



Samaritans - Doing good locally

GAPS

GRANDPARENTS

AS PARENTS

Newsletter 55

October 2008



ALL GRANDPARENTS/CARERS RAISING GRANDCHILDREN ARE MOST WELCOME
Kinship Care Worker - Karen Lizasoain - Phone 0429 914 553

(Extracts taken from the October Newsletter)

MEETING TIMES FOR GAPS GROUPS

Cessnock - Thursdays 10.00 - 12.00 (1st and 3rd Thursdays)

Charlestown - Wednesdays 10.00 - 1.00 (Morning tea and light lunch provided)

Fennell Bay (Toronto) - Wednesdays 6.30pm-8.30pm

Kanwal/Gorokan - Mondays 10.00 - 12.00

Morisset - Fridays 10.00 - 12.00

Newcastle - Thursdays 10.00

Raymond Terrace - Fridays 10.30 - 12.00

Before writing a prescription for my granddaughter, the paediatrician asked her if she was allergic to anything. Erica whispered something in his ear.

That night, before giving her the medicine, I read the directions on the bottle.

The doctor had warned, "Do not take with broccoli."

My 76-year-old father, while still a good driver, has more trouble judging distances than he used to. This sometimes results in him driving by sound: he hits something, and then he realises it was there. The cost of repairing rear bumpers was getting expensive, so a perfect gift seemed to be a reverse-sensor kit that gave an audible and visual signal when the car was getting too close to something. We had the kit installed in his car and watched excitedly as Dad backed out of the garage. The audible signal went off... so he reached for his mobile phone. "Hello?" Bang!

REPORT ON THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT COMMUNITY CABINET MEETING

at Lambton High School - Monday, 29th September, 2008 - Judy Turner

At Karen's invitation I attended the recent Community Cabinet Meeting on behalf of GAPS so that I could urge the Government to improve all matters relating to grandparents raising grandchildren. Having passed the security police swarming all over the place I showed proof of my identity and joined the crowd in the hall.

Members of the Cabinet sat at a long table below the stage and the school choir sang a few delightful items before the Hon Kevin Rudd spoke to the audience. The Prime Minister then invited questions from the audience. Many of these he answered himself, showing a remarkable breadth of knowledge, and often he asked the appropriate Minister to add to his comments. The positive mood of most people in the hall showed that they appreciated the chance to be there.

At the end of the meeting pre-arranged ten minute interviews with a Minister took place and I was able to speak with the Hon Jenny Macklin, Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. Also present were Bill Shorten MP and two members of staff. They were all very caring, and attentive to what I was saying.

I left with them a list of recommendations on behalf of GAPS which I include in this Newsletter and a draft DVD Raising Others Children. I also include a follow-up letter of thanks.

It was very interesting to see democracy at work and I thank Karen for making it possible.

On behalf of **GAPS**, the Support Group for **Grandparents Raising Grandchildren**

In the past two years the number of families involved in GAPS in the Hunter and Central Coast regions has grown to 95 families, including 158 grandchildren.

According to the 2006 census grandchildren being raised by grandparents represent 1% of the population. The number of these grandchildren in the Hunter region alone is estimated to be 6,000. These figures are increasing.

ATTACHED

Recommendations from GAPS - the Support Group for Grandparents Raising Grandchildren - Hunter and Central Coast Regions

DVD Raising Others' Children

The Kinship Care Worker in the Hunter Region:

Karen Lizasoain

0429 914 553

Currently this service is the only one available. It is funded by FAHCSIA and is dependent on tender. There is no guarantee that this essential service will continue. It is due to Karen's excellent work that 95 families are now in GAPS. There are hundreds more in the community that need support.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM GAPS

The Support Group for Grandparents Raising Grandchildren - Hunter and Central Coast Regions

1. The appointment in each region of a specialist support worker for grandparents raising grandchildren with a sound understanding of financial, emotional, legal etc. matters, able to advocate on behalf of the grandparents. Ideally this specialist would meet grandparents new to raising their grandchildren and lead and support them in obtaining all necessary assistance, without adding any further stress to the grandparents' lives. This support worker would also be available for ongoing assistance and advice.

2. Immediate and long-term counselling should be available for grandparents and grandchildren who are suddenly having to lead a completely different lifestyle which includes - trauma, grief, stress, loss, emotional upheaval, financial, legal and housing problems, and educational disadvantage. Lone grandparents have to cope on their own. Grandchildren and grandparents need help through the difficult years of puberty. Many grandchildren are eligible for compensation as victims of crime but grandparents are reluctant to face the courts again.

3. Co-ordination of all services and agencies, especially communication between Centrelink and DOCS, so that e.g. a grandparent who is raising a grandchild and becomes eligible for Family Tax Benefit is told also by Centrelink to go to DOCS to apply for the Supported Care Allowance, and to DADHC if disability is involved. It should be easy to have the grandchild's name put on the Medicare Card.

4. Training of workers to understand the needs of grandparents especially in DOCS, Centrelink and DADHC so that grandparents are given full respect and all appropriate support and entitlements without barriers and undue delays. At present some grandparents are finding the Supported Care Allowance harder to get and are having to wait up to 4 or 5 months. This is causing unnecessary financial hardship and stress.

5. A telephone hotline, similar to the one for foster carers, where immediate satisfying assistance can be given, and followed up.

6. Legal Aid for Grandparents without means testing. It is financially draining to take legal action to gain guardianship of grandchildren. One couple had to pay tens of thousands of dollars in legal fees, make additions to their home and buy a bigger car in order to accommodate four physically and mentally abused grandchildren whose father was a drug addict and whose mothers died. Some neglecting parents return repeatedly to the courts after the custodial decision has been made, forcing the grandparents to yet again find money to try to retain the care of the grandchildren. One lone grandparent who knew her neglecting daughter was still on drugs was forced, after gaining custody, to again go to court, this time representing herself because she couldn't afford legal representation. The stress involved was considerable. Some grandparents sell their homes to cover costs.

7. The availability of respite, childminding, emergency relief or contingency money where grandparents are suffering hardship or ill health. e.g. suddenly having to pay specialist bills for their grandchildren, day care fees, buy children's car seats, or having to go to hospital. Ongoing accessibility to respite is important as grandparents are ageing.

8. Ongoing support, counselling and group therapy for grandchildren being raised by grandparents all of whom are suffering trauma, and support to enable them to meet other grandchildren like themselves. A particularly effective way is to fund a family weekend e.g. at a sport and recreation centre, where food, facilities and activities are provided for grandparent families enabling the grandchildren to get to know each other and

hear each other's stories. It is a very powerful and healing experience, and provides respite and healing for the grandparents as well.

9. The strengthening of early intervention programs for 'at risk' pregnant mothers, and ongoing monitoring before and after birth, especially for those on drugs, or underage, or with a mental illness, or all of these, to ensure that the child is not in danger. Monitoring should take into account the observations of grandparents and other significant people to gain a balanced view that does not rely purely on the mother's statements or appearances.

10. Support services for parents of aberrant underage children. There appears to be plenty for children but few for parents. Authorities should balance their needs equally and responsibly.

11. Equal rights for grandparents as it appears that the rights of the neglecting parent of the grandchildren get preference. Some grandparents feel that they have to prove their worth, and fitness to raise grandchildren, far more than the neglecting parent. Some grandparents have to meet complex access agreements which cause considerable dislocation to their own and their grandchildren's lives, while the neglecting parent makes no effort or fails to meet any obligations.

12. Uniformity of operation and easy communication between Services and Agencies across States. Children get lost across borders.

IN CONCLUSION

Grandparents, with or without a partner, who are raising their grandchildren, numbering anything from one child to ten, deserve all the material and emotional help they can get. They do their job selflessly and with utter commitment for their grandchildren. The least we can do is to make their path as easy and stress-free as possible.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this personally to you, together with the DVD *Raising Others Children*.

Yours sincerely

Judy Turner