

The other day I ran into a friend whom I hadn't seen for a few years. As we chatted, she informed me that she and her husband, both in their 60's, were now raising their grandchildren. She talked about how much they loved the kids, two boys age 9 and 12, but she also shared what a profound impact this was having on their lives. Ideas about retirement have been set aside due to the added financial demands of raising two growing children. The daily schedule now includes more cooking, cleaning and laundry as well as school events, recreation and playtime with friends. As we all know, parenting is a full time job. Those of us who are enjoying the quiet of the "empty nest" can attest that we need our rest after years of dedicated service. Imagine starting over again, this time in a different world with less jump in your step. It is a daunting thought to say the least.

Grandparents raising grandchildren is a growing phenomenon. In BC approximately 10,000 families have grandparents as the primary caregivers for their grandchildren. Over 50% of these grandkids are being raised by grandmothers who are single, many of whom are living below the poverty line. It is quite possible that this contributes to the fact that BC has had the highest rate of child poverty in Canada six years running. There is no financial support given to grandparents by the government so the additional cost of raising a child is born solely by the grandparents who choose to keep their grandchildren out of the foster care system. In the vast majority of cases absentee parents are not able to provide child support.

There are legal issues for grandparents that can be confusing and at times overwhelming. Custody is not automatic because you are the grandparent. Often the court is involved and sometimes the Ministry of Children and Family Development has a role. Parent Support Services of BC, in partnership with the University of Victoria, has prepared a booklet entitled "Grandparents Raising Grandchildren: A Legal Guide". It can be downloaded for free through their website. www.parentsupport.bc.ca

If you are a grandparent raising your grandchild you are not alone. There are many effective parenting resources, some specifically for grandparents. Find the right support resources for you by contacting a community agency like the Family Resources Association, SOS or the Public Health Clinic. Support is essential. Stay in touch with your friends and extended family. Talk to professionals by accessing free community based services. You might want to start your own grandparent support group and there is help available to do that as well.

As we all know, grandparents are the salt of the earth. Those of you who are doing it full time are the best of the best.

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