

# Foster Grandparents brings seniors, students together

## Nonprofit helps seniors stay active, students perform better in school

By JORDAN ACHS

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Luella Flores doesn't like to use the word favorite, but it does aptly describe her feelings toward the kindergartners and first-graders she works with at Slade Elementary School.

Volunteering as part of the Foster Grandparents of the Wyoming Rockies, Flores assists teachers at the school with students' needs, both academic and social. Throughout her 17 years with the program, Flores said the students have helped her as much as she helps them.

"I may get up in a bad mood in the morning, but when I get to school and see those kindergartners, my whole life changes," she said. "My whole day changes with their smiles and their greeting."

The program pairs eligible seniors with students in public schools or other nonprofits around the region. Program director Maryalice Snider said to be eligible for the program, a person must be over age 55, pass a background check, be willing to volunteer at least 20 hours per week and meet the nonprofit's income guidelines.

Snider said right now Laramie has 14 of the region's 31 volunteers, and the program has been active

shoes for recess. Whatever the teacher needs, the grandparents can assist.

"If somebody is doing their math problem, and they're having trouble, I can sit down with them a bit and encourage them and answer a question or two and just work with them on the whole like that," Flores said.

The grandparents' time is mutually beneficial; Snider said the nonprofit keeps metrics as part of their grant funding process, and the data indicates the grandparents' time helps students perform better in school.

"Out of all of our pairings with children our volunteers help facilitate, this year it's about 92% improvement in the goals that were outlined by the teacher," Snider said.

Not only is it beneficial to the students, but for the seniors as well. Flores said it has a huge impact on her life, and it helps seniors stay active rather than "sitting at home after you reach a certain age."

A longitudinal study of the Foster Grandparents program showed similar results.

"(The study) actually demonstrated improvements in health and wellbeing, which intuitively we've all kind of known that because we



Slade Elementary foster grandparent Karyl Hill plays a color match game with a group of preschool students in 2015 in Janet Whel's classroom. Boomerang file photo

### EARN WHILE THEY LEARN!

If you are 55+ with a limited

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Snider said right now Laramie has 14 of the region's 31 volunteers, and the program has been active in Laramie for about 15 years, featuring seniors from 57 years' old to over 90 years' old.

"We always try to match a volunteer, number one, close to where they live, but also with an age group that they feel most comfortable relating to," Snider said. "By and large, they're in the elementary schools, and a lot of them do work with pre-K age group."

Volunteers can help with a variety of classroom needs, Snider said, from reading to children to trying

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"(The study) actually demonstrated improvements in health and wellbeing, which intuitively we've all kind of known that because we see how it changes our seniors' lives," Snider said. "So, it's pretty dramatic, the impact it has not just on the kids but also the seniors."

Flores said one of her favorite parts is seeing students outside of the classroom, and often they run to greet her — even her former students who are now in high school.

"It keeps you young," Flores said.

For more information about the Foster Grandparents program go to [www.fostergrandparents.wy.org](http://www.fostergrandparents.wy.org).



Slade Elementary foster grandparent Karyl Hill plays a color match game with a group of preschool students in Janet Wihel's classroom. Boomerang file photo

## EARN WHILE THEY LEARN!



If you are 55+ with a limited income, contact us to see how you can earn a tax-free stipend while working with children in your community. Enjoy the benefits of volunteering, fellowshipping, and giving back to your community, while knocking off a bill or two!

*"Being a Foster Grandparent has kept me moving, thinking and meeting people. It has added happiness and laughter to my life."*



CALL 307-223-1051  
to learn about being a classroom grandparent!