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FEATURED

'If you can, do it': If it benefits Laramie children, Grandma Jody is there to help

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Jody Lowe stands outside the Feeding Laramie Valley office, where she volunteers with the Kids Out To Lunch! program year. She also has volunteered nearly 10,000 hours as a foster grandparent for local kids.

Abby Vander Graaff/Boomerang

Boomerang Writer

Helping kids is one of the best ways Jody Lowe likes to spend her time. When she's not with her own children, grandchildren and great-grandchild, she's working on behalf of other

young people in need of support.

Lowe, 69, has lived in Laramie since 1970. At the center of her work are a trio of nonprofit efforts: Foster Grandparents of the Wyoming Rockies, Head Start of Laramie and Feeding Laramie Valley.

“She has a really easy going attitude,” said Maryalice Snider, executive director for Foster Grandparents. “She’s super adaptive and she’s meticulous. She’s a model volunteer.”

Foster Grandparents is an AmeriCorps program where people age 55 and older can act as mentors for youth in their communities. Mentors work in schools and child development centers, offering assistance to staff wherever needed.

Snider said Lowe has been a foster grandparent for more than four years and has served almost 10,000 hours in the program.

“She is super caring,” Snider said. “She loves to cook for people. She’s always the first one to offer to bring zucchini bread from her garden, she often just drops treats off for our building.”

Through her work as a grandparent, Lowe has built a special bond with students. They call her “Grandma Jody,” and some even run to greet her when she comes into their classrooms.

Lowe said her favorite part of working with students is “watching them grow and learn and have new experiences ... and to see how much they mature.”

Before the pandemic, Lowe worked at the University of Wyoming Laboratory School, helping with kindergarten reading groups and acting as a support system for the students.

This suddenly came to a halt at the start of the pandemic in 2019, when the school closed the program. Lowe said the school district had gone on spring break before the shutdown, and the foster grandparents never went back.

Since then, Lowe has been working with Head Start, a free preschool. She eats and plays with the kids, ages 3-5, and helps them to stay calm and focused throughout the day. She said being on lockdown in the spring was difficult, and she was very happy to return to her work as a foster grandparent.

“I missed my hugs,” Lowe said.

Despite the challenges, she’s continued helping kids even when she couldn’t see or hug them in person by handing meals as part of a drive-thru program created by Feeding Laramie Valley. Lowe also helps to prepare meals for the school lunch programs put on by the organization.

Lowe started volunteering with Feeding Laramie Valley when she was still working full-time as an accountant at WWC Engineering. She helps with cooking, fundraising, planning and helping with events like Food and Fun in the Park, where volunteers serve hundreds of people and advocate for healthy foods.

“She is the real grandma type in that she can do anything,” said Lina Dunning, community engagement coordinator at Feeding Laramie Valley. “We can just always count on her. If we’re in a pinch or need somebody to step up, she’s always there for us.”

Dunning nominated Lowe for the AARP Eddie Wadda Community Service Award in 2018. The award recognized her daily work at these programs, and she continues to exhibit the same characteristics she was honored for today.

“I’ve known Jody for almost two decades now,” Dunning said. “One thing that stands out about her is that she does not like to sit around. She loves to be busy.”

Lowe said that now, as a retired person, she loves doing volunteer work because it keeps her active and gives her a reason to get out of bed in the morning. She feels that working with the youth of the community keeps her feeling young.

“If you can, do it,” Lowe said of volunteering. “There comes a point in life when you can’t do it.”

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