled in really well and is still with many of the same friends now he’s at secondary school.”

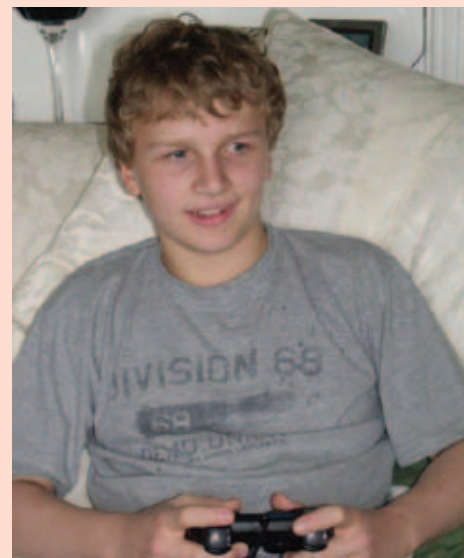
Michael also joined a local group aiming to improve confidence through acting and dancing appearing in shows and musicals like *Oliver*. “That was brilliant and really improved his confidence,” says Frances. “He’s concentrating on his exams now and has worked so hard – we even got a letter from his head of year saying how well he’d done.”

Michael is now coming up to 15 and like most boys his age he wants to have the same things as his friends. Frances and Terry get Pension Credit, Child Benefit and Tax Credit but don’t have any other financial support so they have to budget carefully. Now 67, Frances also has health problems, having suffered a suspected mini stroke and severe arthritis. “I had to spend the day in bed on Saturday and that’s just not me – it’s difficult to walk and I even have to sit down to do the ironing. It’s difficult to manage sometimes.”

Frances is also worried about Michael’s future, and the family are hoping to move so that they will be closer to other relatives. “We want Michael to have family near him if anything should happen to us,” says Frances.

Despite the difficulties caused by the gap between generations, health problems and the loss of quality time for Frances and Terry in their retirement, Frances simply says: “Michael gives us great joy and we want to do what’s best for him.”

“We want Michael to have family near him if anything should happen to us.”



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.

Credit where it's due

Confused by Pension Credit? Here's our quick guide to what's involved.

According to Age UK about a third of people who are eligible for Pension Credit are not claiming it. If you're one of them you could be missing out on hundreds or even thousands of pounds a year. It is worth claiming Pension Credit, even if you are only entitled to a small amount, as it may help you to qualify for other benefits.

What is Pension Credit?

"Pension Credit is a benefit for older people," explains Jo Raine, Advice Worker at Grandparents Plus. "To be eligible, you or your partner must have reached the state pension age for women, but you can claim it even if you are still working. It is means-tested, so the amount you can get will depend on your income and savings. However, some types of income are completely or partially ignored – see our answer to a typical question opposite. Your savings will not affect your Pension Credit unless you have more than £10,000; you're treated as having a weekly income of £1 for every £500 of savings over £10,000."

Pension Credit has two parts and you may be entitled to either part or both:

Guarantee Credit: This aims to provide you with a minimum level of income. "The Guarantee Credit for 2011/12 is £137.35 if you are single and £209.70 for a couple," says Jo. "Additional amounts may be added if you have a severe disability, caring responsibilities or certain housing costs and the total of these sums is referred to as your 'appropriate minimum guarantee'. If your weekly income is less than this, Pension Credit should make up the difference."

Savings Credit: This is for people aged 65 and over who have a small amount of their own income and savings (see above). "You may be eligible for some Savings Credit if your weekly income is less than £188.65 if you are single and £277.43 for a couple," says Jo. "If your income is higher than this you may still qualify if you have a severe disability, caring responsibilities, or certain housing costs."

How can I claim?

Phone the Pension Credit helpline on 0800 99 1234 or visit www.directgov.uk to download an application form.



Grandparents
plus

Call 0300 123 7015

Email: advice@grandparentsplus.org.uk

www.grandparentsplus.org.uk/advice

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

In the spotlight: pension credit

Q: My six year old granddaughter lives with me. As well as Child Benefit and Child Tax Credit, I receive a Special Guardianship Allowance from the local authority. Will this income be taken into account if I apply for Pension Credit?

A: Payments you receive for looking after a child are all ignored when calculating your entitlement to Pension Credit entitlement. These include:

- Child Benefit
- Child Tax Credit
- Guardian's Allowance
- Special Guardianship and Residence Order allowances
- fostering allowance
- child maintenance

To find out whether you qualify for Pension Credit or if you have any other benefits queries, get in touch with our advice service by calling 0300 123 7015 or email us at advice@grandparentsplus.org.uk.

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We champion the wider family who care for children

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