

'It's been wonderful. I'd recommend it to everyone.' – Gail Dunn



Jason Lang/BURNABY NOW

Just like grandma: Jonah Eruera curls up for a story with his 'volunteer grandmother,' Gail Dunn. Dunn signed up with Volunteer Grandparents, which sets up matches for children who don't have a chance to spend time with their own grandparents.

When you really need a grandparent

Erin Hitchcock
staff reporter

Gail Dunn spends time with three-year-old Jonah Eruera about once a week.

They play games, go for walks or simply hang out – all the regular things that grandparents do with their grandchildren.

But Dunn isn't Jonah's real grandmother – she's his volunteer grandparent.

But that doesn't bother Jonah as he looks forward to Dunn's visit and their playtime together.

Although Dunn loves children, she

doesn't have any of her own. When she saw an advertisement at a Burnaby library calling for volunteer grandparents, she quickly saw an opportunity.

"I actually saw a notice in the library," Dunn said, adding that she thought to herself that she's got the time and she likes children, so she applied to become a volunteer grandparent.

"I thought this is terrific. I really, really like (children)," she said, adding that she has eight nieces and nephews.

The notice Dunn saw was from Volunteer Grandparents, an organization that matches volunteers age 50 and up with

children without grandparents or without grandparents living near by.

"I thought this was a perfect opportunity. It's been wonderful. I'd recommend it to everyone," said Dunn, a Burnaby resident who started volunteering about seven months ago.

She was linked with Jonah, whose one set of real grandparents live in a care home and the other live too far away, unable to visit.

Veronica Spiess, program coordinator for Volunteer Grandparents, said volunteers help parents throughout the Lower Mainland who might not be able to spend

as much time with their children as they would like.

"The parents are so busy," she said, adding that not only are parents provided with that extra person to help out with the kids, but the children also benefit.

"They learn, they learn a lot of things from the grandparents," Spiess said, adding that the organization's family match program helps bridge the generational gap.

"A lot of children have no exposure to older adults."

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