



HANDS FULL: Teresa and Roger van Kuylenburg with seven of the grandchildren they raise (left to right) Takawai, 11, Cairo, 3, Faith, 18 months, Teresa, 7, Mathias, 2, Phoenix, 6, and Patrick, 11 during their day out at the Grandparents Raising Grandchildren day yesterday.

PICTURE / BRETT PHIBBS

Grandparents find secret of youth

Looking after a whole tribe of grandchildren keeps you on your toes, says one couple

by Yvonne Tahana

When you've got eight grandchildren to raise it's the clockwork that matters, Roger van Kuylenburg jokes.

He and his wife, Teresa, were at the Grandparents Raising Grandchildren fun day, their tribe of mokopuna in tow, at Chelsea Primary School yesterday.

The pair are thought to be raising one of the biggest number of grandchildren in the country. (Astonishingly, according to the support group, there is a grandmother raising 15 grandchildren.)

With children aged from 18 months to 11, keeping a schedule was one of the things that kept the pair from "pulling their hair out", Mr van Kuylenburg

said. "We've got a good routine — there's the 6.30 bedtime for the babies, 7.30 for the two older girls and 8.30 time for the boys.

But sticking to timetables at other times wasn't always so easy, especially with four aged under 4, the 65-year-old said.

"Things can get tricky in the morning with nappies to be changed."

The children are Faith Herbert, 18 months, Mathias Haimona, 2, Cairo Herbert, 3, Manaia Haimona, 3, Phoenix Herbert 6, Teresa Dixon, 7, Patrick Herbert and Takawai Herbert, 11.

From dysfunctional families the van Kuylenburg clan started growing two years ago when six of the children came to live in Auckland.

Last January, the last two children completed the mix.

Raising such a big family at this time of their lives wasn't something either of the pair, who had both been married before, expected.

Mr van Kuylenburg said that after selling a computer business in Whakatahe he was looking forward to retirement. However, the grandchildren kept him young, he said.

"They're ours now. We love them and we are their parents."

Mrs van Kuylenburg, 58, said if the children, including one autistic grandchild, didn't live with her the other option was for them to go into care with Child Youth and Family.

"We didn't want that to happen. Anyway they keep me fit. You're for-

ever chasing them, saying 'get off that, get of this'."

She said it was a sign of the times that grandparents were increasingly becoming a stop-gap measure in society. "In our day we never thought of relying on our parents to raise our children."

Grandparents Raising Grandchildren national convener Di Vivian said that, as well as showing kids a good time, the day was about making grandparents feel appreciated for the job they did and getting them to make connections with other families.

The association started 10 years ago and has grown to 44 groups with 3600 members. About 170 were entertained with a rock and roll band, clowns, fairies and lolly scrambles.

PICTURE / RICHARD ROBINSON