

You may think of child-carers as being young things in their teens and 20s. But, increasingly, a generation of “granny nannies” is bringing experience into the childminding arena.

JENNIFER SCOTT finds out more.



Flexible Childcare in Your Home

Actually, there's someone quite like Grandma...



TEAM KIT: Margaret and Gabriel play – and she's learned about the Terminator C11060AJL4-1

IN THE first, shocked months after the death of his wife, Helen, from cancer, Dave Miles tried to think rationally about childcare. His nearest relative lived 50 miles away and Dave's busy job as a project manager in adult social care meant he wasn't going to be around to attend to his son Gabriel, then just ten, when he came home from school. Enter Margaret – a newly-retired teacher who, at 65, had bags of experience of dealing with children, not least her own four children and ten grandchildren.

Dave tracked Margaret down through **@HomeChildcare**, a flexible childminding business, which was set up by Yvette Oliver-Mighten in 2005 so that children can be cared for by one of her team in their own homes.

Although Dave hadn't specifically requested a child-carer of Margaret's age, she has turned out to be the ideal minder for Gabriel. "It's worked out perfectly," says Dave. "Gabriel has mild Asperger's syndrome which affects his social skills and

makes him a bit shy. But Margaret's experience of working with children means she can suggest ideas for helping him with that. She suggested they play a board game every week, like backgammon, and sits and chats to him about his computer games."

Margaret has been with the family for two years now. She comes in for three hours a night, twice a week, on the days Gabriel doesn't go to after-school club. During the first year, when Gabriel was still at primary school, she would meet him at the school gates and walk him home. Once there, she would watch him play computer games or he would introduce her to his favourite television shows, *The Simpsons* and *The X-Files*. "He's been telling me all about *The Terminator*," she says. "It's probably not the sort of thing I would have considered watching before but I really think I might now."

After that, she heated up one of the dinners Dave had prepared earlier for Gabriel. All Dave had to do when he returned home

at 6.30pm was collapse in front of the television. Their routine has continued along similar lines, albeit with Margaret now meeting Gabriel at the Miles' house in Sherwood.

"It's not just a job to Margaret," says Dave. "Because of her background as a teacher, she takes a close interest in Gabriel's schooling and how he does in his exams. Two years ago, she even made time to go and see him in his school play."

Touchingly, Margaret says she'd be keen to stay in touch with Gabriel even when he doesn't need minding any more.

Yvette Oliver-Mighten has welcomed older child-carers like Margaret on board – and the over-50s now make up one fifth of her workforce.

She said: "There is a growing trend for the 50-plus generation to provide childcare for their family and this seems the next natural step. They already have extensive parenting skills and qualities such as patience. They also tend to have flexibility – particularly those who have retired. "Older carers provide a 'grandparent' role model which is important – especially if children may not see their own blood grandparents very often."

Yvette is already casting a wider net among the 50-pluses – and is hoping to attract more 'granddad' child-carers too.

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