

## Be a Piece of the Puzzle: *Foster Grandparents Program Revived in Vernonia Schools*



The Foster Grandparents Program has returned to Vernonia Schools and is having an immediate impact with students, teachers, and even the senior citizens who are participating in the program.

After a couple year hiatus, the Foster Grandparents Program, with help from community Volunteer Coordinator Heather Lewis, has found new life this school year. Three senior citizens--Dewey Deweber, and Sykes and Ann Mitchell-- are assisting in classrooms and helping with one-on-one student work. Lewis says the hope is to recruit more seniors to become trained and involved in the program.

According to Lewis, funding for the program comes from a federal "SeniorCorps" grant, which is similar to an AmeriCorps grant. The program is coordinated through Columbia River Fire and Rescue. Seniors who participate in the program must meet certain guidelines and can either volunteer their time or make a firm commitment of at least fifteen hours weekly and receive a small stipend for their work. Regular participants can also receive

breakfast and lunch at the school if they are working during those hours.

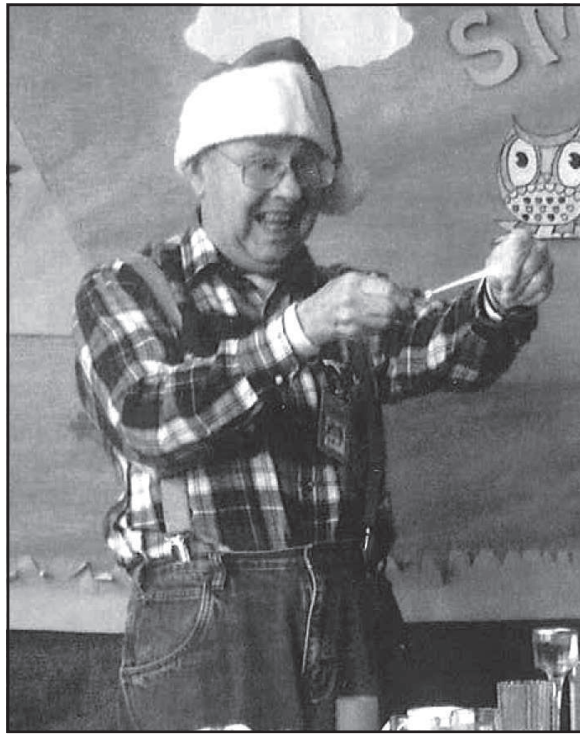
"The program was developed to help shore up literacy needs in the schools," explains Lewis. Foster Grandparents work with students in a variety of subjects where they might need assistance and work to improve their literacy in a variety of ways.

Previously, the program was only available to elementary school students-- the program is now available for students K-12. "That really opens the door for a lot of kids that needed that continued support mechanism," says Lewis.

The Foster Grandparents fill various rolls in the schools. Mr. Deweber works at Washington Grade School (WGS) and is known for performing magic tricks. He also helps in the Life Skills class. "Everybody just loves him," says WGS teacher Gienah Cheney. The Mitchells have worked at the high school level and also with younger students at WGS.

Lewis says there is funding available to fill four to seven more

positions. The schedules can be very flexible and can be modeled to meet the needs of the Foster Grandparent.



*Foster Grandparent Dewey Deweber shows off some of his magic tricks for the students at WGS.*

Lewis says she is working to find ways to provide activities for the program to work throughout the year, not just during the school year. One possible program she is researching is a summer lunch program that would bring together resources from the schools, the Vernonia Senior Center, the City of Vernonia, the Vernonia Prevention Coalition, and

Hands On Art.

Lewis is working as a Volunteer Coordinator through funding provided by the Vernonia Prevention Coalition. She has used her position to connect groups within the community and help them find ways to collaborate with each other.

Lewis says the Foster Grandparents Program is a great fit with the mission of the Vernonia Prevention Coalition-- developing mentors for students in an alcohol, tobacco and drug-free learning environment and creating a healthy, safe community.

And it has been popular in the schools, not just with students who need some extra help and with teachers who are receiving trained assistance, but for senior citizens acting as Foster Grandparents. "It's fun and it keeps me going and keeps me out of trouble!" says Mr. Deweber.

Sounds like a winning program for everybody.

*If you would like more information about the Foster Grandparents Program, contact Director Connie Quick at (503) 397-5655 office or (503) 410-1449 mobile. Her office is located at: 397 South 18th Street Suite C (at the St. Helens Library).*



*Foster Grandparent Ann Mitchell helps a WGS student with his reading skills.*

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Are you feeling desperate, alone or hopeless? Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline a free, 24-hour hotline available to anyone in suicidal crisis or emotional distress. Your call will be routed to the nearest crisis center to you.

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### VERNONIA PREVENTION COALITION

5th Tuesday Community Coalition Meeting at the VCLC 6:30-8:00 PM

March 29th  
May 31st  
August 30th  
November 29th

For more information contact:  
DeAnna Pearl, VPC Director  
503-369-7370  
DeAnna@vernonia-or.gov

According to the Department of Education only 15% of public schools provide direct prevention education.

In 2009 95% of Vernonia 8th graders self reported that they had received direct prevention programming!

Because of the relationship with the Vernonia Prevention Coalition, once again the Vernonia School District gets a chance to shine!

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