

for community By Gayin Linx

SERVING YOUTH MAKES OUR DAYS *Magical!*

HOW I FOUND HAPPINESS BY DOING SECOND GRADE OVER AND OVER AGAIN.



Being a Foster Grandparent brings joy to my life every day.

After retiring, I spent three years reading every book that sparked my fancy on the shelves of the Mt. Shasta Library. It was a wonderful time for this history major – I learned a lot about Winston Churchill and his American mom, and filled in all the gaps in my historical novel scorecard.

I began volunteering one morning each week in my granddaughter Morgan's school classroom to help with small classroom groups. Joan Ward, the Foster Grandparent in Morgan's class, invited me to join the Foster Grandparent Program. Initially I pooh-poohed the idea; I wasn't sure if it would be a pleasant way to spend my time.

The next summer, I realized I was in an "almost" depressed state: No goals, no partners, no joy. I signed up for the training required by the Foster Grandparent Program, then tried my luck in a classroom. Now I'm beginning my 8th year with the program, and I feel more alive because of it!

Sponsored federally through the Corporation for National & Community Service, this national program funds volunteer opportunities for seniors in all our North State counties. Golden Umbrella in Redding runs the Foster Grandparent Program serving Shasta, Siskiyou and Trinity county schools. Passages, located at California State University, Chico, runs the program in Butte, Colusa, Glenn, Plumas and Tehama Counties.

Tina Brown, Senior Corps Program Director at Golden Umbrella, says her office receives calls or emails almost daily from teachers and principals asking for Foster Grandparents. "The Foster Grandparent Program has a key anniversary approaching in 2015 when it will be celebrating 50 years of successful service and inspiration to children across our nation," Tina shares. "Clearly the need is great and the opportunity is here for seniors to share their love, time and experience with children who need it the most."

Tina says, "Foster Grandparents spend one-on-one time with children. In Northern California you may find Foster Grandparents in elementary and high schools, day-care centers, and Head Start programs giving person-to-person

Learn more about Foster Grandparent Program and other volunteer opportunities for seniors in your area:

The folks at Golden Umbrella in Redding, and Passages in Chico, want to remind seniors they are wanted! Senior volunteers choose how and where they want to work; a minimum of 15 hours per week is requested. A stipend and mileage reimbursement is provided for volunteers in the Foster Grandparent program. To learn more, contact these organizations:

Golden Umbrella (Redding office). Serving Shasta, Siskiyou and Trinity Counties. Also offers a senior mentoring program in Tehama County. www.goldenumbrella.org. (530) 226-3098.

Passages (Office at California State University, Chico). Serving Butte, Colusa, Glenn and Plumas Counties. www.passagescenter.org. (530) 898-6761 or 1-800-822-0109.

attention to their 'grandkids'. Children receive the type of companionship, special help, and individual attention that only a grandparent can give."

Dale Porter is principal of Redding's Boulder Creek Elementary School. He shares, "Foster Grandparents provide a wonderful support to Boulder Creek students. They provide an additional caring adult to help students feel loved and connected to school. Every day I see students receiving much needed extra support by a Foster Grandparent. They are a true blessing!"

While the results of seniors being in classrooms are grand, the first goal of the Foster Grandparent Program is serving the seniors. I can vouch for the success of this part of the program. Now I have a place to give of my best self, daily. Teachers and students welcome everything I have to give. Plus, the "free" cash we earn from the non-taxable stipend the program volunteers get allows me to support my favorite community projects and gives me some "grandbaby" money!

We older folks have gained a lifetime of experience. Now is the time to put our skills and talents to good use by volunteering – and we gain new skills in the process! ■



Gayin Linx, aka "Grandma Gayin," has lived in Mount Shasta for the last 25 years. She fondly remembers her grade school experiences, and loves being part of the group of Foster Grandparents at Mt. Shasta Elementary School.

Letter of appreciation from a parent:

North State parent Molly Shabazian shared the following letter describing her son's experience with the Foster Grandparent Program:

I am the parent of a 2nd grade student at Millville Elementary School. My son has struggled with reading since kindergarten but has always tried very hard. Two days ago we sat down to read after dinner and his reading was more fluent than I have ever heard before. The difference as well as the pride on this face literally had me crying as he read.

When he was finished I asked him if he had been practicing that particular story at school (assuming he'd been memorizing). He said no. I asked him if his teacher had been reading with him separately, he said no. I finally asked "What has changed at school that has improved your reading so much?" His answer: "Just reading with Grandma every day."

Surprised, I asked him when Grandma was at school with him. He laughed and said not my Grandma, our class Grandma. He explained to me that she is in this class every day and he reads her a different story every day.

This shouldn't have made such an impact since I knew he read to teacher's aides or his teacher every day in previous years, but the more he talked the more I realized that while the reading practice was helping, it was more a result of the person he was reading to. I don't know this woman, or even her name, other than "Grandma," but obviously she is an angel. As my son explained she doesn't make him nervous, or correct every word, she just listens to him and he loves her like a Grandma.

I just wanted to take a minute to thank Golden Umbrella for supporting this amazing program, and "Grandma" for changing a little boy's life. Teachers and aides try so hard, and are so appreciated, but this "grandma" brings a kindness and comfort to a child who has been intimidated by reading for years. Because of her gentle nature and encouragement I really believe this school year will be his best.