



# Granny nannies

Retirement isn't a time to put your feet up! **Andréa Childs** meets the older women making a new career in the childcare world

**G**randparents are first choice for parents looking for help with childcare. According to a report from Grandparents Plus, 63% of grandparents with grandchildren under 16 provide childcare. It's not just that they're volunteering their services free of charge (though that helps!). It's also that parents appreciate the experience that an older generation can bring to looking after little ones.

It's this older-and-wiser attitude that is fuelling a new trend in childcare: granny nannies. Agencies in the UK and Europe are increasingly looking for mature women to work as nannies and au pairs. For busy working families, it's a way to avoid the pitfalls of employing a younger person (homesickness, boyfriend problems, limited cooking skills). For the granny nanny, it's a low-cost way to see the world, gain new experiences and feel fulfilled.

## ABROAD...

'I've never visited the UK, so I came here to explore the country and meet the people,' says Hilde Floquet, 68, from Berlin. Hilde signed up with German agency Granny Aupair at the beginning of the year and this is her first position – a three-month posting with a family in London with a six-month-old son. 'My husband died a few years ago and my son, who is 34, hasn't given me any grandchildren yet,' she laughs. 'This seemed a way of stepping out of my life for a while and doing something new while I'm still fit and active. I worked as a teacher for 20 years and as a hearing specialist for another 22 years. After retirement, I volunteered with the Red Cross, looking after premature babies, so I had lots of experience to offer.'

Hilde's host family paid her travel costs, but she doesn't receive wages. Instead, she lives rent-free with the family and has agreed time off. 'I enjoy exploring London. I've been



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to the Tate, the Barbican and the London Symphony Orchestra, and I'm planning excursions to Brighton, Cambridge and Windsor Castle.'

It's easy to feel isolated in a foreign country, but Hilde has made friends with another German au pair at an English language class, which has helped. 'Since my husband died, the support of my friends is very important to me. For that reason, I decided to take a three-month placement, rather than six months. I took out a flat-rate phone deal, so we speak a lot, and I'm touched that my friends have missed me and are looking forward to me coming home. Some of them have said I'm brave to do this, but, to me, it's a brilliant opportunity. I've never been to America, so I'm thinking of taking a placement there next year.'

## AND AT HOME...

You don't have to leave the country to enjoy a job as a granny nanny. Angela O'Donnell, 61, from Glasgow, joined nanny agency Tinies ([www.tinies.com](http://www.tinies.com)) in April 2014. She and her husband don't have children of their own.

'But I worked with the NHS for 40 years, as a midwife, paediatric nurse and, finally, a health visitor, so I've worked with children my whole life,' she says. 'I retired in 2011, but I missed working. Then I saw an advert for Tinies.'

As an agency nanny, rather than an au pair, Angela enjoys a regular salary. Her first post was looking after two children, aged four and 12, while their mother was at work two nights a week.

'My hours were from 8.30pm until 8.30am, so I helped with bedtime and stories, and then got the girls ready for school and nursery in the morning,' she says. 'I'm now working three days a week



Below: Move over Mary Poppins – there's a new nanny in town

## GRANDPARENTS BY NUMBERS

- \* The unpaid work grandparents do to help out their own children and grandchildren adds up to more than £6,000 a year, according to a survey by retirement-home builder McCarthy & Stone. The top jobs parents ask grandparents to do include childcare, DIY and decorating, housework, gardening and cooking, and paying for equivalent help would cost parents around £120 per week.
- \* According to Grandparents Plus ([www.grandparentsplus.org.uk](http://www.grandparentsplus.org.uk)), 1.9 million grandparents have given up

- a job, reduced their hours or taken time off work to look after their grandchildren.
- \* Grandparents Plus research also shows that a 10% reduction in grandparents providing childcare would cost UK parents an extra £730 million in childcare each year.
- \* And grandparents have loosened the purse strings, too – 12% have spent more than £1,000 a year on their grandchildren, and 17% have spent between £500 and £1,000. There are 13.6 million grandparents in the UK, so that adds up to £8 billion annually.



with a new family, with children aged three years and 18 months. I love working with children again because they're so open and it's a joy to watch their development. I work part-time, so I don't feel tired, and I get to spend the rest of the week with my husband.'

Asked why she thinks the families have chosen her over younger nannies, Angela says her work background is obviously a bonus. 'But you don't need to have worked professionally with children to do this job.

If you're used to being with grandchildren, you could pick a family with children of a similar age so you feel comfortable. You will need a background check [an Enhanced Nanny DBS Check], and a first-aid qualification is useful. Look around for part-time hours; there are lots of families that need flexible help.'

Look out, Mary Poppins, it seems the latest must-have for busy families is a granny nanny.

## GRANNY TO GO

Thinking about becoming a 'granny nanny' abroad? Here are some points to consider...

- \* Visa restrictions vary from country to country. An agency will be able to advise you.

- \* Agencies generally require granny nannies to be single, active, flexible and committed.
- \* Granny Aupair has openings in Germany for British grannies. See [www.granny-aupair.com](http://www.granny-aupair.com)
- \* Nannies receive a wage and expenses and the role is

covered by legal guidelines. Au pairs do not receive wages, but may agree travel and accommodation costs, and certain living expenses with the host family. Hilde advises that hours and expenses are specified in a contract.

- \* An agency will charge a placement fee of €200-€300.
- \* As a nanny, duties are usually restricted to childcare and tasks relating to the children. Au pairs may also be asked to help with housework and shopping.