

September 2016

## Bridging the Generations

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United Way of  
Northwest Vermont

## Meet Sue and Theresa: FGP in Action

*By Susan Abell, Program Coordinator*

There is a strong bond between Foster Grandparent volunteers and the teachers with whom they work. Sometimes a Foster Grandparent is part of a larger team of educators working in the classroom, and other times, the teacher and the Foster Grandparent are the main adults in a classroom of sixteen or more children.

Sue Austin-Fleming and Theresa Lessard have been paired together at Underhill ID School since 2011. Sue is the only kindergarten teacher at the school, and Theresa assists students with literacy and math skills, as well as being another caring adult to all students in the classroom.

Sue said she had been aware of the program before meeting Theresa. “Many years ago we had a senior gentleman working in a first grade classroom in our school. Although his job was to read with first graders, everyone in the school knew and loved him. Often he arrived with homemade fudge!”

Theresa learned about Foster Grandparents from her sister-in-law. “After retiring from Vermont Adult Learning, I seemed to have a lot of time on my hands. My sister-in-law invited me to play cards one day and she was telling me about this program in Swanton. Her grandson had a Foster Grandparent in his room and he really liked her. I called the Foster Grandparent Program office

and decided that’s what I wanted to do. I chose kindergarten because my grandson had just started kindergarten in Underhill.”



*Theresa Lessard (left) with Sue Austin-Fleming.*

Although Theresa’s own grandson was in the class, Theresa worked closely with the students identified as needing extra support around math and literacy. “Theresa’s first year was special indeed. A Foster Grandparent’s role is so different than that of staff members,” Sue said. “Having Grammie in kindergarten truly added to the “family feel” of the classroom.”

As with any new relationship, both Theresa and Sue needed to learn to work effectively together. “Sue is the kind of teacher who never raises her voice to the children. The children always know what her expectations are and they very

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quietly get down to work. I love going to school every day.”

Adds Sue, “Theresa brings a calm and caring presence to the classroom. She is such a good listener and nurturer.”

Being placed in an elementary school was familiar to Theresa, too. “After graduating from college, I taught in the lower grades for a while. I liked being in the classroom and watching the children grow and improve. With Foster Grandparents, I can work 15 hours a week, get a stipend and I don’t have to do any discipline.”

Sue noted that Theresa has been an eager participant in the classroom. “Theresa joins the children in all we do. She takes part in Spanish classes, recess play, and P.E. classes. We do a lot of singing and movement activities in kindergarten. Theresa’s really good at the “Tooty-Ta!”

Learning together and from the children has been a big part of the program for Theresa. “I’ve learned to be patient with the children. I learned to back off some when they were afraid to speak out in front of everyone. If they were playing when I came in, I would visit with the small groups and they would tell me what they were doing. I learned new games to play with them. The children come to work with me after circle time and we have such fun together.”

When asked what she would tell another teacher considering having a Foster Grandparent volunteer in their classroom, Sue answered, “It does take time and effort to be a teacher involved with the Foster Grandparent program. Knowing that the rewards are so great for students, it is truly a worthwhile endeavor. A bonus: my relationship with Theresa. She is not only a unique part of the classroom, but also a true friend of mine.”

## ***Welcome New Foster Grandparent Volunteers!***

### **Jackie Crego**

The Foster Grandparent Program welcomes Jackie Crego to our Foster Grandparent Program family. Jackie lives in St. Albans and likes to keep active in her community. She has previously worked in retail and at a day care center. In the past, Jackie has also volunteered at Northwestern Medical Center and Franklin County Rehab. She likes to exercise, listen to music and absolutely loves to dance! Jackie is very excited to start her volunteer work with children in September!

Welcome to our program, Jackie! Your eagerness and enthusiasm will be a great addition to The Foster Grandparent Program!

### **Lea Johnson**

The Foster Grandparent Program also welcomes Burlington resident Lea Johnson to our program. Lea enjoys helping others learn and grow—especially children. During her career in education she worked with

children from preschool through 5th grade, and has also volunteered in a kindergarten classroom. Lea is looking forward to a school placement in September.

Welcome, Lea! Your experience and desire to help children succeed will be a great asset to our program.

### **Rose Johnson**

The Foster Grandparent Program also welcomes Rose Johnson to our program. Rose lives in St. Albans and comes to us with plenty of experience working with children. She has four children, thirteen grandchildren and one great grandchild! Rose has worked for Home Health as a Homemaker and as a LNA. She loves knitting, crocheting and puzzles. She also enjoys genealogy. Rose is volunteering at Y’s Time in St. Albans for the summer and looking forward to a school placement in September.

Welcome, Rose! Your kindness, love and experience will be a welcome addition to The Foster Grandparent Program!



# Program News

## Help Wanted

*By Ellen Biddle, Foster Grandparent Program Director*

As fall approaches, schools across Chittenden, Franklin, and Grand Isle counties are preparing to welcome children back to freshly painted classrooms and newly waxed hallways. For more than twenty schools in our region, fall also means eagerly welcoming Foster Grandparent Volunteers.

Foster Grandparents are an invaluable source of support to both teachers and students alike—helping children with exceptional needs to build early literacy and math skills and develop confidence, social skills and a life-long love of learning. During the past year alone, our local Foster Grandparents have contributed over



*Foster Grandparent Coordinator, Mary Pelkey talks with a potential volunteer.*

22,000 hours of service to children in our region. Based on current average hourly wage data, those volunteer hours equal close to \$520,000 in educational support to our communities. To ‘their’ kids, though, a Foster Grandparent’s contribution is priceless.

Right now, more than half a dozen local schools have requested volunteers and are waiting for our help.

Our team is committed to finding Foster Grandparents to serve the children of those schools and beyond. Growing the number of volunteers in our program not only helps even more children reach their potential, it also helps more adults 55+ in our community share their skills—and lives—with children who need them.

To reach our goal, we need to get out into the community and share the Foster Grandparent story with as many people as we can.

To help us do just that we have created a brand new role on our team: Coordinator for Volunteer Recruitment. This new staff member will be dedicated to working throughout Chittenden, Franklin, and Grand Isle counties, sharing information about our program and recruiting new Foster Grandparent volunteers.

### We need your help.

Do you know someone who would make a great Foster Grandparent volunteer? Know of an event, organization, club or busy location where FGP program staff can meet potential volunteers? Let us know! Please reach out via phone or email to [ellen@unitedwaynwvt.org](mailto:ellen@unitedwaynwvt.org) or 861-7836.

### 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



United Way of Northwest Vermont

## Lunch with My Friends

By Maurice Pelletier, Foster Grandparent Volunteer

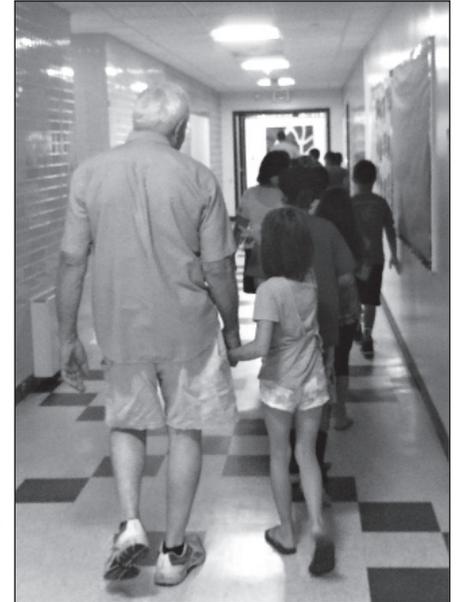
As a 75 year-old Foster Grandparent my life is rich and full because I get to spend 6 hours, 3 days a week with about 250 children, K-2 at Porter's Point School in Colchester. I don't get to know all the children there. However, I get to know many outside of my assigned class as I choose to have lunch in the cafeteria and mid-day recess on the playground with them.

It gets a little more challenging as I grow older to keep up physically and mentally, but one thing I treasure is I have never been judged or put down because I couldn't keep up playing tag or running a short race. Younger children are just so accepting of new elders in their life. It warms my heart so when a

the children is that I get to know a little more about them and their families. When children are happy to share I encourage them. Usually they don't have many surprises. Maybe it helps for them to talk about a sibling who can be difficult at times or they like to talk about good things that happen in their families. It

made it easier for me when I realized children don't necessarily expect an answer for their concerns. They do appreciate a good listening ear that accepts and encourages them no matter what is going on.

Sometimes when we are eating lunch, I ask myself isn't this really way too noisy, but then I hear a tiny voice within, 'Do you want to be alone and quiet or do you want to contribute? Do I really want to be selfish? No thanks!' I will accept the rewards I experience with my school family. I will receive the honor a child gives when they come to me for help. I will accept the love and respect they give us each day.



**“Grandpa’s life experiences and willingness to sit with struggling students was always a comfort to those students.”**

– an FGP teacher

child will say, “I love you” after knowing you for 2 or 3 days. What trust they place in us! How could I let them down?

The world has changed so much since I was 7 or 8, but there is still so much beauty that surrounds us each day. One of my rewards with having lunch with

## Thank You to Our Recent Donors!

Anonymous

Elizabeth Allen

Stanley & Diane Baker

Deborah Bedrin, in memory of Virginia Kenyon

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The family of Freda Burnor, in her memory

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Kathleen Riley and Michael & Richard Olmstead

Kathy Riley

Jeff & Stacie Rouleau

Brenda and George Lacasse

Helen Valine, in memory of Freda Burnor



**Senior Corps** is a program of the federal Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS). It 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.

## Ten Tips for Avoiding Fraud\*

Thank you to our July in-service presenter, Janet Murnane of the Consumer Assistance Program at the Vermont Attorney General's Office, for sharing practical strategies in her discussion "Preventing Elder Fraud." Here are some valuable tips:

1. Know who you are dealing with. Try to find a seller's physical address (not a PO Box) and phone number. Do an online search for the company and website, and look for reviews.
2. Know that wiring money is like sending cash. Don't wire money to strangers, to sellers who insist on wire transfers for payment, or anyone who claims to be a relative or friend in an emergency and wants to keep the request a secret.
3. Read your monthly statements. Scammers steal account information and then run up charges in your name. Dishonest merchants bill you for monthly "membership fees" and other goods/services without your authorization.
4. After a disaster, give only to established charities. Pop-up charities don't have the infrastructure to get help to affected areas or people. Check out [consumer.ftc.gov](http://consumer.ftc.gov) for more donating tips.
5. Talk to your doctor before you buy health products or treatments. Ask about research that supports a product's claims – and possible side effects or risks. Learn more about buying health products on line at [consumer.ftc.gov](http://consumer.ftc.gov).
6. There's no Sure Thing in investing. If someone contacts you with low-risk, high-return investment opportunities, stay away. When you hear pitches that insist you act now, that guarantee big profits, that promise little or no risk, or demand that you send cash immediately, report them to [ftc.gov](http://ftc.gov).
7. Don't send money to someone you don't know. Watch out for online sellers you've never heard or – or an online love interest who asks for money. Type unknown company or product names into a search engine with terms like "review," "complaint," or "scam." Never pay fees first.
8. Don't agree to deposit a check and wire money back. You're responsible for the checks you deposit: if a check turns out to be fake, you are responsible for paying back the bank. No matter how convincing, someone who overpays with a check is a scam artist.
9. Don't reply to messages asking for personal or financial information. It doesn't matter if the message comes as an email, a phone call, a text message, or an ad. Don't click on links or call phone numbers in the messages, either. Check your statements for the contact information if you are concerned about an account.
10. Don't play a foreign lottery. It's illegal, and messages claiming you've already won are false. Inevitably, you have to pay "taxes," "fees," or "custom duties" to collect your prize.

\* From *10 Ways to Avoid Fraud* published by the Federal Trade Commission, August 2012.

# Letter from a Foster Grandparent Teacher

My name is Julie LaFontaine. I'm a teacher in the toddler classroom at the Pine Forest Children's Center. I'm happy to say we've had our Foster Grammy, Margaret Rutledge, in our class for about a year now. I'm proud to be here tonight to celebrate Grammy, as well as this terrific program.

As a small child, I lived with my mother and uncle in my grandmother's house. My Gam was a retired school teacher, who fostered my love of learning and

**"I treasure the days when she is with our class, simply because I know I can always look to the side and see her calm presence."**

— Julie LaFontaine, Pine Forest teacher

encouraged my curiosity by the simple fact that she never acted as if any questions I posed were silly, or without merit. I am who I am today, in great part, due to my grandmother.

I'm sure almost everyone in this room can think back to at least one grandparent who has had such an effect on their upbringing. Grandparents can be very special to us. They have the ability to provide inter-generational role models, without all the daily pressures that parents face. And if hindsight is 20/20, then who sees more clearly than an octogenarian?

In our school, we have children from varying backgrounds and lifestyles. Some live with their grandparents, too, while some go months or more without seeing them. Some of these children spend 50 hours a week here with their teachers. Regardless, to all of the children in the Pine Forest Children's Center, we are a second home, and an extension of their family. Having Grammy join our Pine Forest family has been the most natural addition to our community.

Grammy genuinely cares for each and every child who comes into our classroom. She has formed strong bonds with several of our children who need a little extra one-on-one comfort and loving attention. Children seek her out in the mornings when their

parents drop them off, and ask about her on her days off. They run to her for a hug when they are sad or hurt, and crawl into her lap when they want her to read to them. But Grammy is also a comfort to me. I treasure the days when she is with our class, simply because I know I can always look to the side and see her calm presence. She's helpful as a teacher in a million ways, from reading books during the calm times, to getting children's lunch prepared, to helping us settle 12 toddlers down for a nap. And, quite frankly, I love her, too.

The Foster Grandparent Program is a wonderful resource. I'm so glad to have Grammy as part of our family at Pine Forest Children's Center. But don't just take my word for it.

Here is something that was written by a parent for Grammy:

"When Julie came to me requesting a little something for her to read at Grammy's award ceremony, I didn't think twice. Now, as I am trying to write, I am finding it difficult to put into words what Grammy means to our family, so I will quote my three year old. 'I love Grammy because she gives me hugs!'

Grammy came into our lives as the best possible

**"I am so grateful to have her as a part of both my sons' lives and I want to thank her from the bottom of my heart for the hugs!"**

— Parent of a Pine Forest student

time last year. Our youngest was just born and our then two year old was having an extremely difficult time transitioning into daycare in the mornings and with life in general. With her love and compassion, she supported our son as he adjusted into being a big brother. The two formed such a sweet bond. Grammy, without you, I'm not sure how we (especially me) would have survived that time. I am so grateful to have her as a part of both my sons' lives and I want to thank her from the bottom of my heart for the hugs!"



**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.unitedwaynvt.org](http://www.unitedwaynvt.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.

# *A shout-out to our volunteer drivers!*



Our Foster Grandparents provide a wonderful service to the children in their communities. Though most volunteers drive themselves to their volunteer sites, for

some this is not possible. This is when special people like Chris Fecteau, Joanne Bishop and Paula Boomhower step up to the plate!

Foster Grandparent Audria Bryce volunteers at Fairfield Center School where she is a valued member of the school community. Unfortunately, she has no way to get to and from the school or to the valuable monthly In-Service learning opportunities we provide to our volunteers.

Three days a week, life long friend Paula Boomhower drives Audria to school bright and early so she can work with ‘her’ students. Paula, who is like a daughter to Audria, understands how important this program is to Audria... keeping her vibrant and ‘young at heart’! Paula says “Seeing Audria every morning gives me as much pleasure as she gets from volunteering!”

Joanne Bishop wanted to do something for her community. When she discovered Audria needed to find a way home after she finished her volunteer work in the

classroom each day, she was ready to help. Audria and Joanne have become very close friends on their rides home. Joanne says, “Audria is a wonderful lady who loves working with kids. It keeps her young at heart. I am happy I can be a part of making it happen!”

Friend of the Foster Grandparent Program, Chris Fecteau, has volunteered to transport Audria and other FG volunteers to our In-Services for many years! In fact, Chris’s mom used to be a Foster Grandparent. Chris said “After Mom died, I just kept driving Audria to the In-Services. I do it as a friend. It helps me as much as it helps her! Audria has become a dear friend and I love our many conversations!”

Volunteer drivers are very important to the Foster Grandparent Program! They enable our volunteers to provide valuable services to the children in their communities.

Our heartfelt thanks go out to Chris, Paula and Joanne for their dedication to Audria, The Foster Grandparent Program and the children served!

We always need more volunteer drivers. For more information, please contact your local Foster Grandparent Program office!

**“Grammy’s patience and warm reassurances guide young children as they practice reading and writing. She is a good listener for both children and staff at our school.”**  
*– an FGP teacher*



United Way of Northwest Vermont  
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## *Foster Learning. Foster Confidence. Foster Grandparent.*



**D**o 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