

Many grandparents are struggling to raise grandchildren with special needs



United Way
Central and Northern
Vancouver Island

Grandmother and Granddaughter Supported through Rough and Rocky Journey by Program Funded by United Way Donors

When Jenna was 2.5 years old, she began to exhibit behaviours typical of in utero exposure to drugs and alcohol. Once she started school, Jenna and her grandmother struggled through “two years of hell” until the young girl could be properly diagnosed.

Jenna and her grandmother struggled through “two years of hell” during a lengthy diagnosis process.

Ruth never imagined that at 67 years old she would be single and raising a grandchild, let alone a child who might have Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FASD) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

During the lengthy process of diagnosis, Ruth and her granddaughter struggled through each day. Jenna attended school for just a little over two hours a day, much of it spent in the principal’s office.

Jenna rarely went on field trips because the bus was too noisy and chaotic. She was often kicked out of music class; she hardly performed in school concerts despite a marked musical aptitude and sweet singing voice.

Things were no better at home where FASD’s main symptoms of lying, stealing and bolting meant living with locks on doors and watching Jenna every minute. Ruth could not even shower unless Jenna was sleeping or at school.

Throughout these trials, Ruth’s lifeline was a United Way-funded program for grandparents raising grandchildren. The group allowed Ruth to spend time with other grandparents who “got it” and who shared suggestions on how to cope. The social events allowed both Ruth and Jenna to be a “normal” family among peers.



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Finally, at seven years old, Jenna’s diagnosis was confirmed and treatments began. Within the first weeks, Jenna was able to sit still and listen at school. One year later, Jenna is at school full-time, going on field trips, excelling in music, and performing a main role in her school’s musical.

The journey has been rough and rocky but, if she had to, Ruth would do the same thing all over again for her granddaughter.

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