

## **Transcript: Services Australia Podcast – Grandparent Advisers**

### **Cindy:**

There are so many ways Services Australia helps people during some of the most difficult times in their lives. One that we're particularly proud of is our team of Grandparent Advisers who work tirelessly to help a special group of vulnerable Australians.

Hi, I'm Cindy from Services Australia. Today I'm talking with Polly, who's one of our Grandparent Advisers celebrating 10 years of the Grandparent Adviser service.

Hi Polly, thanks for joining us.

### **Polly:**

Hi Cindy, thanks for inviting me along to discuss my fantastic role of Grandparent Adviser, Queensland.

### **Cindy:**

So Polly, how do Grandparent Advisers work?

### **Polly:**

So we have our grandparents and non-parent carers. They're a very special group of Australians who perform an important caring role. Sometimes grandparents and foster carers/ kinship carers, take on full time care of children when the parents are unable to care for them.

This is obviously an overwhelming and challenging time as they may not have had to deal with Centrelink for many years.

My role is to provide extra support by providing tailored information about our payments and support services based on the individual family circumstances.

This includes arranging appointments with other specialist staff. As in financial advisors, social workers, Indigenous Service Officers or Multicultural Service Officers, which will also support the customers throughout their journey with Centrelink.

I also encourage all of our customers to use our online services, and I link them also to other local support groups in their local area.

### **Cindy:**

Polly, 2020 has been a pretty tough year on most Australians. Has that seen an increase in the need for Grandparent Adviser services?

**Polly:**

Definitely, yes.

Within probably the first four weeks of COVID-19 affecting us all in March, it was very sort of quiet and then all of a sudden our telephone lines were just ringing off the hook.

So, yes, I've seen a definite increase in customer contacts, mainly in grandparents taking care of the grandchildren.

**Cindy:**

How do grandparents and non-parent carers react to a service like this?

**Polly:**

Well, when they contact the Grandparent Adviser, a lot of them will learn about the position when they go into a face to face office.

So their grandchildren come into their care, the first thing they do is they'll go into a service centre.

They're very gracious about the service as we don't just do Centrelink, we don't just do the payments and get them on payments and let them go.

It's more of a personalised sort of area where we'll discuss their payments, we'll let them discuss what's going on in the family so we know where we can refer these customers to. We also can cover child support and we also cover Medicare.

So it's really a one stop area that they can call and get any sort of advice.

**Cindy:**

Polly, this is a really important job that you're performing. What is it that you love about your role?

**Polly:**

Well, I first commenced with the agency in 1990 and I was trained in the family payments section.

I specialised in change of custody of children and I learnt the complexity of these cases and families which did not have a lot of support back then.

It's always been an area of interest for me, and I love helping these vulnerable customers.

And the most rewarding aspect is helping customers end to end.

So I get to see them right from the start when they make that first contact with me right up until the end, when all their payments and their supports are put into place.

Last year I went to a carers forum in Brisbane and I was a guest speaker and a lady stood up in the audience and said, "You may not remember me, but you helped me 18 years ago when my three nephews entered my care". So when the grandparent role did come about 10 years ago, I've always been very interested in that role. It is a great position and it's a very helpful position for very vulnerable customers.

**Cindy:**

Polly, that's a lovely story.

If there are people out there who want more information or want to speak to a Grandparent Adviser, how do they make contact?

**Polly:**

Most customers go straight into a service centre to get information.

So my goal has been to make sure all our service centre staff and processing staff are aware of my role and how I can help our customers and how they can refer customers to me. Staff advise customers of the contact number, which is 1800 245 965 and if the customer presents in a service centre, they'll also give them the Grandparent Adviser factsheet.

There is a Grandparent Adviser in each state and territory which I advise that we check in daily with each other for advice and support and also to share the national workload.

Customers actually don't need to be in receipt of a Centrelink payment to access the Grandparent Adviser assistance either.

So this could just be for referrals to outside agencies or information about eligibility or maybe even accessing the myGov website.

**Cindy:**

Thanks very much Polly, and congratulations on helping to provide 10 years of a great service.

Our Grandparent Advisers are here to help.

You can call them on 1800 245 965 or visit [servicesaustralia.gov.au/grandparentadvisers](https://servicesaustralia.gov.au/grandparentadvisers) for more information.