

AS WE AGE *Celebrating Seniors*

‘We have this super trusting relationship’

Moscrop Secondary student bonds with volunteer grandparent for 13 years and counting

By Tereza Verenca
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Radhika Patel was just three years old when she was paired up with her grandmother through Volunteer Grandparents, a Burnaby-based non-profit.

As the name suggests, the organization links children between the ages of three and 14 years old who don't have contact with their natural grandparents to seniors willing to spend a few hours with them.

In Patel's case, her grandma was really sick and her grandpa had cancer.

"I really didn't have a grandparent figure, so my mom thought it would be a great idea to have that kind of role model to look up to," the now-16-year-old Moscrop student told the **NOW**.

Patel was paired up with Maureen Hopper, whose daughter also benefited

from Volunteer Grandparents.

"She wanted to be part of the program, too, as a way to give back," said Patel.

Hopper's and Patel's relationship has been going strong for 13 years now, with get-togethers happening once every two weeks.

When Patel was younger, her time with her grandmother was spent sewing, knitting and baking.

"Once a month, we'll bake her famous cookies. She loves to hear about my school life. I'm like an open book with her. I tell her absolutely everything."

The teenager said the relationship has kept her from making bad choices.

"My grandmother is the least judgmental person I've ever met. High school is not the best situation for me. It's hard and difficult. She can relate to me and also tells me stories from her high school. We have this super

trusting relationship."

Hopper echoed the sentiments.

"She is a delightful girl, even now as a teenager. We both put a lot of energy into the relationship and are just naturally compatible," she wrote in an email to the **NOW**, noting the pair keep very active. "Last week she got tickets to Bard on the Beach and invited me, and next week we plan to go to the art gallery for the Monet exhibition. Past summers it was arena concerts like

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A blooming relationship: Radhika Patel, left, and Maureen Hopper. The granddaughter-grandmother duo have gotten to know each other over the last 13 years thanks to a matching program offered by Burnaby-based Volunteer Grandparents. The pair keep active, including taking a spin on Hopper's Vespa. PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

Burnaby teen stays active with g'ma

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Taylor Swift and Katy Perry."

Patel recommends the program to anyone wanting to have that grandparent relationship.

"No matter your age, you can always connect with

people," she said.

To become a volunteer grandparent, applicants must be 50 years or older and live in the Metro Vancouver area; can share two to three hours a week with a child; and can commit for at least one year.

To learn more about volunteering, visit tinyurl.com/GrandparentApplication.

To register a child, visit tinyurl.com/ChildApplication.

The non-profit is located at 203-2101 Holdom Ave.

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