

Grandparents' own stories



Pat "I have always loved my grandchildren and always will"



Annie "I have brought up Connor on my own for 6 years ..he is doing really well"



"I've made loads of mistakes and they do show sometimes, but now I'm learning again.."



"After the meeting I felt I wasn't alone nor the only grandparent in this situation"

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*The names of these grandparents have been changed at their request



Pictured here at the launch of The Grandparent Carer Network in Burnley in September 2005 are (from left to right) - Lancashire County Councillor Clive Grimshaw, portfolio holder for children and families, Cllr. Steve Large, Fe Duncan, Ann Marie Wrigley, a local grandparent carer, and Fiona Muir.

“Grandparents’ Stories” are stories from some of the grandparents in the network, who tell, in their own words, of the hard work, the trials, but also the great rewards of being grandparent carers.

In September 2005 New Era Enterprises launched The Grandparent Carer Network.

This innovative project has been funded by Lancashire County Council and offers a programme of support for grandparent carers throughout Burnley Pendle and Rossendale.

It is the only project of its kind currently operating.

Research conducted by New Era Enterprises identified a significant number of grandparents with sole responsibility for the care of their grandchildren, either by way of a formal or informal arrangement. This research was validated by The Family Rights Group survey – Second Time Round and informal research conducted by Age Concern Burnley and The National Grandparents Association.

Whilst research highlighted a large number of grandparent carers, more significantly it produced anecdotal evidence of grandparent carers feeling unsupported and sometimes struggling with the physical, emotional and financial aspects of parenting in later life.

The grandparent carer network offers grandparents an opportunity to meet monthly at a designated venue and enjoy peer support as well as benefit from formal training sessions.

To complement these monthly meetings beneficiaries can access an outreach support service into their homes.

The network works closely with outside agencies, including colleagues from Social Services, Lifeline, the PCT and Education and the network is felt to be a wonderful example of how statutory and voluntary agencies are working together for the benefit of children.

New Era’s Grandparent Carer Network service is managed by Fe Duncan with support from Fiona Muir, Ann Marie Wrigley and New Era’s Project Support Teams.



My daughter left school to go to college for hair dressing and in her first year she fell pregnant with my first grandchild. I was very angry at first but came round to the idea of being a grandmother 'till I found out the father was a drug user. I made sure that he never came anywhere near my first grandchild because I did not want drug money coming from him to support the baby.....

Pat's Story

.....Then my daughter met up with another boyfriend who willingly took on my first born grandchild. I thought he was a nice lad 'til he got involved with drugs and beating my daughter around if she did not get money to feed his drug habit.

Altogether I have four grandchildren by my daughter, two of them were adopted and I ended up with two living with me.

At first I fostered them and got fostering money and when I got a residence order I started getting residence allowance for them, which a lot of grandparents know about. You are entitled to the child benefit and child tax credit and CSA, and working tax credit if you are working and having to pay someone to look after them while you are out at work.

My daughter was into drugs too and I told her that I would have the kids off her if any harm came to any of them. She was sent to prison for smuggling drugs into a prison, then when she came out she went to live in Blackpool where I heard she was on the game. She was off drugs and I thought she would look after the boys, but I was wrong. My two grandsons were in and out of foster care from the youngest being four months.

I have had them for five years now. It split my marriage up because I blame my ex-husband for not letting me keep all four grandchildren together - so I don't get to see my grand-daughters and their brothers are not allowed to see them either. When their birthdays come around they are always thinking of them and wondering when they can meet up again.

As a grandparent I know a lot of grandparents do not get the help they should get. If I had known what I know now I would have carried on fostering my grandchildren and made a career out of it. They get birthday money, clothing allowance, travel expenses, which is more than residence allowance. I would advise anyone taking grandchildren on to do this or go to a solicitor for advice.

The Social Services build up your hopes saying they may find a family that may allow the children to meet up on their birthdays, but it doesn't happen. Well, they will come looking one day and we will all sit down and have a good old talk about the family history. I have always loved my grandchildren and always will.

"My story of how I ended up with two of my grandchildren"

Annie's Story

My name is Annie. I became mum to 3 girls when I was very young.

I was very maternal, but had no support from family, friends or husband. I struggled financially. I was close to all three daughters and had a special bond with the middle child Ann Marie. Ann Marie had severe learning difficulties, calcium deficiency and a hole in her heart.

.....When Ann Marie was 21 years old and living in Manchester she became pregnant with Connor. The relationship with Connor's father was emotionally and physically abusive. When Connor was 6 weeks old I learnt that Connor had been taken into foster care. He was placed in care for 6 months with Ann Marie having supervised contact. He was returned back to Ann Marie with parenting classes in place.

One day when Connor was 10 months old, my brother told me that Ann Marie had turned up at his house drunk, with Connor who had been given beer in his bottle. I went to the house and found that Connor was underweight, pale, and distressed. The following day I phoned the Health visitor and Ann Marie and Connor came to live with me. When Connor was 12 months old Ann Marie turned round one day and said she didn't want him. She returned to Manchester, leaving Connor in my care. I contacted Social Services and applied for a residence order. I had no doubt in my mind I wanted to bring up Connor and not have him taken into care again.

Eventually Ann Marie settled in Blackpool. She had erratic contact with Connor until he was three years old and then no contact at all. Connor's biological father has had no contact.

When Connor was three my marriage broke down, due to differences about parenting Connor. I did not want Connor being brought up like my own three girls; in my opinion my ex-husband was too strict.

Continued...

Pictured below is Annie with her grandson, Connor who holds a photo of his mummy, Ann Marie.



.....A year ago my beautiful Ann Marie died at the age of 29. It was a morphine overdose in suspicious circumstances and the case is still open with the police.

I have brought up Connor on my own for 6 years, and he is now 10. I have struggled financially and emotionally, but now I have a really good support network of friends family and agencies. Connor is doing really well at school, and we have just moved house.



The Grandparent Carer Network meets monthly at the Central Methodist Church in Burnley. Grandparents meet for informal coffee mornings sharing the highs and the lows of bringing up their grandchildren.

The Network invites guest speakers, which have included:-

- Education Welfare Officers who delivered a workshop on bullying issues;
- A Specialist Designated Nurse for children looked after;
- A Clinical psychologist;
- A firm of specialist solicitors offering advice;
- East Lancashire Fire Safety and Rescue
- Mentor UK.

Speakers invited for future meetings are East Lancs Advocacy, National Children's Homes, and Early Break "Drug Awareness".

The Network also provide facilities for childcare during the meetings.

A Karaoke and disco will be held to celebrate the success of the network in July 2007.



East Lancashire Fire Safety and Rescue officers delivered a workshop on fire and safety strategies in the home.



Here the Network met with Esme Medhill from Mentor U K. The day focussed on identifying effective practice in drug misuse prevention.



Grandparents attending the regular monthly meetings at the Central Methodist Church in Burnley

The Grandparent Carer Network also meets for fun days out, parties and celebrations.

Events have included:-

- A visit to Farmer Ted's in West Yorkshire;
- A visit to The Wild Boar Park in Chipping, near Preston;
- A Fun Day out at Towneley Park;
- Christmas parties which have included magicians and karaoke;

For the Easter holidays a three day stay at Coldwell Activity Centre has been booked. Grandparents will benefit from time out on their own, with supervised activities for the children.



Grandparents and their grandchildren setting off for a fun day out at Farmer Ted's in West Yorkshire



Grandparents and their grandchildren on a visit to the Wild Boar Park, Chipping



Members of the Grandparent Carer Network enjoyed a Christmas Party fancy dress karaoke and magician.

Pictured right are Project Workers Fiona, Mark, Fe and Andy the dog!





Library photo

have 4 children, 3 boys and 1 girl aged 27,25, 23 and 14. Two of them still live at home, the 27 and 14 year olds. I've worked all my life from the age of 14 doing various things up until having full time care of my 2 grandchildren, then aged 9 months and 18 months. These are my only daughter's children.

.....She was pregnant at 16 and her partner was very violent towards her. She left him when she was 3 months pregnant. My initial concerns were reported to the health visitor after the birth of my granddaughter. Some drugs were involved, domestic violence, controlling and abusive behaviour. There were signs of some behavioural problems so early – even at 18 months. Plans and parenting classes were put into place and I was involved the whole way through and saw the children nearly every day like I had done from birth. They have always slept 2 – 3 nights a week at my house. They didn't want to take the children into care but help the family help themselves, which I totally supported. The health visitor and I felt it was a time bomb ticking away, but other people, including Social Services, didn't .

Gail's Story *

The Family Support Worker said my only option was to apply for a residence order which I did but it took months to go to court because it was being contested by my daughter and partner and Social Services, until the Family Support Worker turned up to see if I would take the children temporarily as they had been left with an inappropriate carer. The children never went back and I got a residence order. I had to give my job up, which was my security as well.

My youngest son by now was 10. Even though we discussed it and found it to be the right decision, he has lost out on so much of my quality time e.g. going to sports events and such. He can only play out in restricted areas as I wouldn't be able to collect him and such. Yet I am so proud of him for all his understanding and trying hard in school and at sport. He's a teenager to be proud of.

I do feel some resentment even though I love them so much. Starting again going to nursery, changing nappies, teething – I wanted to take them on lovely walks and swimming and trips out and then send them home to mum and dad.

How did I feel through all of this? I had a mix of good and bad feelings when my daughter was pregnant. When I became totally aware of what drugs she was taking it was absolute sheer devastation, like a

little girl lost trying to find her way back and a mother looking for her and they see each other but when their hands reach to touch each other the girl disappears. The effects of bringing children to a stable environment, when my emotions went unstable because of the emptiness – no daughter, no job, no security, on income support, relationship with other siblings breaking down. I was emotionally, mentally and physically drained. Everything became hard work, so, so tiring.

It's made me realise you've got to have time for yourself, you've got to keep yourself well in body and mind, take each day as it comes, talk to someone. Try not to be resentful towards the children; it does sound awful, but it will creep in somewhere, but everyone's situation is different. You must look after yourself or your world will begin to crumble. Take any help that's offered and it will release the pressure somewhere. Be prepared to learn new things; parenting is a learning process. I've made loads of mistakes and they do show sometimes, but now I'm learning again, listen to what they say. Jogging my memory helped me through difficult situations going out for the day. I do feel completely let down by the whole system.

I would like to say a big thank you to New Era Enterprises and Sure Start for all their help and support.

**this grandparent did not want to be identified, so her name has been changed*



I am a fifty year old grandmother who is caring for my young grandson. On the 10th of August 2005 I was contacted by social services and asked to take Colin into my home. He was to be removed from his mother and to be taken into care. I was not going to let him go into care because I loved him so much.

I thought if I took him it would encourage my daughter to get herself clean so he could return to her, but the situation did not improve and his return did not happen.

My daughter lived in Nelson; her only interest for the past few years has been recreational drugs and Asian dealers.

During the first few weeks of caring for my grandson my daughter was allowed supervised contact with her son. These visits lasted a couple of hours at my home. On several occasions I was subject to violent attacks from my daughter.

There was also no improvement in getting clean.

I also did not receive any support from Social Services, or any other relevant agencies.

My self and my husband had to gather information together to apply for a residence order with parental responsibility on 10th October 2005. Our daughter agreed to this order.

During the following months I had great support from Women's Aid, but with all the support I still felt isolated, I felt like I was the only grandparent who was caring for my grandson.

Colin's health visitor referred me over to New Era Enterprises, to register on the Grandparent Carer Network.

On the first meeting I was very nervous, but after the meeting I felt I wasn't alone nor the only grandparent in this situation.

I returned home and I had the strength to

confront my daughter and told her I was not going to put up with further abuse of any sort.

You could say I returned home a totally changed person, knowing that I was not suffering on my own.

I now attend regular monthly meetings which I have found some training sessions useful and we have also enjoyed some fantastic fun days out.

Our daughter has given birth a couple of months ago to another boy. She is still using drugs and as far as I am aware having a relationship with the Asian drug dealer. Social Services, Women's Aid/ Women's Refuge have and are still involved with our daughter; she has supervised contact with my grandson twice a week, but very often lets him down and does not turn up.

The relationship between myself and my daughter is strained and uncomfortable. However the pleasure my grandson gives me is a positive and outweighs the negative.

He is a happy, intelligent, very much loved little boy, whom we adore implicitly. Me and my husband have put in place boundaries, structure; this has created stability in the home.

I am myself more relaxed and will never put up with abuse from her again.

"I am a fifty year old grandmother who is caring for my young grandson."

Joyce's Story *

We had just returned from Spain after spending a month there. My daughter from a previous marriage had been looking after the house whilst we were away in Spain.

As soon as we opened the door I could see the house was a mess, cigarette burns in the carpet, dust on the furniture and my plants were dead.

I told her to get out of my house. As she left she grabbed her youngest daughter, aged 4, by the arm. My granddaughter held onto my skirt and begged to stay with me because she was frightened that her mother would hit her.

So I was left with my youngest granddaughter. The eldest granddaughter was staying at her father's for the weekend. When they arrived at my house that weekend I told the father what had happened. He agreed with me that the mother was not capable of looking after the children. She had been on drugs for about two years and things had gone from bad to worse.

We also discovered some of our belongings had gone missing, but our tv and electrical stuff were still here. We thought ourselves lucky.

On the Monday morning my husband and I went to a solicitor. We went to court to get custody of the girls and got a residential order for them.

We have had our ups and downs with them but on the whole they are good kids. Our eldest granddaughter has been playing football for about ten years, the youngest has done drama, hockey and dance.

Our eldest passed eleven G.C.S.E and is now attending college doing very well. Our youngest is 14 this year and the eldest is 18 this year.

My husband and the father of the girls and his family have stood by me all the way, they have helped me and been very good. The girls still see their mother, when she comes to my house, but she has let them down at Christmas's and Birthday's. She still takes drugs. The girls love and hate her, but after all she is their mum.



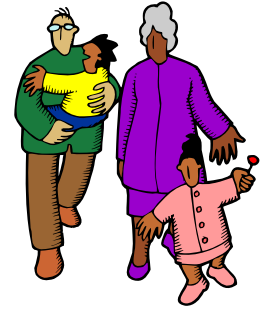
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"My story of how my two granddaughters came to live with my husband and I."

**this grandparent did not want to be identified, so her name has been changed*



GRANDPARENT CARER NETWORK MONTHLY MEETINGS



**Realistic Strategies & Solutions
for local Grandparents**

Forthcoming Events 2007

**CENTRAL METHODIST CHURCH, Hargreaves Street, Burnley
CRECHE FACILITIES PROVIDED**

28 March 2007
10.00am – 12.30pm
East Lancashire Advocacy
“Getting the message across”.

25 April 2007
10.00am – 12.30pm
N.C.H.
“Childrens Service”.

May’s meeting has been cancelled due to the half term break.

27 June 2007
10.00am – 12.30pm
Early Break
“Drug Awareness”.

25 July 2007
4.00pm – 8.00pm
“**Summer Party 07**”
Venue: L.M.R.C.A., Railway Club, Rosegrove, Burnley.
Karaoke & Disco

- **If you have difficulty in parking, this is available at the Crown Court at a cost of £1.50 ;**
- **If you require Crèche facilities please telephone to confirm your place one week prior to the meeting.**

Fe, Project Worker with the Grandparent Carer Network.

“There is very little support out there for grandparents caring for their grandchildren. This is the only project within the local area of this kind.

Working on this project for the past two years has been a rewarding experience and has special meaning for me because my own mother was raised by her grandmother in the 1950s”.

I would like to thank our grandparents who contributed to the publishing of this story and to wish all our grandmas Happy Mother’s Day.





The Grandparent Carer Network is managed by New Era Enterprises Ltd, which is a social enterprise based in

Burnley and providing services across Lancashire. We help people to improve the lives of residents by supporting economic development, regeneration, community capacity building and personal development activities.

We help to create employment opportunities and develop the workforce, support the development of co-operative and social enterprise, provide advice, information and guidance, education and training, consultancy and professional services and carry out research.

Above all we promote mutual self-help within communities through local initiatives which empower people to meet their own personal and collective needs and to participate more fully in their community. We help to develop the skills, self-confidence and

employability of individuals and to build the capacity of voluntary and community organisations.

We presently manage a number of contracts with Jobcentre Plus, the NorthWest Learning and Skills Council, Surestart Children's Centres, local authorities and voluntary and community organisations.

We are committed to a quality service for all our clients and we are able to achieve this because of the skills, experience and dedication of our staff.

The Grandparent Carers Project was originally developed with the support of Burnley Borough Council through SRB funding and is now supported by Lancashire County Council. It operates across Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale.

For more information about this project, further copies of this publication and all our services visit our website www.newera.coop.



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