

## NEWS

# Grandparents fight to seize kids from ice addict parents



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SAVING OUR KIDS: Grandparents are stepping in to get children away from their ice addict parents.

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A WOMAN who has won an exhausting battle to wrest control of her grandchildren from her drug addled off-spring says the size of the problem on the Sunshine Coast is horrifying.

The woman, who can't be identified to protect those children, said existing laws had to change to effectively deal with the impact drug-affected parents have on their offspring.

She says the needs of grandparents who have stepped into the breach to protect at-risk kids had to be give priority.

Hers is a story she says is being repeated across the region and Australia. On the Sunshine Coast it is so large it has not been difficult through word of mouth for her to begin to establish a support network among grandparents.

The grandmother said everyone seemed to know someone grappling with the support of grand children who need to be removed from at-risk homes.

"There are simple solutions that don't cost a lot of money," she said.

"Grandparents who step in save the government a lot of money."

What is needed quickly, she said, is recognition of the extent of the issue and the creation of linked support services rather than ad hoc approach now in place.

The grandmother said at present there was no centre point to which grandparents could go to organise a network of support.

"There is a need to catch up with the times and problems that have developed since crack first appeared and what is now the ice epidemic," she said.

"Some need help, other families need parents out of the way.

"I had one government official tell me 'the children's health and wellbeing were none of my business, we are dealing with the parents'.

"At the time I was part-time caring the kids. Everything was frustrating. There was compassion but no assistance with the next step. Some would stand their ground for me but would hit a brick wall.

"It shouldn't be like that. It should be sufficient to say 'I'm a grandmother, this is my situation, who can I go to for help'.

"Everyone needs to be on board. In the end we are helping the children."

She said in many situations the only way grandparents could keep an eye on the kids was by letting their violent and drug and alcohol abusing parents under their roof.

"When they do that Children Services don't help because they are under a roof and grandma is there," the woman said.

"Centrelink funding still goes to the mother and is not spent on the children. Grandma who may be on an aged pension goes without everything for them.

"There's no one to pull you out of that."

The woman and her husband have won custody of their grandchildren after she found the support of the Suncoast Community Legal Service.

It's been a long and frustrating journey to this point and came after realising they could never afford to fund legal representation themselves.

"I know people who have given up their homes and professions to fight for the safety of their grandchildren," she said.

"By the time Centrelink (for the children) cuts out at 16 they are too old to go back to work."

The woman said as a parent the first reaction to concerns about their offspring's behaviour was denial.

"People tell you things are happening and you say 'no, that wouldn't happen, they wouldn't do that'.

"In your presence they do everything to hide the problem. As it escalates and becomes evident in the children you try to seek help.

"I had every emotion you think of. You grieve for your child and try to fix them. Then you learn you can't, they have to make that decision."

She said taking on the care of young children at her age was a job and responsibility.

"That's just the way it is. Of course it affects my life, but we have a changed life that's adapted to meet the child's needs."

The woman is grateful to have been able to build a great support network.

She intends to try and show others in her situation how to do it.

"I must say though we spent long periods of time living in fear as visits could escalate into fuelled drug rages and violence from both parents and there was no support through child safety to have the children court ordered or the support of a DVO," the grandmother said.

"Over this period I tried to seek help from various community groups and even Legal Aid.

"However they even turned me away. I appealed Legal Aid and this took a further six months to be told I did not pass their three-point criteria and why didn't I just go straight to the courts myself and apply as I would win.

"Maybe legal aid should have a group that prioritises grandparents with the rise of drugs and alcohol and violence.

"I was scared and horrified and did not know where to turn, whilst the court portal may have the information you feel like you still need a degree to survive.

"Let me say I do not personally blame the child safety or legal aid employees as were very compassionate it's just the red tape and the laws that need to be changed.

"I asked many organisations for help to fill in these papers and they either had no time or they didn't know themselves. The forms are daunting and I was a nervous wreck from trying to protect the children and filling in forms with no room for legal mistakes.

"I was out there with no help and I can tell you I am not alone. There are so many other grandparents in the same situation.

"Why are grandparents taking second mortgages and subjected to their own violent adult children living in their homes just to protect their grandchildren.

"I can tell you spending years of hiding in your home to protect the children from sudden visits from raging drugged parents whom were threatening to retrieve the children is no joy.

"Then one day my life changed, I went along to hear a discussion about elder abuse and grandparent rights. I listened to this lawyer Kirsty Mackie from Suncoast Community Legal Centre and knew right there she had the experience to help me.

"Kirsty was so compassionate to my story that she took it internally to her legal team at Suncoast Community and these beautiful people took my case.

"Countless emails, phones calls and appointments over months of developing affidavits and gathering hundreds of pages of evidence, never once did they make me feel I couldn't do this. "Suncoast Community Legal Centre not only supported me with documentation they taught me how to represent myself in court, how to speak and what to do next.

"The day we won I notified them but I do not know if they realise how much they have done."



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