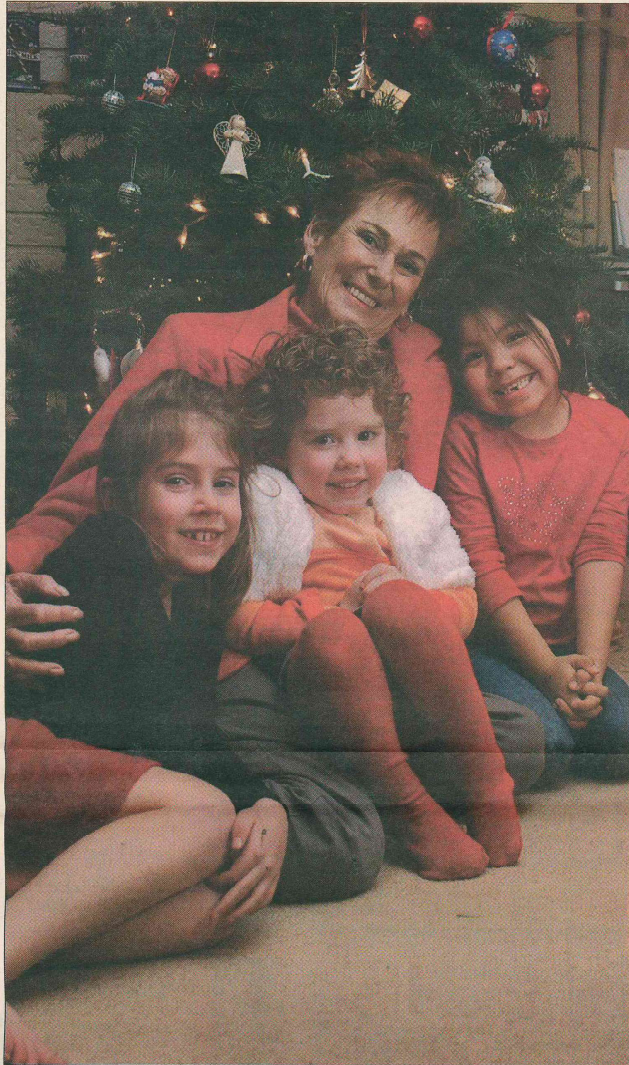


# Girls enjoy the holidays with grandma



**VOLUNTEER** grandma Carol Wells enjoys the holidays with her three grandchildren Zoe (left) and Ruby Gilson, and Querstyn Dawson. The girls spend time with their grandma cooking together, and making arts and crafts among other activities.

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**THERE'S something pretty special about the bond between grandparents and grandchildren.**

The worries and frustrations experienced between parents and their little ones don't exist in the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren. They enjoy each other for who they are, and let the parents take care of the rest.

For North Vancouverite Carol Wells, becoming a grandparent was the kind of heartwarming experience she imagined it would be. Not having any children of her own, she decided to join Volunteer Grandparents. As the name suggests, the organization matches children with older adults to connect the two generations.

"I can't believe how much they've added to my life, they've just enriched it so much," says Wells.

She signed up for the program just over two years ago, hoping to grandparent a little girl on the North Shore. Before being accepted, she went through an extensive screening process that included background checks and a home visit.

In May, the program coordinator matched her up with five-year-old Querstyn Dawson from east Vancouver. She lives with her dad, and although she has aunts and uncles as well as siblings, the relationship she developed with Wells is quite different because of the kind of undivided attention Querstyn receives from her.

She usually visits with her about once every two weeks. When they meet, they do things like cook dinner together, make arts and crafts and play.

"We just became great pals," says Wells. "(The friendship) probably makes (children) feel a little more secure. I do make a point of when I promise her something I carry through with it. It makes them feel like there's somebody special in their life."

Three weeks after meeting

Querstyn, Wells received a call about a family on the North Shore with two little girls looking for a grandmother. She says she wasn't sure about the commitment at first, but after meeting the girls, Zoe and Ruby Gilson, and their parents, she decided that she'd love to take on that experience as well.

She soon became an important part of the family, someone who comes to birthday parties, helps decorate the Christmas tree, and someone who the children can look up to.

"We just laugh, and have a great time. I'm really interested in them . . . I hope it'll be a life-long commitment," says Wells. "They've enriched my life a lot."

She hopes that others will consider joining the Volunteer Grandparents program, which first began in 1973. It was founded by a social worker named Marjorie Walters, who was motivated to start the Volunteer Grandparents after meeting numerous children and elderly people in her work who were unable to enjoy the benefits of an extended family.

Wells says participation in

the program doesn't need to be as extensive as hers. She notes that she knows of seniors who spend time with children in a classroom instead of having a one-on-one relationship with individual kids.

There are three programs Volunteer Grandparents provides. The family match program matches families who have children between the ages of three and 14 years old, and who do not have access to grandparents.

The school grandparent program provides volunteers for assignments in elementary schools throughout the Lower Mainland. It began as a pilot project in 1996 and has evolved since due to its resounding success. Volunteers can also simply participate in a variety of activities such as listening, reading, arts and crafts, or special events, at the discretion of the individual educator or school.

"I just think it's a wonderful opportunity. It's a fun, rewarding experience," says Wells.

For more information visit the website at [www.volunteer-grandparents.ca](http://www.volunteer-grandparents.ca), or call 604-736-8271.

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