

## Welcome to the February Edition of Grandview

Thank you to all who attended the meeting on the 8th of February. I am sorry that I missed it, but I hear on all accounts that the meeting went well and Tony did a superb job of standing in for me on such short notice. I hope the information on self esteem was helpful and that you will all look after your *own* self esteem as well as the self esteem of your grandchildren.

There have been a few changes to the dates for this year's meetings.

We have been having a bit of trouble securing rooms to hold our meeting but, *fear not*...it has all been fixed up and the dates are as follows:

- April 5th                      Wednesday      12.00pm— 2.30pm
- May 10th                      Wednesday      12.00pm— 2.30pm
- June 21st                      Wednesday      12.00pm— 2.30pm
- July 12th                      Wednesday      12.00pm— 2.30pm
- August 9th                      Wednesday      12.00pm— 2.30pm
- September 13th      Wednesday      12.00pm— 2.30pm
- October 11th              Wednesday      12.00pm— 2.30pm
- November 8th              Wednesday      12.00pm— 2.30pm
- December 15              Friday              12.00 pm—2.30pm

**NOTE - There will be NO meeting in March as we are have the "Kids at play" on the 24th February**

*There is a very inspiring article give to me by Julie Samuels-Green expressing the thoughts and views of a kin ship carer (grandparent) on page 2 worth a read!!*

Cheers,  
from Mary

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looking after her grandchild  
fulltime



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A joint project of Marymead,  
Canberra Mothercraft Society  
and Relationships Australia



*The author of this story shared it in a workshop at a NSW Family Support Conference I attended late last year. She is involved with one of the NSW kincare support groups and is a grandmother raising her grandson. She has agreed to let me anonymously share it with you in our newsletter. Our thanks to her for her generous gesture.*

*Julie*

## **MY STORY**

### **Where do you go for help?**

When the unbelievable and unimaginable happens and you are in shock and denial **where do you go for help?** One day you are living your life enjoying the freedom of your children grown up with families of their own. The joy of being a grandparent, having a career, when suddenly you are the mother of a young grandchild or grandchildren. Just when you are looking forward to leisure, travel, doing lunch, suddenly you are talking about toddlers, potty training, speech therapy and preschool.

### **Where do you go for help?**

Overnight my life is very public with the Department of Community Services in my home to assess whether I am a suitable person to have a grandchild who has experienced trauma and abuse. The grandchild whose birth I attended and cut the cord.

Unable to tell my family and friends the truth of what happened I carried the feelings of shock and guilt, where did I go wrong with the errant child that has become such a dysfunctional adult, resulting in poor choices for a partner. I have raised other children who seem to be O.K. **Where do I go for help?** Suddenly the department who has the power, the courts and legal people are making decision on behalf of my precious grandchild. **Where do I go for help?** You know you need to focus on the child who has suffered abuse. What about the anxiety you have for you own child and their welfare. **Where do you go for help and understanding?**

We make the decision to be parents again in our senior years because the pain of doing nothing is far worse. **Where do we go for help?** The state has a duty of care towards these children but unfortunately all the responsibility is left to us. "We don't need to be involved as much because it's their family...they've learnt to cope with them in the past," (Quote from DoCS caseworker). It is true the family has had to cope in the past, but not as the full time carers of the children.

Even when DoCS caseworkers recognize the support needs of kinship carers, the organizational resources are lacking for them to play a supportive role. Kinship care is increasingly used BUT the economic and social resources to support such care have not developed alongside.

I had my grandson for almost 1 year before I found any support. He was just three years old. The shared counselling group I was fortunate enough to be part of helped me through some very difficult times.



The journey has been a very difficult one. I have met many amazing people along the way. I have the other grandparents to thank for their loving support. I have learnt many things. There has been lots of sadness. Lots of happiness too. My grandson brings me much joy. We have shared an incredible journey together.

Out of my experiences I am fired by a passion to make a difference, especially when I hear other people's stories often more difficult than my own. Grandparent carers face many issues and dilemmas, such as whether they continue working to support the children or stop work and go on benefits to care for children, which is almost impossible to manage financially without further assistance. Some kinship carers receive an allowance others do not. Research shows that Grandparent carers have higher rates of social isolation. They have more psychological and physical health stresses and are more likely to be depressed.

Without the support of the shared counselling support group that was started by the PANOC team (Physical Abuse and Neglect of Children) at the Wentworth Area Health Service, life would have been very difficult to make sense of. In my experience of connection with the support group and instigating a support group in the Blue Mountains. I have learned many things.

The support group is very empowering. It is true that each of us holds our own best answers within ourselves, but sometimes we need a safe environment in which to talk through our situation and so discover what those answers might be. People come to support groups for different reasons. To share their stories, to find companionship with people who have similar experience, to learn from one and another, to give support. Some important observations I have made are the strength and courage the members displayed and how there was the drawing of hope from each other in terms of moving forward, staying together and carrying out a vision of trying to help make kinship care a more recognized and supported form of care. The awareness of hope has been very important for our members, the awareness of the things that draw us into hopelessness and the support that we need to give each other to hang on to Hope. There is always hope things do improve – it is important not to take away another's Hope.

With strength and courage from each other some of us are advocating for positive changes to assist us all in the amazing job we do for our grandchildren.

To date we have achieved many things for example fruitful meetings with both State and Federal politicians who have been empathetic to our cause. Positive changes are happening and we have faith that more support will happen be it ever so slowly. We have established a working party in our area with non-government agencies to raise awareness and establish what assistance is available. We are very pleased to report that we have been successful in receiving funding which allows us to have a worker for 30 hours per week for 3 years to establish more support groups and to assist moving things forward in our three local government areas being the Hawkesbury, Penrith and Blue Mountains. We also have a worker for 10 hours per week for special projects. In May 2005 we held a very successful forum 'Giving Grandparents a Voice' in Penrith with the assistance of COTA NSW (Council on the Ageing). We have done numerous radio and TV interviews, article for local newspapers, professional journals and magazines.

I would encourage kinship carers in the ACT to be active and lobby for a better deal. The more people we have talking to Government the better. Currently there are no respite services available for kinship carers in either government or non-government agencies. Recently as a result of lobbying from Grandparents throughout Australia, the Federal Government granted childcare benefits for grandparents who use child care services.

Kinship care is now considered the best option - it retains ties with the extended family reducing stress for children dislocated from their parents' care, being placed with people familiar to them, rather than strangers. It is a less expensive option for the Government than other forms of 'out of home care.'

There is a lot of joy in what we do. With help and understanding our lives and our grandchildren's lives have the potential to be joyful and happy.

*Anonymous*

