



## **REPORT OF THE GRANDCHILDREN'S PROJECT**

**DECEMBER 2018**

# **THE GRANDCHILDREN'S PROJECT**

## **Introduction**

The Grandchildren's Project was first considered by VOYC (Voluntary Organisations for Young People and Children) in 2015. The aim of the project at that time was to consider the potential of grandparents as educators of their grandchildren. It was hoped that this, in turn, would help children's organisations and schools to develop this potential to the full. It was intended that the impact on grandparents would lead them into becoming more effective as educators and also more appreciative of what they could learn from their grandchildren!

It was felt that many grandparents were unaware of their role as educators. The project would illustrate this fact to them, underscore their value to their grandchildren on so many levels, and lead to a deeper appreciation of the unique role that they play.

VOYC is an umbrella organisation which provides the voice for the voluntary children and young people's sector across Devon. It has 280 member organisations ranging from the Boys Brigade to Young Farmers Clubs, which provide a service to over 20,000 children and young people.

Because VOYC is a registered charity it did not have a dedicated budget for the development of The Grandchildren's Project. It therefore decided to seek funding from external sources. It applied to the following funding organisations for financial support:

- The Santander Foundation
- The Devon Educational Trust
- The Norman Families Charitable Trust.

Two of the applications were unsuccessful but fortunately in November 2017 The Devon Educational Trust awarded £750 to support the development of the project. VOYC is very grateful to the Trust for providing this award.

Due to the lack of financial help from the other two funding organisations, it was recognised that the scope of the project could not be as wide as was originally intended. However, VOYC still believes that the project is innovative, and with changing family patterns, increased life expectancy, growing numbers of dual-worker households and higher rates of family breakdown; grandparents are now playing an ever increasing role in their grandchildren's lives.

In the light of the reduced budget it was decided that the specific purpose of the project would be to raise awareness of how grandchildren's education can benefit from the involvement of their grandparents.

### Methods

- 1 The completion of a literature search to identify best practice examples.
- 2 The use of a semi-structured interview for interviews with:
  - a) A member of the Executive Committee of VOYC who is also a grandparent.
  - b) The Chair of Kennford Primary School's Parents' Association
- 3 These procedures would then be analysed and considered for inclusion in the main findings of the project.

### The Literature Search

The Grandparent's Association is the national charity which can give grandparents and their families help and advice. It has a helpline for those seeking expert advice, and the telephone number is 0845 4349585. The general office is based in London (telephone number 01279 428040). The Association's website is :

<https://www.grandparentsplus.org.uk/> . The Association works with the government and local authorities. It also campaigns with key charities to raise awareness of the needs of grandparents and grandchildren. The VOYC 'Grandchildren's Project' found the Grandparents' Association to be an excellent source of information.

For example, The Grandparents' Association gave details about the 'Family and Early Year's Analysis and Records Team' at the Department for Education. The most important details related to the review of research evidence on grandparents providing childcare. Key points in this research document which are relevant to the Grandchildren's Project are as follows:

- Grandparents were the main child care arrangements for 35% of families where the mother was working or studying, ahead of all other types of care.
- Grandparents continue to have a significant role in child care arrangements when children start school, particularly during holiday periods.
- There is evidence that children receiving informal childcare (primarily grandparents) in their first few years of life have better vocabularies than others.

The literature search also identified a best practice example of a school's project which involved grandparents. This example was called 'The Taunton Market Project' and it is described in the next few paragraphs.

In the academic year 2004/5 primary schools across the whole of Taunton in Somerset, decided they would develop a project which would focus on 'enriching the curriculum through history, and in particular within their local historic environment'. Taunton livestock market had been located in the centre of Taunton for over 1,000 years but the decision had been taken to relocate it outside of the town, much to the concern of many residents. The project involved Somerset Heritage Services and local schools working in partnership to create a record of the market, its buildings, users, tradition and history before it left the town.

The Taunton Market Project proved to be a very good example of the ways in which pupils' achievement could be raised through the involvement of parents and grandparents. Of particular interest was the involvement of grandparents in a theme, based upon oral history.

### The Interviews

The interviews in The Grandchildren's Project were based on three stages of learning which grandchildren can experience as their education develops over time. These stages are as follows:

- 1 Informal opportunities for learning.
- 2 Learning opportunities which are not necessarily school based, but are more structured than stage one.
- 3 School based learning.

### Interview with a member of the VOYC Executive Committee who is also a grandparent.

The interviewee was asked to give examples of informal learning opportunities that he or his wife had been involved in with their grandchildren. Also, what help did he think he might need to be more effective?

Examples of informal learning opportunities could include:

- In the home? eg, cooking or games.
- In the garden? Do they have their own patch?
- Involvement with songs and rhymes?
- Involvement with favourite books?
- Involvement with activities further afield?

He responded by confirming that he and his wife had been involved in all these examples. He felt that it was important to learn about the individual interests of each grandchild and build upon these interests (he has eight grandchildren and 'another on the way'). For example, whilst most of his grandchildren were fascinated by animals one of them was also

particularly interested in myths and legends. In addition to sharing grandchildren's enthusiasms it is also natural for grandparents to teach the particular skills which they themselves possess. For example, he said that he had great interest in sport and cited the fact that he helped his grandchildren to learn how to swim. He added that learning was not only about activities, but that social education was equally important.

With regard to activities further afield, he felt that Devon has a wealth of attractions and places to visit which are of particular interest to children. For example, there is the Donkey Sanctuary in Sidmouth and the Haldon Forest Park near Kennford. We discussed how purpose built outdoor and indoor play facilities could help children to overcome their fears and build up confidence. He was particularly interested in inter-generational outcomes. They show that learning is a two-way process, where grandparents can also learn from their grandchildren. For example, grandchildren are often more adept with information technology than some grandparents are!

The interview then moved on to discussions about learning opportunities which are not necessarily school based, but are more structured than Stage One. The discussion focused on an event organised by the National Trust. Killerton House is a National Trust property near Broadclyst in Devon. Every Christmas, Killerton House is transformed with pages from a classic story. In 2017 the story chosen was 'The Wind in the Willows'. The Trust provided a journey through Killerton House which had scenes from this much loved tale of camaraderie. Outside, the journey continued the adventure with an activity trail under sparkling lights. Children were given a story and activity book comprising: a summary of Wind in the Willows, a Word search puzzle, a picture for colouring and a map of the outdoor trail. Whilst this learning example is a bit more formalised than stage one, the emphasis is upon children having fun and there is no doubt that this is exactly what children are experiencing.

The interviewee felt that this was a very good example for learning in which grandparents were often involved. Clearly he is doing a wonderful job in helping his grandchildren in their learning, and is open to advice on how he can be even more effective.

#### Interview with the Chair of Kennford Primary School's Parent Association

It had been hoped that if the initial funding strategy for The Grandchildren's Project had been fully successful, that the funds secured could have supported the development of a case study. Having reflected on the Taunton Market Project it was proposed that a Devon case study based upon oral history, should be identified for The Grandchildren Project. So, a case study was identified and though sadly it could not be funded it was decided that the interviewee should be asked to comment on its suitability as a case study for a primary school.

The case study was to have been based on the history surrounding the Royal Clarence Hotel in Exeter which tragically burned down in 2016. Children could learn from this local history project and grandparents could contribute their personal recollections through oral history. The children would also learn about plans to re-build the hotel. Having made a start with history, the case study could then broaden out to cover most aspects of the curriculum.

The interviewee thought that the case study would have been an excellent example of how grandparents could contribute to children's learning within a school based setting. Schools would of course have to raise the funds for such a project but could also seek help from local heritage services and organisations such as the Royal Albert Memorial Museum (RAMM).

She also said that there definitely was a need to raise awareness of the extent to which grandparents are involved in the education of their grandchildren. Parental involvement is well recognised, but the time has now come to acknowledge the role of the grandparents as well. She thought The Grandchildren's Project would be helpful in bringing about this greater awareness and she would consider the possibilities of grandparent representation on the School's Parent Association. She was very supportive of the work that VOYC had commissioned for the project and wished us well in our future developments.

### Main findings

It is clear that there is a need to raise awareness of how grandchildren's education can benefit from the involvement of their grandparents as well as their parents:

- There is clear evidence that children receiving informal childcare from grandparents, In the child's first few years of life, have better vocabularies than others.
- Furthermore, grandparents continue to have a significant role in childcare arrangements when children go to school.
- Grandparents who want help and advice can get this by using The Grandparents' Association' helpline (0845 4349585).
- The two case studies mentioned in the report are examples of the way in which schools can be helped to improve the quality and delivery of education through parental and grandparent involvement. Oral history is often the key to grandparent involvement.
- Parent-Teachers Associations might want to consider including representation from grandparents in the local community.

Grandparents who want to add to the general support they give to their grandchildren's education, might find the following tips helpful:

- Make a record of your grandchild's development and think how you will want to store the memories you will gather.
- Be interested in their school reports.

- Reward them for effort as well as success.
- Teach them some skills you possess.
- Share in their enthusiasm too.
- Take advantage of activities which are fun, but also provide a structure with books and other materials for learning (see the example given of the event at Killerton House).

### Conclusion

The specific purpose of this project is to raise awareness of how grandchildren's education can benefit from the involvement of their grandparents.

Many thanks are due to everyone who has contributed to the production of this report. They are all, in their own way, helping us to achieve the purpose of the project. It is recommended that the next step should be to place a summary of this report on the VOYC website. This will acknowledge that the report has relevance to many of our member organisations, as well as to schools.

Finally, the educational philosophy upon which this project has been based is summed up in the following quote:

*"A child's mind is not a vessel to be filled, but a fire to be kindled".*