

# Prize for granny with the big heart

LISA MAYOH

"I NEVER really liked kids," 58-year-old Denise Duroux joked.

But when her daughter could no longer take care of her children she stepped up and did what had to be done, quitting her job and welcoming four of her eight grandchildren into her home to raise as her own. That was nine years ago, when they were just babies ranging from 18 months to six years. They are now aged between 11 and 15 and life is busy — but it's good.

So good that Ms Duroux has today been named NSW Grandparent Carer of the Year in the state's Grandparent Awards, fittingly announced on Grandparents Day.

Ms Duroux said the flight from Ballina to Sydney to accept the honour was the kids' first plane trip — and they hadn't watched their favourite show, *Air Crash Investigations*, since booking the tickets.

"They were all a bit nervous about flying," she laughed.

"It's been an unbelievable nine years. That's what needed to be done so I did it. There was no way those kids were going to go into the state system. They are good kids.

"Any challenging moments are overshadowed by their achievements. They excel at sports and when they put their minds to it they are good at school."

In NSW alone there are 15,000 children officially living in the permanent care of their

grandparents.

Grand Friend of the Year went to Raelene Bernhardt, who has been a nurse and cardiac technician at the Children's Hospital for 45 years. She remembers every name and face and treats each child and parent like family.

"I was blown away. I didn't think I was important enough for an award like this," she said.



Denise Duroux.