

January 2017

Bridging the Generations

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United Way of
Northwest Vermont

Hope for the Future

By Beth Glaspie

Theresa Hope was so eager to get started in the Foster Grandparent Program that when she signed on in May of 2012 and was given the option to begin then or wait until September, she chose the former. “I didn’t want to wait!” says the enthusiastic 80-year-old.

“I know in my heart I was meant to do this,” admits Theresa. When she first showed up to the class that spring, “It was as if I’d already been there,” she recalls. “The kids welcomed me with open hands, even though they’d just met me.”

She spends her days in Tony Lewis’ kindergarten classroom at the St. Albans City School. The minimum requirement asked of a Foster Grandparent is 15 hours per week. Since the beginning, Theresa has given more—she’s there for a full day of school every day but Friday, when she leaves at 1:00 p.m. “I don’t want those hours off; I want to be there,” she explains.

Day after day, she reaches into seemingly bottomless pockets and pulls out the bits of maternal love and fun she keeps stored in there to share with the children. “I love them like they’re my own,” she says of the kindergartners. “This is the family I don’t take home with me.”

Tony shared that “the classroom experience is enhanced by Mrs. Hope’s attention to the students and her love of children [that] shines



Theresa Hope helps a student at St. Albans City School with math.

through,” adding that she teaches them by example “how to be patient and tolerant of others. She offers her heart to the students and they appreciate her presence.”

You might say that Theresa earned a degree in early childhood education from the College of Life. The eldest of five children, she began babysitting by age 12 and ultimately raised five kids of her own. Ten grand- and 17 great-grandchildren later, it would seem that a youngster is always within hugging distance of this energetic senior.

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She draws on her vast experience when working with the students. “Mrs. Hope wants to know what the students have to say. She listens and teaches them with the care of a family member,” notes Tony.

Grandma, as Theresa is known in school, also brings a historical perspective to the classroom, relaying stories and answering questions about her childhood, during which radio was her television and she played “old-time” games such as Red Rover and hopscotch and marbles, all of which she teaches to the kids.

“She teaches them by example how to be patient and tolerant of others. She offers her heart to the students and they appreciate her presence.”

– Tony Lewis, teacher

During free time, a student typically will come to her, book in hand, and ask to be read to. They “pick a little corner of the room” and start to read and “before you know it, there’s a group of four or five kids sitting around me.”

Theresa reads to the children the way she read to her own—with proper inflection so as to aid in

listening comprehension, and with expression and the intent to place her young audience into the story. She employs character voices to do this and demonstrated altering her voice into that of an old woman character, then laughed when she caught the irony of it.

In addition to reading to and playing with the children, and generally helping in any way asked, Theresa also works 1-on-1 with three students a few times each week to provide additional support as they progress with their literacy skills.

Theresa explained that her first name means “reaper of the harvest.” Referring to the countless children that she’s been surrounded by throughout her life, she declared, “I sure did reap the harvest.” She still gets hugs from former students she encounters in the school, many of whom ask to join her at the table when she takes her lunch break.

Of his Foster Grandparent, Tony says, “I treasure the time that I have in the classroom with her and thank her every day for the hard work that makes everyone around her see how special she is.” The woman known and loved as “Grandma” summed up her experience this way: “I truthfully am very happy that I found this little nook for me to do. For however many years I’ve got left, I’m going to go, until I can’t go anymore.”

Congratulations, Theresa Lessard

Foster Grandparent volunteer Theresa Lessard (2nd from left) accepts the Hometown Hero of the Month award from United Way’s Laurie Dana (left) during WPTZ News Channel 5’s live broadcast at ECHO Lake Aquarium and Science Center.

Theresa is in her 7th year of volunteering with the Foster Grandparent Program and serves in kindergarten at Underhill ID School. ECHO’s Executive Director, Phelan Fretz, and Channel 5’s Chief Meteorologist, Tom Messner, were part of the award presentation.





Program News

Recent In-services and Learning Opportunities

Program Funders:

The Corporation for National and Community Service

VT Dept. of Disabilities, Aging & Independent Living

Cities & Towns of:

Enosburg
Franklin
Richford
Swanton

United Way of Northwest Vermont

Sheila Conroy, LCMH, Military Family Life Counselor at Camp Johnson, recently spoke about “Military Life and Its Impact on Children.” In addition to sharing resources for children experiencing different types of loss, Sheila gave each Foster Grandparent a copy of the children’s book, *The Kissing Hand*, by Audrey Penn.

Jessica Barquist, Education Coordinator for Let’s Grow Kids, spoke to Foster Grandparents about

healthy brain development in young children. As part of the presentation, the Foster Grandparents used pipe cleaners and straws to build model brains to show the importance of strong and positive brain connections.

Tamira Martel, Corporate and Foundations Relationship Manager for Committee on Temporary Shelter (COTS), spoke about working with children who are experiencing homelessness.

Welcome New Staff:

Danielle Williams has joined FGP of Northwest Vermont as the Coordinator



of Volunteer Recruitment. Danielle graduated from the University of Vermont with a Bachelor of Social Work degree and brings to her role valuable experience with

the VNA, Lund Family Center and United Way of Northwest Vermont where she served as a Loaned Executive during the 2015 campaign. Passionate about volunteerism, Danielle also contributes her skills and energy in service to the Jarred Williams Foundation dedicated to helping children suffering from

chronic and life threatening illnesses and to the Travis Roy Foundation committed to enhancing the lives of spinal cord injury victims and their families by providing grants and funding research.

Sandy Menard has joined FGP as part-time Program Assistant. Sandy began volunteering for the United Way’s RSVP program back in 2012, moving into a part-time administrative support position for the United Way in 2015. Currently, Sandy divides her time between the Resource Development, Foster Grandparent and RSVP teams, providing invaluable administrative support and assisting her co-workers in achieving United Way’s mission of ‘building a stronger community.’

Foster Grandparent Recruitment

Help Us Recruit More Foster Grandparents!

My name is Danielle Williams, I began my role as the Coordinator of Volunteer Recruitment this past September. This position is very important to me, as I have been a part of nonprofit organizations for many years, and know how instrumental volunteers are to making a community a better place!

I recruit volunteers 55+ to work in early education settings with children who may have exceptional needs, as well as economic disadvantages.

Do you have the time and energy to spend at least 15 hours per week with children in a classroom? Volunteers receive a small non-taxable

hourly stipend, free daily meal at site when available, supplemental insurance and paid time off.

Are you part of a business, club, school or organization that would be interested in learning more about the Foster Grandparent Program? I speak at rotary meetings, churches, nonprofits, senior housing facilities, and more. I'd be happy to come to you!

If you would like me to visit your community to speak about the Foster Grandparent Program or are simply interested in learning more, please contact me at daniellew@unitedwaynwvt.org or 802-861-7821.

Foster Grandparent Volunteer Opportunities

These schools and classrooms are looking for their own Foster Grandparent! Please contact Danielle Williams at 861-7821 or daniellew@unitedwaynwvt.org for more information.

- First Grade, Edmunds Elementary School, Burlington
- Kindergarten, Summit Street School, Essex Junction
- Preschool, J.J. Flynn Elementary, Burlington
- After School, Champlain Elementary
- Milton Elementary School
- Montgomery Elementary School
- Alburgh Community Educational Center
- Sheldon Elementary School
- Fairfield Center School

Thank You to Our Recent Donors!

Rose Pells, in memory of
Floyd Handy

Richard and Eileen Mitchell in
memory of Maude Mitchell

Kathleen Keenan

Family of Freda Burnor,
in her memory

Brian and Holly Reed

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Handy Toyota/Chevrolet
in memory of Floyd Handy

Judith and William Kelly

Robert Jackson and Leslie
Ward, in memory of
Maude Mitchell

Deborah and George Bedrin,
in memory of Virginia
Kenyon and Vern and
Muriel Waterman

Helen Valine

Megan Humphrey

Lisa Simon and Peter Nobes,
in honor of Holly Reed



Senior Corps is a program of the federal Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) which provides opportunities for Americans age 55 and over to serve their communities. Senior Corps programs include RSVP, the Foster Grandparent Program and the Senior Companion Program. Nationwide over 500,000 volunteers who are 55 and over are involved with Senior Corps.

The Foster Grandparent Program receives 61% of the program's total funding from the Corporation for National Service.



United Way of Northwest Vermont

United Way of Northwest Vermont sponsors RSVP of Northwest Vermont and the Foster Grandparent Program. In addition, United Way connects volunteers of all ages with nonprofit organizations addressing community needs. To learn more, call (802) 860-1677 or visit our website at www.unitedwaynwvt.org.

United Way volunteer services are supported in part through donations to United Way of Northwest Vermont as well as federal, state and local grants.

Welcome !

Welcome Back, Grandma Bev!

We are pleased to announce that **Beverly Fresn**, affectionately known as “Grandma Bev” has rejoined the Foster Grandparent Program!

When asked why she wanted to be a volunteer once again, Bev smiled and said “I just love being around children!” She has a lot of experience working with children. In addition to her previous volunteer work, Bev is a proud mom, grandma and great-grandma!

Bev makes her home in St. Albans. She also enjoys knitting, word games, puzzles and reading. Grandma Bev’s new home away from home is the St. Albans City School. While at the school, she works with students in the Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten classes. We want to thank Georgie Andrews, Ellen Rose and all the staff at the school for making Bev feel so welcomed!

Welcome To Brewster Pierce

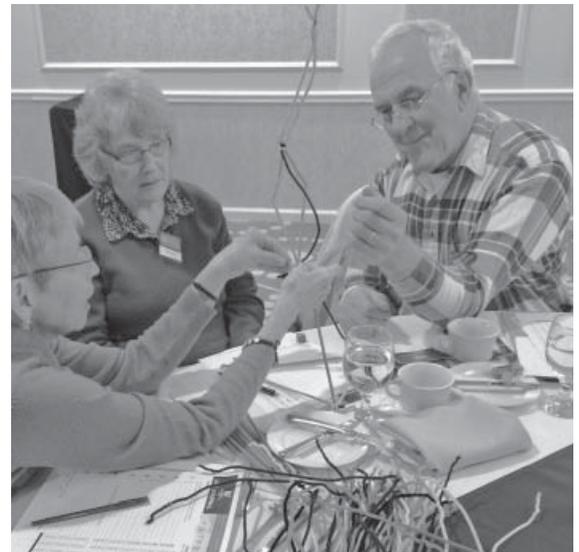
Brewster-Pierce Memorial School in Huntington, a K-4 school in the Chittenden East Supervisory Union, is the latest school to host a Foster Grandparent volunteer.

Joanne Blinston is working four days a week with Aimee Motta’s 3/4 classroom. Joanne’s contribution to the classroom was immortalized in a student-illustrated story called “Foster Grandmother,” in which Nana does a “flying side kick into the wall and says “Burrito Time!” The story continues with all the students enjoying burritos while Nana (dressed in war paint and sporting a bandana) invites the students to call her Nana.

Learning About Healthy Brain Development

At right: Foster Grandparent volunteers Carolyn Brooks and Joyce and Maurice Pelletier learn about healthy brain development by building model “brains” with pipe cleaners and straws. This activity demonstrates how positive connections (straws) help make stronger brain connections and protect against adverse conditions.

Thank you to Let’s Grow Kids for this learning opportunity at our recent in-service.





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Foster Learning. Foster Confidence. Foster Grandparent.



Do you have the time, talent, and desire to make a life-changing contribution to a child in Chittenden, Franklin, or Grand Isle County?

The Foster Grandparent Program needs you.

Serving in partnership with staff in early learning environments, Foster Grandparents help children build early literacy and math skills, self-confidence and a love of learning. Foster Grandparents are role models, mentors and friends to the children they support and are important and trusted members of their school communities.

If you or someone you know is age 55+, willing to commit at least 15 hours per week to service, meet eligibility requirements and would like to share your experiences and compassion with children, we would love to talk with you!

Contact us today!

Chittenden County

861-7823

Susan Abell

Franklin & Grand Isle Counties

524-6337

Mary Pelkey