

# Resources and Programs for Grandparents

BY BEYAWORSKI

Volunteer Grandparent Carol and kids picking strawberries.

Photo: Liesel Gilson

**G**randfather Doug Reynolds enjoys spending time with his grandsons, aged 7 and 1 1/2 years. Swimming at their local swimming pool, testing new science experiments, reading a fascinating book together or eating a meal at their favourite restaurant are all part of their shared activities.

Family life experts say the role of grandparent is more important than ever for the stability of families – and society. It's a role that requires openness and a willingness to change. And what do children value most from their grandparents? Unconditional love and spending time together, report authors Peggy Edwards and Mary Jane Sterne, in *Intentional Grandparenting: A Boomer's Guide*.

At the heart of this book's approach is the notion of intentional grandparenting, a process for planning ahead and taking deliberate action to be the kind of grandparent you want to be. Through interviews and research, the writers suggest 10 principles for effective grandparenting. The tips they offer highlight the importance of showing consideration and encouragement to the parents, while also accepting your grandchildren for who they are – not for whom we may wish them to be.

## Grandparent Resources

According to the BC Council for Families: "Grandparents are family resources. They are babysitters, they transmit family history, traditions, and social values; they are confidants and role models."

Life today with grandchildren can be more complicated, although exciting! Grandparents may encounter: lack of time, blended families, distance issues, family break-ups, working grandparents and contemporary child-raising methods. Fortunately, there are many resources to guide and support grandparents along this meaningful path of discovery. Countless opportunities for grandparents and grandchildren to share time together exist: Social service agencies, community centres, playgrounds, pools, parks, hiking trails and much more.

## Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

One helpful program is Grandparents Raising Grandchildren organized by Parent Support Services of BC. They offer a toll-free line to assist grandparents raising a family member's child to find the answers, assistance and resources they need to resolve problems.

Professor Barbara Whittington, School of Social Work, University of Victoria says: "This accessible support line with real people answering the questions is a solid step toward truly supporting extended family caregivers. That care often means endless appointments, court dates, emotional turmoil, financial stress and juggling other family needs, as well as love and good fun.

Grandparents can also participate in Support Circles to learn positive parenting skills, receive emotional support and discover useful services and resources. Participants comment how the Sup-

port Circles are "an informative lifeline and help them feel less isolated." Legal seminars are also available outlining Kinship Care facts, relevant legislation, government and community resources, benefits and services for grandparents.

More details are available at: 1-855-474-9777, Email: [GRGline@parentsupportbc.ca](mailto:GRGline@parentsupportbc.ca) and [www.parentsupportbc.ca/grandparents\\_raising\\_grandchildren](http://www.parentsupportbc.ca/grandparents_raising_grandchildren)

## Grandparent Connections

Grandparent Connections is a support group for grandparents who share in the care of their grandchildren. It could be full time, part time or grandparents who just want to connect with other grandparents. They meet at the John Braithwaite Community Centre, North Vancouver.

"We meet once a week with a facilitator in one room and we have childminding staff in another room for the grandchildren," says Group Facilitator Carol Lundrigan. "Grandparents who attend tell us they feel supported by being able to share confidentially with other grandparents. It's uplifting to come and learn and share with others. They learn from others' experiences. It's like a little respite/retreat for grandparents that also is so much fun!"

Consider contacting your local health department or community centre about similar groups in your area. The North Vancouver group is coordinated by the North Shore Neighbourhood House [www.nsnh.bc.ca](http://www.nsnh.bc.ca)

## Road Scholar Intergenerational Programs: Travel together

The Road Scholar Intergenerational programs created by Elder Hostel, a leader in lifelong learning, is a special grandparent/grandchild travel initiative. These programs offer opportunities for grandchildren and grandparents to share an adventure together on their own. Each program is structured to fit with the age range of young learners and offers unique curriculum for adults and children, as well as combined educational experiences.

John and Kay Nelson, in their 70s, raised four children, and are now the proud grandparents to nine grandchildren. Upon turning 10 years old, each grandchild is the recipient of their first Road Scholar Intergenerational

program, giving them the opportunity to spend quality time with their grandparents without their siblings or parents.

Like many families, some of the Nelson's grandchildren live nearby, while others live several hours away. In efforts to get to know their grandchildren better, John came up with the idea of taking them on Road Scholar Intergenerational programs. "We babysat for our grandchildren from time to time but we really wanted the opportunity to spend some quality time with them, individually, to get to know them and give them a chance to get to know us better," says Kay. "We thought Road Scholar would be ideal for us and our grandchildren."

When their first granddaughter turned 10, they selected a program on Prince Edward Island that centered on the book *Anne of Green Gables*. Kay says both her granddaughter and her daughter-in-law were nervous before the trip; however, after some initial homesickness, their granddaughter loved the program.

"We ask each grandchild to keep a journal and we do the same," says Kay. "At the end of the program, I make a scrapbook for them that they can share with their family and keep as a treasured memento of our time spent together. It's such a special time for all of us."

To learn more about Road Scholar's Intergenerational programs, visit: [www.roadscholar.org/intergenerational](http://www.roadscholar.org/intergenerational)

## Volunteer Grandparents

Grandparenting can be one of the most rich life experiences. "The grandparent-grandchild relationship promotes the de-

velopment of strong and healthy families by supporting intergenerational connections," says Veronica Grossi, Program Coordinator for Volunteer Grandparents. "Children who have a relationship with an older adult develop socially and emotionally in many positive ways. This emotional bond promotes self-esteem and breaks social isolation for everyone involved in the relationship."

Volunteer Grandparents is a non-profit organization based in Burnaby with a mission to "bridge and enrich the generations." They accomplish their goals by connecting caring individuals over the age of 50 to children (from ages 3 to 14) who lack the immediate presence of grandparents or older adults in their everyday lives. The intention is to create a mutually beneficial relationship that resembles a true extended family, leading to more healthy and connected lives for all involved.

"Volunteer Grandparents provides seniors with the opportunity to share their wealth of knowledge and experience with the receptive, enquiring minds of children," says Veronica.

The organization offers programs in the Metro Vancouver Lower Mainland including: the Family Match Program that matches volunteers with families who have children between the ages of 3 to 14 years old and who do not have accessible grandparents. They also organize a School Grandparent Program to provide volunteers in elementary schools.

Contact them by phone: 604-736-8271 or online: [www.volunteergrandparents.ca](http://www.volunteergrandparents.ca)

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## What Generation Gap?

Can you share 2-3 hours a week with a child?  
Become a volunteer grandparent.

Your gift of time can  
enrich the lives of families  
in the Lower Mainland.

For information on how, call  
604-736-8271  
[www.volunteergrandparents.ca](http://www.volunteergrandparents.ca)

**Volunteer Grandparents**  
Volunteers for Intergenerational Programs Society

