

Building families

Adopted grandchildren

NOT WANTING their children to be robbed of the pleasure of growing up with grandparents, Anne and Alex Downy turned to Volunteer Grandparents, a North Vancouver society that matches grandparents with prospective families.

"It's just been terrific," Anne Downy says of the almost one year relationship her husband and two children have experienced with Eileen and Donald

Shockley. "The children took to them from the start, there was an immediate bond."

And Downy says she and her husband took to the

By **BARRETT FISHER**

Shockley's right away as well. "Eileen and I are both real talkers — we both have to fight to get a word in edgewise. And they are an active couple as we are, so we like to get out and do things."

With both of Alex's parents dead, and Anne only

having a father left in Ontario, the Downys are a perfect example of the type of couple who would benefit from the Volunteer Grandparent program.

"My mom died when I was two weeks pregnant with my first child," Downy says. "It was a real dark cloud over my pregnancy. That's the time when you get really close and have a chance to

say to your mom, 'Hey, I know what you went through.'"

For Downy, the Shockleys are just like her own family. And the Shockleys feel the same way.

Says Eileen Shockley: "When we met the children we hit it off like a house on fire, and their parents treat us like their own parents."

With their own family and grandchildren living in Penitction and Lethbridge, the Shockleys, both in their 60s, decided after seeing a notice at West Vancouver Seniors' Centre they would volunteer to be surrogate grandparents.

"We take the children to Stanley Park or Maplewood Farm or to our place for dinner."

Carol Harris, coordinator for Volunteer Grandparents which locates out of Capilano Community Services in North Van, says the society is trying to make the community more aware of the enriching service.

"We need families who need grandparents, and grandparents who need families," she says. "We're encouraging people to come and see us. Then we interview the parents and grandparents to make sure there is some basis for the relationship, so they have common interests and backgrounds."

"It's not a babysitting service," Harris emphasizes. "It's strictly a support,

although the grandparents do take them on outings. But it should be free and easy, just like having real grandparents."

Harris says a couple who decides to become grandparents must like children and must be prepared for a long-term commitment.

After the relationship has been formed, a social worker checks with both the grandparents and the family on a monthly basis for the first six months.

Downy says when she and Alex first applied for grandparents they thought they would meet a couple within a few months, but it was over 1½ years later that they were matched with the Shockleys.

"I know I was frustrated waiting," she says. "You hear about older people who are lonely, but if only they knew there are so many young couples out there who would give their eye teeth to have grandparents for their children."

For interested parents and grandparents, drop-in information seminars will be held the first Thursday in every month at Capilano Community Services at Delbrook Community Centre, 600 West Queens, North Vancouver, or the last Tuesday in every month at the West Vancouver Seniors' Activity Centre, 695 21st St., West Vancouver. Or call 988-7115, or 926-4375.

