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## Community

### Program links kids with second family

By June Russell  
 Emerald Contributor

Tim Thayer is an experienced matchmaker.

In the past year Thayer and fellow coordinator Zall Villanueva have linked more than 30 University students with developmentally disabled children through Fostering Friendships, a program of Lane County's Association for Retarded Citizens.

The program started four years ago through a grant from the Oregon Research Institute. Today the program is funded from a new grant from ORI for working with brain damaged children, fundraising and contributions from United Way.

Although most of the volunteers are education or psychology majors, the program is open to anyone willing to make a two-term time commitment. The program offers upper-division practicum credit to participants, but the experience, Villanueva said, is worth even more.

"I think it's invaluable," Villanueva said. "For one thing, we think we have problems until we work with a child with special needs. Sometimes I think it's more of an educational experience for the volunteer

than for the child. It isn't a chore. What it is, is developing a friendship."

As coordinators of the program, Thayer and Villanueva recruit University students, interview new volunteers, and host a three-hour training session before introducing the students to the child and her or his family.

"In those sessions generally we show videotapes and give examples," Thayer said. "We also go on the first visit with them to meet the family. From then on we just do minimal supervision."

"I think a lot of volunteers are apprehensive when they get started," Thayer added. "They just need to jump in; once they get started it's much more natural. A lot of them say it's just like having a second family."

Villanueva, an elementary education major, started in the program as a big brother to gain practical experience in working with a child with disabilities.

"I just wanted to be exposed to it because I may someday have a child in my class with a disability," Villanueva said.

"Now the trend is toward mainstreaming these kids into a classroom setting, so they can

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