

Corporation for National Service

National Service Fellowship Program

Senior Volunteers in Literacy Programs

A study of design and practice

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Corporation for National Service

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ABSTRACT

Senior Volunteers in Literacy Programs: A Study of Design and Practice

The Study

Amy Blake's National Service Fellowship research focused on identifying impacts on reading performance and attitudes of students who worked with seniors volunteering in Foster Grandparent Programs (FGP) or Retired and Senior Volunteer Programs (RSVP). The study also sought to detail the outcomes senior volunteers experienced as well as elements of design and practice leading to programs' success. Blake conducted an extensive search, reviewed information and data, and interviewed program directors to identify programs and partnering schools to participate in the study. She identified five programs—one FGP and four RSVP—and conducted in-depth interviews with their tutoring coordinators, volunteers, teachers, principals, and other school and district staff. Additional information was gathered through program reports and school data.

Findings and Results

Blake wrote this study, which contains a review of the findings, profiles of the five participating programs, and recommendations for tutoring programs and their stakeholders. Additionally, a Web site, www.users.uswest.net/~ablake2, features tips for coordinators and teachers, and a place for visitors to post questions and ideas about effective practice in any program using senior volunteers as reading tutors.

Tutoring design and practice vary across programs, but this study shows that senior volunteers impact students and benefit from their service experiences as well. Senior tutors help improve students' attitudes about reading, including self-confidence and motivation to read. Programs whose volunteers engaged in structured tutoring sessions focused on reading and related literacy skills reported students' improved their reading one, two, sometimes three grade levels at the end of a school year. Senior volunteers benefited from the personal connections they made with peers, teachers, and students. Seniors who worked closely with teachers and were integrated into instruction as well as the school community experienced increased self-confidence, self-esteem, and feelings of self-efficacy. Program design, volunteer training and support, tutoring environment, and intergenerational tutoring relationships were key factors leading to programs' success and volunteers' feelings of satisfaction and effectiveness. Principal support of FGP and RSVP programs was also key to many programs.

What It Means to You

Blake intended the study to show not only the impact of national senior service programs on students' reading performance and attitudes, but also to detail the elements of program design and practice support seniors' efforts to enhance student learning. The findings and profiles provide information on how programs have implemented America Reads or other

tutoring programs, balancing research on effective volunteer tutoring with their unique needs and resources. She also presents information on how intergenerational tutoring relationships are beneficial to both children and seniors, and how seniors in FGP and RSVP programs have become important members of schools and integral to students' education. The study provides information and insight critical to any such program's success, and the Web site gives direct service providers and others a forum for discussing these issues.

For More Information

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Research Questions

This study focused on three primary questions: What impact do seniors volunteering in Foster Grandparent Programs (FGP) and Retired and Senior Volunteer Programs (RSVP) focused on reading tutoring have on students' performance in and attitudes about reading? What impact do these programs and experiences have on the senior volunteers? What elements of program design and practice lend to positive outcomes and experiences for students and senior volunteers?

This was a particularly compelling topic of study for several reasons:

- In 1996, the America Reads Challenge enlisted thousands of volunteers to read with and tutor students to help ensure they learn to read well and independently by the end of third grade. Many FGP and RSVP programs joined that effort, placing their senior volunteers in new elementary classrooms or refocusing the work they already did in schools throughout their communities. This study provided the opportunity to understand how national service programs were positively impacting students and seniors' unique contributions (and own benefits) to the initiative.
- Intergenerational relationships are widely valued, especially as they are thought to positively affect children's self-esteem, self-confidence, and social behaviors. This study provided the opportunity to examine deeply how those relationships impact children's attitudes toward school and reading, and how the relationships contribute to overall educational performance.
- This study provided an opportunity to show how seniors in FGP and RSVP programs provide valuable contributions to their organizations, schools, and the field of national service.

These questions and topics were explored through working closely with several programs to examine their program design, practices, and outcomes. Stakeholders in those programs would participate in in-depth interviews, and programs and schools would provide data for review. Research in the fields of reading, tutoring, and intergenerational relationships provided the backdrop for the investigation.

It was anticipated that much of the information about outcomes for students would come from FGP and RSVP Programming for Impact (PFI) data, and would show some increase in students' reading performance. The study assumed that program design, volunteer training and support, and tutoring environment would influence volunteer tutors' effectiveness with students. The dynamic of intergenerational relationships was also expected to play an important role in students' outcomes and volunteers' satisfaction.

The study sought to contribute to the work of the Corporation for National Service and the entire service field by:

- Showing that FGP and RSVP programs and senior volunteers have enhanced student learning and contributed to their success in learning to read
- Identifying practices that positively impact student attitudes and performance
- Identifying qualities of program design that contribute to volunteer effectiveness and help produce positive outcomes for both students and seniors
- Articulating how elements of program design, tutoring practices, tutoring environment, and intergenerational relationships work in concert to positively impact students
- Providing profiles of effective intergenerational America Reads or other tutoring programs, including how they have used PFI to design and report on outcomes

Methodology

In order to gather general information about tutoring in FGP and RSVP programs and to identify three to six programs that would participate in the in-depth study, state directors of the Corporation for National Service (the Corporation) and program directors were contacted by letter, e-mail, and telephone. All Corporation state offices were contacted, and e-mail postings to the National Senior Service Corps (NSSC) and America Reads listservs reached hundreds of potential participants. Though only five programs participated in in-depth interviews, many others provided specific information about their outcomes, training, assessments, and other practices.

Programs were chosen to participate in the in-depth portion of the study based on several considerations: design of tutoring program (in-school, individual or small group work with tutors, tutoring focused on reading and literacy skills), state office recommendations, willingness of volunteers and school partners to participate in interviews and site visits, availability of PFI or other data, and representative qualities of typical NSSC programs. Given those considerations, five sites were chosen: Atlantic County RSVP in Atlantic City, New Jersey; Monmouth County RSVP in Oakhurst, New Jersey; Nashville RSVP in Nashville, Tennessee; RSVP of Cape May County in Rio Grande, New Jersey; and Vancouver FGP in Vancouver, Washington. Three New Jersey programs were included because of their proximity during a site visit to the state. FGP and RSVP directors, tutoring program coordinators, volunteers, teachers, principals, and other school and district staff participated in telephone or in-person interviews. Interviews and visits were conducted beginning in December 1999 and concluded in March 2000. Conversations with directors and coordinators were ongoing and did not follow a set protocol. Interviews and data provided by program reports and other sources were analyzed in order to determine outcomes for students, outcomes for seniors, and key elements of design and practice.

Discussion of Findings

Only two programs conducted systematic, reliable assessment of student performance; these programs were also the only ones that had senior volunteers placed in classrooms where students received instruction in reading intervention programs and volunteers worked directly with reading specialists. They reported students improved at least one-and-a-half to two grade levels, in some cases three. Teachers also reported that these students maintained these levels of performance. Students showed improvement in letter recognition, word recognition, letter-sound correspondence, comprehension, spelling, and writing.

Teachers and volunteers with all five programs reported that students working with senior volunteers, regardless of the goals or structure of tutoring/reading sessions, showed increases in:

- self-confidence
- self-esteem
- participation in large groups
- motivation and interest in reading
- self-direction in reading
- attention or focus to reading-related activities

Some teachers noted that students seemed to have better attendance, and one principal felt that the senior tutors lent significantly to lowering the number of discipline problems during the year. However, no program or school partner conducted assessment of attitudes or behaviors. Reports of these changes were based on teachers', volunteers', and coordinators' as recalled during interviews.

No program assessed seniors' experiences, but interviews with volunteers, teachers, and coordinators identified these outcomes for seniors volunteering as reading tutors:

- increased self-confidence and self-esteem
- stronger personal motivation
- opportunities for social and professional interaction
- connections to neighborhood and/or community
- connections to other resources (e.g., social, health, financial)
- positive images about youth and schools

Volunteers who worked consistently with individual children and were involved in programs that used their skills well and actively engaged them in the classroom community reported strong feelings of self-efficacy, connections to their fellow volunteers, and commitment to their schools and programs.

The study identified several critical elements of program design and practice included:

- Performance-related goals that set guidelines for volunteers' work, ensuring seniors provide direct service and engaged in reading-related activities with students
- Development or use of assessment tools that gauge student performance in areas likely to be impacted by tutors
- Initial and follow-up training (by programs and/or schools) that address effective tutoring techniques and give seniors opportunities for hands-on learning
- Ongoing support by programs and schools that allows seniors to network with each other, teachers, and other school staff
- Access to information, training, and resources relevant to seniors' needs and interests, both personal and professional (e.g., tutoring, reading, etc.)
- Tutoring environments and sessions that allow seniors to engage in meaningful, direct service to students and that promote student learning; teachers who integrate senior volunteers into their instructional approach
- Tutoring sessions that incorporate elements of effective practice identified by research
- Frequent tutoring sessions that allow seniors and students to form relationships, which promote student learning and volunteer satisfaction
- Support and leadership from principals that help teachers engage seniors direct service and make volunteers feel welcome and effective

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, these are the key recommendations made. Though they are geared toward program coordinators, they are also instructive for teachers, other school staff, policymakers, and funders.

- Use goals and objectives in to structure and guide seniors' activities; work with long-time partners to transition volunteers to direct service
- Include goals and objectives for volunteers' outcomes; assess outcomes for seniors

- Design tutoring content based on proven practices and in alignment with program goals; work with partners when possible
- Design student assessments that measure both performance and attitudes; work with partners when possible
- Communicate frequently with classroom teachers, school contacts, and senior volunteers about program goals and everyday tutoring activities
- Provide opportunities for ongoing feedback and discussion among teachers and senior volunteers
- Provide initial and ongoing training on effective tutoring practices; identify and tap local resources for training
- Encourage schools to integrate senior volunteers into their community, engage them in direct service; and provide opportunities to network and develop new skills and knowledge
- Understand and talk about the value of intergenerational relationships to school partners, volunteers, and other stakeholders in specific terms of benefits and outcomes

Policymakers and funders must also provide guidance and support that foster effective design and practice in national service tutoring programs. They should provide coordinators with access to relevant material resources, clear procedures and reporting that help coordinators set appropriate goals and establish effective partnerships, and appropriate training and support in both volunteer management and tutoring programming.

The results of this study confirm what research says: volunteer tutors are most effective when they tutor students from lessons drawn from research-based curricula or material and have access to reading specialists. They suggest that the importance of these elements isn't only in creating a controlled environment for tutoring—where volunteers focus on appropriate skills and use appropriate techniques—but also that they create an environment in which volunteers are supported by readily available resources and included in the network of educators, staff, and other volunteers. Other elements such as principal support, school environment, and teacher background seem to play roles in creating such environments. Further research into the relationships of all of the elements of design and practice in program impact and volunteer effectiveness is warranted.

Common sense suggests that these relationships are positive and good. This study helps to articulate the role of intergenerational relationships in tutoring programs and lays the groundwork for further research into their impact on student learning and behaviors, and volunteer motivation and satisfaction.

There is much more to understand about the impact of these and other tutoring programs on students, volunteers, schools, and communities. Further research may help to show more precisely the changes in students attitudes and behaviors. Focusing on senior volunteers' motivations and outcomes is also an important area of study. Many fields, including education, national service, volunteerism, and child care, could also benefit from further investigation into the dynamic of intergenerational relationships and their impact on children and volunteers. At the very least, it is hoped that this study will initiate conversations at the local level among partners about how national service programs can work with teachers and schools to create or refine senior volunteer programs to better serve children, seniors, and communities.

INTRODUCTION

Schools have long valued volunteers' helping hands, and teachers have especially welcomed the calm and reliable presence of senior volunteers in their classrooms. Volunteers in the Foster Grandparent Program (FGP) and Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) have been involved in Head Start programs, classrooms, and other settings since 1965 and 1971, respectively. In the last several years, national service and America Reads in particular have helped expand the role of seniors in elementary classrooms, enhance the educational experience of thousands of children, and engage seniors in some of the most meaningful work of their lives.

We know that every child benefits from the individualized attention of a caring adult, and when that attention is geared toward reading, a child can improve his literacy skills as well as his attitudes about reading.¹ In the realm of national service, we know that individualized attention from a volunteer tutor is most effective when programs are thoughtfully designed and tutoring sessions incorporate research-based elements and proven practices.² And there are, indeed, important principles of volunteer management that help both national service programs and schools effectively support and engage reading tutors so that they can better assist student learning. These principles and practices apply whether the tutor is a 66-year-old RSVP volunteer wanting to stay active in retirement or a 20-year-old AmeriCorps member attending college.

However, more must be said about senior volunteers and the role they play in tutoring programs and schools. Every child benefits from the individualized attention of a caring adult, and when that adult is a senior volunteer, something special happens for both student and senior. That something unique is what FGP and RSVP program directors and educators have long valued but not fully articulated; what policymakers have assumed but not completely understood. And thus, its potential has never been fully realized. That something unique stems from the nature of the intergenerational relationship. The dynamic of that relationship—reciprocal and accepting—give rise to opportunities for learning, growth, and understanding for both participants. When that relationship is supported by program and school resources and staff, then it can become the foundation on which students build personal as well as academic success, and from which seniors make important connections to peers, the community, and a younger generation.

Many FGP and RSVP programs are already working closely with school partners to support and nurture those relationships. This study focuses on the elements of design and practice that school-based FGP and RSVP tutoring programs have used to help seniors

¹ See especially Wasik (1998) and Invernizzi, Juel, and Rosemary (1997). Though focused on tutoring by professionals and paraprofessionals, Pikulski (1994), Pinnell, Deford, Bryk, and Seltzer (1994), and Wasik and Slavin (1993) are also instructive for national service programs.

² See Corporation for National Service (1995), which encapsulates this research for FGP and RSVP programs.

feel confident, be effective and, positively impact students and their stations.³ How do education-focused, senior volunteer programs define their goals and work with partners to achieve them? What other elements of program design lend to strong partnerships with schools, volunteer effectiveness, and student success? What training and other support help senior tutors feel confident and be effective? What tutoring session designs have helped students behind in reading improve and volunteers realize their potential? These are the questions at the core of this investigation, which looks closely at five National Senior Service Corps programs (four RSVP and one FGP). What follows is an outline of the study's methodology and a review of its findings, first discussing the outcomes for both students and volunteers as reported by programs and as described by teachers, volunteers, and others in interviews. Next are outlined the ways in which programs and schools have worked together to design effective tutoring projects, create vital and robust tutoring environments, and provide effective volunteer training and ongoing support so that students and volunteers thrive. Based on the experiences of the partners and participants in these five programs (and what research tells us about effective program management and volunteer tutoring practices), recommendations are offered to help programs, educators, funders, and policymakers work together to create effective programs that serve children and senior volunteers and report on the full range of benefits each realizes. Finally, the five participating programs are profiled; these profiles represent a range of effective design elements but are not meant to be complete models for tutoring programs.

Research Questions

This study focused on three primary questions: What impact do seniors volunteering in Foster Grandparent Programs (FGP) and Retired and Senior Volunteer Programs (RSVP) focused on reading tutoring have on students' performance in and attitudes about reading? What impact do these programs and experiences have on the senior volunteers? What elements of program design and practice lend to positive outcomes and experiences for students and senior volunteers?

This was a particularly compelling topic of study for several reasons:

- In 1996, the America Reads Challenge enlisted thousands of volunteers to read with and tutor students to help ensure they learn to read well and independently by the end of third grade. Many FGP and RSVP programs joined that effort, placing their senior volunteers in new elementary classrooms or refocusing the work they already did in schools throughout their communities. This study provided the opportunity to understand how national service programs were positively impacting students and seniors' unique contributions (and own benefits) to the initiative.
- Intergenerational relationships are widely valued, especially as they are thought to positively affect children's self-esteem, self-confidence, and social behaviors.

³ NSSC programs use the word *station* to denote those agencies, organizations, and schools in which volunteers are placed. Throughout this study, the word station and school are used interchangeably.

This study provided the opportunity to examine deeply how those relationships impact children's attitudes toward school and reading, and how the relationships contribute to overall educational performance.

- This study provided an opportunity to show how seniors in FGP and RSVP programs provide valuable contributions to their organizations, schools, and the field of national service.

These questions and topics were explored through working closely with five programs to examine their program design, practices, and outcomes. Stakeholders in those programs participated in in-depth interviews, and programs and schools provided data for review. Research in the fields of reading, tutoring, and intergenerational relationships are the backdrop for the investigation.

It was anticipated that much of the information about outcomes for students would come from FGP and RSVP Programming for Impact (PFI) data, and would show some increase in students' reading performance. The study assumed that program design, volunteer training and support, and tutoring environment would influence volunteer tutors' effectiveness with students. The dynamic of intergenerational relationships was also expected to play an important role in students' outcomes and volunteers' satisfaction.

The study sought to contribute to the work of the Corporation for National Service and the entire service field by:

- Showing that FGP and RSVP programs and senior volunteers have enhanced student learning and contributed to their success in learning to read
- Identifying practices that positively impact student attitudes and performance
- Identifying qualities of program design that contribute to volunteer effectiveness and help produce positive outcomes for both students and seniors
- Articulating how elements of program design, tutoring practices, tutoring environment, and intergenerational relationships work in concert to positively impact students
- Providing profiles of effective intergenerational America Reads or other tutoring programs, including how they have used PFI to design and report on outcomes

Methodology

In order to gather general information about tutoring in FGP and RSVP programs and to identify programs to participate in the in-depth study, state directors of the Corporation for National Service (the Corporation) and program directors were contacted by letter, e-mail, and telephone. All Corporation state offices were contacted, and e-mail postings to the National Senior Service Corps (NSSC) and America Reads listservs reached hundreds of potential participants. Though only five programs participated in in-depth interviews,

many others provided specific information about their outcomes, training, assessments, and other practices.

The five programs participating in the in-depth portion of the study were chosen based on several considerations: design of tutoring program (in-school, individual or small group work with tutors, tutoring focused on reading and literacy skills), state office recommendations, willingness of volunteers and school partners to participate in interviews and site visits, availability of PFI or other data, and representative qualities of typical NSSC programs. Those chosen were: Atlantic County RSVP in Atlantic City, New Jersey; Monmouth County RSVP in Oakhurst, New Jersey; Nashville RSVP in Nashville, Tennessee; RSVP of Cape May County in Rio Grande, New Jersey; and Vancouver FGP in Vancouver, Washington. Three New Jersey programs were included because of their proximity during a site visit to the state. FGP and RSVP directors, tutoring program coordinators, volunteers, teachers, principals, and other school and district staff participated in telephone or in-person interviews. Interviews and visits were conducted beginning in November-December 1999 and concluded in March 2000. Interviews and data provided by program reports and other sources were analyzed in order to determine outcomes for students, outcomes for seniors, and key elements of design and practice.

It is important to note that this is not a comparative study nor an evaluative one: The profiles of programs are meant to provide a picture of how each has implemented America Reads or other reading tutoring in the context of program and school needs, resources, and goals. The bulk of the report is meant to provide practitioners and policymakers with a clearer understanding of how seniors volunteering as reading tutors impact students and, more generally, to articulate the importance of intergenerational relationships in the lives of children and seniors. It is an initial sketch of a vision in which intergenerational relationships can be integral to children's educational experience and national service a means to meaningful community involvement for seniors.

Findings and Discussion

Put simply, this study shows what teachers and national service program coordinators have long assumed: that students benefit from tutoring programs that match them with senior volunteers, and that seniors themselves also benefit from their experiences. However, in-depth interviews with coordinators, teachers, and seniors conducted for this study provide a detailed and complex picture of these outcomes. They reveal that the impact extends beyond reading scores to students' attitudes, behaviors, and values, and that the importance of intergenerational relationships formed around reading is greater than reports to funders can convey. The findings of this study make clear that such program outcomes and effectiveness stem from an array of practices, personnel, and resources that guide and support the senior-child relationship at the core of their programs.

Outcomes for Students

I have one student, a reading teacher begins, he's a bright-eye child in the second grade. When I tested him at the beginning of the year, he mastered the primer level but none of the basic first-grade material. I matched him with one of our RSVP volunteers who spent a lot of time teaching him about the world. They would take books and find the places they were about on the globe and talk about what it might be like in those places. They bonded so well. And now, after a year, he's moved up two-and-a-half grade levels. He's reading third and fourth grade words. He has absolutely blossomed.

Senior volunteer tutors do not take the place of teachers or parents. They do allow children extra time to practice reading, writing, and talking, giving each child individual attention and caring. Seniors' unique experiences, storytelling, and calm demeanor can captivate children, and their unconditional friendship creates a space where children feel learning is safe, fun, and rewarding.

Four programs participating in this study had performance-related goals, which are detailed in their Five Element Plans.⁴ In brief, those four programs' goals are:

1. Students' reading scores will increase by 20% (Atlantic County RSVP)
2. 80% of students served will show 1/2 to 1 grade-level increase in skills assessed (Nashville RSVP)

⁴ The Five Element Plan is a planning tool used by FGP and RSVP programs to set goals and objectives, and report outcomes. The five elements are community need, service activity, inputs, accomplishments, and impact. The Corporation for National Service produced the *Programming for Impact National Toolkit* (1997) to help programs effectively plan and report volunteer activities and outcomes.

3. 20% of students served will improve reading skills in particular areas, and read at grade level, enabling them to move to the next grade (RSVP of Cape May County)
4. Half of the children served will gain in reading abilities to rise to the mean or average of their class (Vancouver FGP)

The fifth program, Monmouth County RSVP, focuses primarily on reading and literacy enrichment, and its goals are geared toward general objectives and outcomes such as instilling a love of reading in children and providing classrooms in need with access to quality books.

Of the four programs with performance-related outcomes, two conducted assessments of students working with senior tutors. The Nashville RSVP developed an assessment that volunteers administered, and the Vancouver FGP relied on curriculum assessments used by teachers in reading classrooms where volunteers were placed to determine students' improvement. The other two programs did not specifically assess students' reading skills and performance.

In the two programs that conducted assessments, students working with RSVP or FGP volunteers improved at least one to two grade levels in reading. By the end of the year, those students were reading at or slightly above the level of their peers. In other words, a second-grader who began the school year reading first-grade material (and working with concepts and skills typically taught in the first grade) finished the year reading the same material as his peers and was ready to move into third grade. Reports also indicated that students improved in skills such as letter recognition, letter-sound correspondence, sight-word recognition, printing, writing, and comprehension.

There are several important things to take away from these findings. These two programs (e.g., the schools participating in the study) have distinct characteristics: a) seniors work closely with reading specialists who help structure tutoring sessions and guide tutors' activities; b) volunteer tutoring—from seniors as well as others—is integrated into students' year-long reading intervention program; and c) students work with either a senior or other volunteer tutor several times during the week, in addition to receiving instruction from the reading teacher. These characteristics are what enable tutoring sessions to be structured, students assessed, and thus outcomes reliably reported.

The other two programs, which have volunteers stationed in regular classrooms, may contribute to improvements in student performance, but they did not conduct systematic assessments of students served. These seniors' time in classrooms tends to be less structured and more responsive to the entire classroom's needs. One day, a senior might read to a small group of students, and the next help one or two students complete an in-class writing assignment. Volunteers' time with students is less likely to be discrete sessions. Assessment of students occurs in the normal course of instruction, and seniors' impact is understood by noting students' overall performance, e.g., grades in particular subjects or promotion to the next grade. It may be that the impact of such volunteer work cannot be accurately assessed. Invernizzi, Rosemary, Juel, and Richard (1997) suggest as

much. “Despite the good will and effort of volunteers, their relatively unsupervised tutoring [does not appear] to yield as significant gains as those obtained by trained paraprofessionals.”⁵ Yet, they found that nonprofessional volunteers could be effective “if trained and supported by certified teachers knowledgeable about how children learn to read. . . . The key to these successful volunteer efforts is likely to be the training and close supervision given to tutors”⁶ Programs that provide training and supervision also structure volunteers’ activities to address skills and concepts in ways can be assessed; those classrooms naturally have the ability and resources to conduct such assessments (and thus show volunteers’ impact on students). The loose structure of volunteers in regular classrooms engaged in a variety of activities prevents programs and teachers from determining seniors’ impact on student learning.

Perhaps more significant than these performance-related outcomes are the attitudinal and behavior impacts teachers, volunteers, and coordinators report. All five programs report that students working with senior volunteers, regardless of the goals or structure of tutoring/reading sessions, show increases in:

- self-confidence
- self-esteem
- participation in large groups
- motivation and interest in reading
- self-direction in reading
- attention or focus to reading-related activities

Some teachers note that these students seem to improve their attendance, and one principal feels that the senior tutors lent significantly to lowering the number of discipline problems during the year. “Kids want someone to set limits for them, even when they’re in trouble,” says Dr. Herbert Frederick, principal of Glenwood Avenue School in Wildwood, New Jersey. “The seniors help do that. They give the kids a personal connection that they value. I can say ‘What’s your grandpa going to say when she hears you’ve been doing this?’ And they really respond to that.”

Teachers and coordinators identify these attitudinal and behavioral impacts as some of the most important outcomes of seniors’ service, but none of the programs assessed these aspects of volunteers’ work. While a teacher or volunteer could provide an anecdote illustrating compelling changes in a student’s self-confidence or motivation, there were no structured, program-wide, or even station-specific evaluations of these elements of students’ literacy development. However, teachers, principals, and districts continue to

⁵ Invernizzi, Rosemary, Juel, and Richard (1997, p. 278).

⁶ Ibid (p. 279).

value and support NSSC programs even when those outcomes are not systematically observed or reported.

Assessment tools that gauge students' attitudes about reading exist and could be adapted to help identify changes in students served by senior tutors.⁷ Coordinators do not seem to be aware of these tools, and if teachers are, they may not consider them in relation to volunteer tutoring. Coordinators also perceive that funders do not value changes in students' attitudes or consider them valid indicators of a program's impact. If this perception is correct, it is not only counter to what educators—at both building and district levels—believe, it is at odds with research in reading and literacy development.⁸

Motivation, interest, and self-confidence are crucial to emerging and early readers' success. Indeed, those attitudes and self-concepts underpin much of the improvement of students' skills and knowledge shown on assessments; and, in a continuous positive feedback loop, students who perform well (and who receive positive feedback about that), feel more self-confident, continue to be interested in reading, and are thus motivated to learn new skills. A senior volunteer plays an important role in this positive feedback loop of student self-confidence and performance. Assessing those elements would help all participants in FGP and RSVP programs better understand the role and impact of seniors in children's reading and educational experiences and, thus, design more effective programs. Equally important, funders and policymakers would gain a fuller understanding of the impact of their dollars and initiatives.

Outcomes for Seniors

A Foster Grandparent talks about when she began volunteering at school seven years ago: When I first started I was absolutely dumbfounded. I hadn't been the best student in the world, and kids would come up with questions I didn't know the answers to. And if I did come up with an answer, I wasn't sure it was right. Since then, I've seen a change in myself. Working with the kids and the teachers has given me more of a sense of value. I am still amazed at how much of a difference I can make to one kid, and how much a kid can care about me. You can see that they need someone to help, to pay attention. It really lets me know that I'm important to people, and that I've done good for them. It's done a lot for my self-esteem. It gets me up and keeps me active. It makes the day worthwhile.

Volunteers with FGP and RSVP tutoring programs help children practice and improve their reading skills, but children are not the only beneficiaries of senior service. Many seniors are disconnected from their families and friends and isolated from their communities, but those who volunteer in school-based reading

⁷ See especially Elementary Reading Attitude Survey developed by McKenna and Kear (1990), and Reader Self-Perception Scale developed by Henk and Melnick (1995).

⁸ Both the Committee on the Prevention of Reading Difficulties in Young Children (1998) and Adams (1990) address the importance of attitude and motivation, the absence of which can create significant barriers for children learning to read.

programs become vital participants in their neighborhoods and communities, forming meaningful relationships with children, teachers, and peers. FGP or RSVP programs give seniors access to important resources that help them stay healthy, keep active, and continue learning. Tutoring and being a part of the classroom community lets them to put to use a lifetime of experience and continue learning new skills and ideas.

Senior volunteers in FGP and RSVP programs experience many of the same attitudinal changes that teachers report of students. And all coordinators feel that how seniors' benefit from their time reading with students is just as important as how students benefit. Teachers, principals, and the volunteers themselves value the programs as much for their services to seniors as they did for their services to children. Yet, just as with children's attitudinal outcomes, the benefits, changes, and outcomes seniors realize are not systematically assessed or reported by programs.

Seniors initially sought volunteer positions in which they could work with young readers for many of the same reasons seniors volunteer in other settings: to remain busy during retirement, use skills they have gained over the years, and give back some of their knowledge and expertise. All of those interviewed in this study express a strong belief in the importance of reading and desire to help children find pleasure in reading. Freedman (1998) found that, in mentoring programs, seniors "meet their own needs through providing the kind of attention, caring and commitment the youth craved."⁹ Similarly, seniors in these tutoring programs seem fulfilled with the most basic volunteer activities in classrooms. However, seniors who are placed in one-to-one tutoring relationships and supported by other program and school practices (e.g., training, ongoing discussions and interactions, etc.) seem more engaged with their work. They describe experiencing more benefits than their counterparts in other programs, talk about those benefits in greater detail, and consider volunteering at school one of the most meaningful activities they participate in, even when they initially thought the experience would not be a significant part of their lives.

Rather than leaving volunteers to meet their own needs, these programs and schools create environments where seniors' basic needs are met in specific ways that cultivate their skills, foster their personal growth, encourage their further involvement in the classroom or school:

- *Keep busy:* Seniors' time and commitment are appreciated by teachers, other school staff, and program staff, and their time is well used. Teachers are prepared when volunteers arrive, provide them with access to an array of tutoring and other resources, and frequently thank them in both formal and informal ways.
- *Feel useful and use skills:* Seniors are engaged in activities with students that allow them to use their skills in meaningful ways. Seniors also have opportunities to teach students problem-solving skills and have significant conversations. Seniors are able to frequently talk with teachers, other staff, and each other about

⁹ Freedman (1998, p. 66).

students, tutoring strategies, or simply chatting as colleagues do. Schools and programs also offer training, workshops, and other activities that help seniors learn new information and skills directly related to reading tutoring. In Nashville, involving seniors in assessing students helps them better understand the process and goals of tutoring, and allows them to see their impact on students and think about how they might adjust their tutoring approach to assist student learning.

- *Give back*: Seniors often begin their volunteering with a general notion of wanting to give back to their community. Freedman describes this as the “elder function, a propensity of the old to share the accumulated knowledge and experience they have collected.”¹⁰ In interviews for this study, seniors describe that general desire to give back, which often stemmed from a sense of religious or civic duty, developing into personal connections with students, teachers, and sometimes entire schools. General notions became specific actions, and a vague idea of community transformed into the faces and names of students, teachers, and peers. As one Nashville RSVP volunteer explains, “I’m a lot more concerned about these children than I thought I would be, and not the children collectively but the individual ones I work with. I really care about them.” What begins as a one-way relationship—senior giving to child—turns into many mutually beneficial relationships that connect seniors more strongly and significantly to children and schools, and enhance their long-term commitment to their national service programs.

In addition to these basic needs being met, seniors also describe these positive outcomes:

- increased self-confidence and self-esteem
- stronger personal motivation
- opportunities for social and professional interaction
- connections to neighborhood and/or community
- connections to other resources (social, health, financial)
- positive images about youth and schools

Volunteers who work consistently with individual children and are involved in programs that use their skills well and actively engage them in the classroom community report strong feelings of self-efficacy, connections to their fellow volunteers, and commitment to their schools and programs. The experience of sitting down with a particular child week after week and witnessing her progress makes a senior volunteer feel good. The school and program help seniors realize other significant personal and professional benefits when they focus seniors’ activities, allow them to connect with children, teachers, and peers, and provide relevant support and resources.

¹⁰ Ibid (pp. v)

Those personal connections between seniors and children also benefit schools. “Seniors saw our building as cold brick and mortar sucking up their tax dollars,” says one principal. “But when they came inside [to tutor] they saw warm, real bodies living here. They saw that it could be a haven for the community. And though I can’t say that [the RSVP tutoring program] is the only reason, we’ve come closer to passing a funding levy than we have in years.”

An RSVP tutoring program coordinator tells the story of a volunteer, Addie, now passed away: Addie was paired with a girl in kindergarten who was very quiet; she wouldn’t respond to anyone trying to help her. They began to work on writing her name, which began with the letter J. But the little girl wasn’t very familiar with the alphabet, and she struggled with getting the first letter down. One day Addie came to their session, pushed aside all of the books and games, and laid down a piece of paper with a fishhook taped to it.

“Do you know what this is?” Addie asked the girl, holding up the fishhook on the paper. She didn’t, so Addie told her about the fishhook, what it was used for. And then she told stories of how she used to fish with her father, right down to the squishy feeling of the worms and the wriggling fish.

“As I tell you these stories, why don’t you draw pictures of these fishhooks?” Addie said, giving the girl a piece of paper and a pencil. After a while, Addie took down the magnetic letter J from the blackboard and held it next to the fishhook. “See how close they are. They’re almost the same shape,” she said. The girl nodded and continued drawing. For several more sessions they continued drawing fishhook Js and the rest of the alphabet. In a few weeks the girl could write her entire name.

Addie wasn’t a retired teacher, and she probably wasn’t thinking about the complexity of reading and writing—symbols corresponding to sounds, coming together to form words and make meaning—when she told her fishing stories and helped her student trace and then write the letter J. “She just had a true love of reading, learning, and children,” the coordinator says. “She wanted to see the children succeed, and she helped this one child get over the hump of ‘I can’t.’”

These outcomes for students and seniors raise more questions than they answer. The picture of children’s literacy development is a complex collection of abilities and expectations, experiences and influences. A senior tutor is only a small part of that picture, but neither insignificant nor simple. Some approaches to outcome-based reporting oversimplify this picture and underestimate the impact of national service tutoring programs. Those programs encounter problems and questions when outcomes are their sole focus of reporting impact, especially if outcomes are limited to performance level or grades and disconnected from volunteers’ real practice in the classroom. The question is not, if senior tutors impact students’ performance and attitudes in reading, but

rather, how can programs and schools help senior tutors be most effective in serving students? In carefully reframing the questions, we move from *what* to *how*, from product to process (and effective practice). The very nature of these programs demands this, for what is education, indeed, what is living but an ongoing process of learning, growing, and connecting with ideas and others in meaningful ways. Shifting focus does not amount to casting aside accountability for national service programs. Instead, restating the question allows programs to more fully understand children's and seniors' outcomes, and thus report on the broad impact of federal and state dollars in their schools and communities.

Alone, scores recorded and grade levels increased fail to communicate some of the most important aspects and outcomes of FGP and RSVP programs. Focusing the discussion of impact in terms of design and practice draws a truer, more complete picture of national senior service in education. Pinnell, Deford, Bryk, and Seltzer (1994) invoke Vygotsky and others when they write about individualized tutoring in reading instruction as filling the "critical role of social interaction in learning. Inherent in social interaction is the development of learning and thinking."¹¹ Literacy development is intensely social, and senior tutoring meets this important need, as well as others, for children learning to read.

Seniors volunteers can and do enhance children's literacy development. They bring years of experience and skills, and a level of patience and acceptance that seems to come almost naturally. As part of programs like FGP or RSVP, seniors can better serve children and benefit from the resources, training, and support those programs provide. When national service programs and school partners, particularly classroom teachers, work together, seniors can become an integral part of children's literacy development and educational experience. In partnership, seniors, national service coordinators, and teachers can create positive, powerful learning experiences for children beginning to read. They build dynamic programs that benefit all participants in a myriad of ways. By understanding the *how*—the planning and practices of these programs—we gain a fuller understanding of the impact of seniors—and dollars—have on students, and begin to recognize how education and national service can come together to create nurturing classrooms, effective schools, and strong communities.

Elements of Design and Practice

What makes senior tutors most effective? Seniors bring their own skills and experiences to tutoring sessions, but behind them are national service programs with a support structure of staff, practices, and resources that can enhance their natural assets and increase their effectiveness. Four main elements of program design and practice were examined in this study: program design, volunteer training and support, tutoring environment, and tutoring relationships. In addition, other elements of varying importance in programs' success and volunteers' feelings of effectiveness were also identified. These included principal involvement, school environment, teacher background, program staff and background.

¹¹ Pinnell, Deford, Bryk, and Seltzer (1994, p. 12).

Program Design

This study explored five areas of program design in an effort to understand how they contribute to volunteer effectiveness and program success. These areas were:

- Program goals (defined by Five Element Plans and as understood by coordinators, teachers, volunteers, and others)
- Partnerships
- Design of tutoring content and sessions
- Assessment or Programming for Impact (PFI)
- Established modes of communication (between and among all participants and partners)

Programs in the study were not compared to each other or to an established criteria because the purpose is not to evaluate. Rather, the intent is to understand how programs effectively served the unique needs of their partners and communities. Internal consistency, rather than conformity to a model, was key: Within a program, were goals realistic and achievable? Did stakeholders have a common understanding of the goals? Did the design of tutoring sessions facilitate achieving the goals? Did assessment align with both the content of sessions and overall goals? Did communication among partners reflect the kind of relationships necessary to achieve the goals?

In the programs studied, design was the foundation on which effectiveness was built. Nearly all other factors at play in their success—training, support, environment, relationships—grew from a framework constructed around established goals and the means provided to achieve them. The more design was considered and programs carefully constructed, the stronger those other elements were, and thus the more volunteers and students benefited.

Goals. Goals seemed to be the linchpin in effective program design and implementation. Styles and Morrow (1992) posit that “how a [mentoring] program is structured and implemented can have a significant effect on relationship formation.”¹² In these tutoring programs, goals either guided implementation and practice or existed independent of what occurred in classrooms or tutoring sessions. Programs were most successful—e.g., students showed improvement, volunteers were satisfied, and school partners were committed—when goals were a means of structuring how seniors and students met, guiding what they did together, and identifying other elements and practices necessary, such as communication with teachers, training volunteers, and assessing students.

FGP and RSVP programs often come to school partners with a defined set of goals, and thus must help teachers and schools adapt to their existing framework. Effective programs clearly and frequently communicated their goals to school partners, and in

¹² Styles and Morrow (1992, p. 59).

some cases worked with teachers to refine the stated goals in order to align them with the realities of school resources. The programs best able to measure student outcomes and report on their impact articulated in their Five Element Plans the specific skills volunteers would focus on while working with students, which included letter recognition, letter-sound correspondence, and word recognition. When programs set goals to increase student performance without articulating (to themselves, volunteers, and partners) the specific means or skills by which this would be accomplished, they created a disconnection between what seniors should do in classrooms or sessions and what they actually did. In some instances, a motivated teacher planned appropriate activities or volunteers planned their own sessions, but it left effective practice to chance. And such teacher or volunteer self-direction was not likely to happen when other elements of effective design were absent: teachers did not understand the role of volunteers in their classrooms; volunteers did not receive training in tutoring techniques; and volunteers' time was not divided into discrete sessions with students. When these factors combined, seniors were less likely to engage in direct service to students, and thus less likely to impact their reading skills and performance.

Partnerships. FGP and RSVP programs with reading tutoring projects had a variety of school partners, some of whom they had worked with for years and some who were new to the program and to the concept of NSSC. Partnerships, whether long-term or new, did not weigh heavily as an isolated factor in program effectiveness. Programs that had weak, informal relationships with teachers and schools were as effective—and volunteers just as satisfied—as when they had strong working relationships with stations in which they collaborated to develop content and training, and perform assessment. Instead, clear communication with partners about program goals and parameters for seniors' activities seemed to be the most significant factor in this aspect of program effectiveness.

Assessment and Programming for Impact. While programs working with new schools often experienced growing pains, these partnerships allowed coordinators to design tools and integrate assessment into seniors' work from the outset of tutoring. In contrast, old partners sometimes posed challenges for coordinators seeking to shift seniors' from helping roles in classrooms to direct service to students. In some cases, PFI served as a catalyst for programs and schools to revisit partnership goals, review shared assumptions, and reconfigure volunteers' work. PFI allowed them to define new goals together, discuss the best ways to achieve them, and plan new activities accordingly. Many factors seemed to contribute to a program's ability and propensity to redefine partnerships: program staff, school staff, school needs, an understanding methods of assessment and valuing their results, to name a few. Some programs had stations that persisted in using seniors as helpers and had not redirected those partnerships; their primary obstacles were lack of time and/or staff and a lack of understanding or buy-in into direct service and assessment by either program or school staff.

All FGP and RSVP programs were concerned about reporting seniors' impact on student learning. In response, some developed simple but effective tools that volunteers used; others worked in conjunction with school partners to locate or develop appropriate assessments. Still others struggled to find effective ways of gauging impact. All programs, regardless of effectiveness of their assessment methods, felt that the ways in

which they reported seniors' activities and students' outcomes failed to communicate the extent of their success. Program, school, and school district staff valued FGP and RSVP volunteers because of the impact their presence had on students' attitudes and behaviors. And they recognized the positive impact of volunteering on seniors' health, attitudes, and well being. However, few programs systematically assessed or reported impact on students' attitudes and behaviors, and none reported outcomes for seniors.

Established modes of communication. Goals laid the foundation of tutoring programs' success, and communication provided the connections that linked not only seniors and teachers but also goals and practice. As crucial as communication was, programs did not seem to systematically design ways to connect with volunteers, teachers, and other stakeholders beyond standard monthly or quarterly meetings for volunteers. As programs grew, some developed forms to make reporting volunteers' hours easier for school staff. This allowed for conversations with teachers to be purposeful rather than task or process oriented.

Programs whose main school contacts were also teachers who hosted seniors had better and more effective communication—problems were addressed in a timely manner, feedback was given and received frequently, and volunteers' work was closely aligned with program goals. When information had to filter through a school contact, such as a volunteer coordinator, to teachers whose students worked with seniors, there were frequently misunderstandings about program goals and seniors' roles. Perhaps not unsurprisingly, FGP and RSVP programs with coordinators dedicated to America Reads or tutoring-focused programs (e.g., Programs of National Significance, or PNS) had more effective communication with school partners and volunteers. This was not simply a matter of more personnel equals more contact. These coordinators were more likely to ask for and receive meaningful feedback from teachers and volunteers. The contact between participants tended to be more content-oriented and addressed significant issues, particularly planning, administering, and reporting on student assessments, a time-consuming aspect of a coordinator's job. These coordinators were also ones who developed student assessments themselves or worked with teachers or other school staff to develop and administer assessments.

All programs had fairly frequent communication with their senior volunteers either in person or by telephone. While FGP staff saw their volunteers once a month at mandatory in-service meetings, the RSVP programs held optional trainings or meetings each quarter. These trainings were for all volunteers, most of whom were not stationed in schools or tutoring programs. Both FGP and RSVP coordinators served as many seniors' primary support in the community, one of a few to whom a volunteer could turn to for advice, problem solving, and caring. While this was an important role for programs and coordinators, it did not afford the same benefits as those conversations and meetings that allowed for meaningful conversations focused on the many aspects of tutoring.

Volunteers communication with each other was largely organized through FGP in-service and RSVP quarterly meetings. Some volunteers did work more as a coherent group at their stations, largely a result of their host teachers' approach. These seniors seemed to

feel the most connected with students, their classrooms, and each other; they reported feeling particularly efficacious and satisfied in their volunteer experience.

Tutoring session content. There is a great deal of research about the components and practices of effective tutoring sessions, and much of that is applicable to volunteer tutoring programs. Reading researchers and practitioners agree that effective sessions with students behind in reading have four components: rereading familiar texts, phonics, writing, and reading new material.¹³ NSSC programs are also guided by *Principles and Key Components*, which identifies keys to effective design as research-based tutoring practices, well structured sessions, coordination with school and/or classroom, frequent sessions, and supervision of tutors by a reading specialist.

Each program in this study configured its tutoring sessions differently based on its goals, resources, and school needs. In general, they can be divided into four designs: enrichment, in-class volunteers, independent volunteers, and reading classroom volunteers. In this order, they show an increasing focus on reading skills, and therefore, an increase in impact shown on students' reading performance.

Enrichment. The enrichment program (Monmouth County RSVP's Book Club) had distinct reading sessions of 20 to 30 minutes, one time a week. Volunteers (not all of whom were seniors) read to small groups of pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, and first grade students from books provided by the RSVP program. All students in the classroom served by the volunteers participated; reading sessions took place either in the classroom or in the gymnasium/cafeteria. Books were frequently related to topics covered in students' classrooms; the coordinator observed classrooms or spoke with teachers about upcoming topics in order to gather appropriate books for sessions. Most books contained summaries and suggested questions, methods of reading, and other hints so that volunteers could emphasize the learning or skill elements in the books (e.g., stress rhyming words, sound out particularly difficult words, etc.). These summaries and hints were written by the coordinator. Volunteers often engaged students in conversations before, during, and after reading sessions, but did not use a structured lesson plan, engage in specific skill-related activities, and did not receive training in tutoring techniques.

In-class volunteers. In two programs (Atlantic County RSVP and RSVP of Cape May County), seniors worked closely with classroom teachers to meet the changing needs of students and the classroom. Their activities varied, one day working with a small group of students on an in-class writing assignment, and on another working with an individual student to complete a homework assignment, or perhaps reading together while the rest of the class pursued another activity. Because they usually worked with the entire class and could be in a classroom for several hours, volunteers did not focus solely on reading or always work with individual students. Teachers directed seniors' activities and structured them based on daily activities and student needs. In the classrooms observed,

¹³ See Invernizzi, Juel, Rosemary, and Richards (1997, p. 228).

volunteers did not have tutoring sessions, per se. They engaged in general, non-structured tasks of varying lengths of time, such as reading to small groups of students or listening to students read brief compositions.

Independent volunteers. This design is, in fact, a variation of the Nashville RSVP's Friends Learning in Pairs (FLIP) program, described below. Because the ways volunteers worked with teachers and engaged students during sessions differed significantly in the two participating stations, they are discussed separately. Seniors stationed at Hermitage Elementary worked individually with students in 30- to 40-minute sessions, primarily reading with students from books students brought from their classroom. Volunteers primary contact was a volunteer coordinator; they rarely had extended interactions with students' classroom teachers. They received a schedule of students from the school's volunteer coordinator each day, pulled out each student from his or her classroom, read with the child in a quiet area in the library or hallway, and moved to the next student. The content of sessions was always focused on reading or related skills such as spelling, and volunteers were largely self-directed. Based on the RSVP program's training—received by these and the volunteers described below—seniors worked with students on skills such as letter and word recognition. Students who met with RSVP volunteers had been identified by teachers as needing extra work on those skills, but direct connections of tutoring to classroom work occurred mostly through coincidence, such as the child bringing a book related to what he had been working on in class or, in some cases, the teacher choosing the book for him.

Reading classroom. This design placed volunteers in classrooms where students were pulled out to receive reading instruction, sometimes in a particular intervention program. Nashville's FLIP program at McCann Elementary and both stations of the Vancouver FGP program used this design. Though they shared many characteristics, they differed in one significant way. Both had seniors working with individual students on reading and literacy-related activities drawn from research-based curricula. Reading specialists in all three classrooms developed lesson plans or provided other guidance for sessions. Reading teachers worked with students' classroom teachers to coordinate activities and topics. They, in turn, designed their own lessons and planned tutors' activities based on that information, helping to ensure that students kept up with their regular classrooms.

FLIP volunteers were in their reading classroom, on average, two to four hours a week; these students also worked with a variety of other volunteers during the week including students from nearby Vanderbilt University. Foster Grandparents in both schools tutored and worked with students 20 hours a week, generally four hours a day, five days a week; some of these students also worked with other community volunteers during the week.

FLIP volunteers' sessions drew from the Accelerated Reader curriculum and resources, and the Vancouver Foster Grandparents' sessions followed a specific

format based on the Help One Student to Succeed (HOSTS) curriculum. At Sacajawea Elementary, Foster Grandparents met daily with the reading specialist, special education teacher located in the same room, and teaching assistants as part of the classroom team. These meetings let them know who they would work with; students' folders guided seniors on what books to read and activities to pursue. At Lincoln Elementary, tutoring sessions had a standard structure: based on his reading level, a student read a book with or to the Grandparent, worked with the Grandparent to correctly understand the story, wrote a summary of the book, and then read that summary to the reading specialist who checked it for spelling, grammar, and talked to the student to ensure his understanding. Students progressed through different books and moved on to higher levels as they mastered concepts and skills. The curriculum and seniors' frequent presence in the classroom made their daily work in both classrooms routine and predictable.

The differences in length of time and frequency of tutoring between FLIP and the FGP program did not seem to be a significant factor in student improvement, suggesting that the structure and content of tutoring sessions is more important. Students working with RSVP volunteers improved in their reading abilities and attitudes just as those working with FGP volunteers. And both sets of seniors were satisfied, felt that they made an important difference to students, and showed long-term commitment to their national service program and schools. While some Foster Grandparents had been at their stations for more than five, 10, even 15 years, many RSVP volunteers had been tutoring students since the program's inception in 1993.

In all of the programs studied, teachers were the primary architects of seniors' activities with students. While coordinators occasionally worked with teachers to design and deliver appropriate tutor training, most were not closely involved with seniors' day-to-day activities with students. This made communication, agreement on goals, and parameters for volunteers' activities all the more important, particularly when a program's goals were performance oriented. Poor, infrequent, or inconsequential communication, among other factors, created and often exacerbated problems of ensuring direct service, reliably assessing seniors' impact, and providing relevant resources and support to seniors.

Above all else, this study shows that both FGP and RSVP volunteers can and do impact students in significant ways, and that service is a meaningful part of *all* senior volunteers' lives. And like some mentoring studies,¹⁴ this study shows that sound, thoughtful design of tutoring programs can facilitate and expand volunteers' positive impact on children, and schools. Additionally, it demonstrate that RSVP and FGP volunteers can be successfully integrated into classrooms using research-based reading curriculum or intervention programs. While senior and other tutors did not take the place of teachers or even of paraprofessionals working individually and in small groups with students, their sessions allowed students to practice and hone the skills they were learning from teachers and assistants. Indeed, seniors were invaluable members of these classrooms.

¹⁴ See Herrera, Sipe, and McClanahan (2000); Freedman (1998); and Sipe (1996).

Volunteer Training and Support

It is not impossible to imagine a senior working in a classroom and connecting with teachers and children without the backdrop of support that accompanies NSSC volunteers. However, the support structure provided by FGP and RSVP programs, in partnership with schools, transforms an individual's time from a momentary helping hand producing an isolated result into a corps of hands working in concert generating many and varied benefits, cultivating long-term commitment, and planting the seeds of success—and service—in a younger generation.

How did FGP and RSVP programs support seniors to make them comfortable and effective in their service experience? The five programs were examined with regard to the initial training given to seniors, follow-up or ongoing training, opportunities for volunteer feedback and interaction, and available training and related resources for both volunteers and program coordinators.

Initial training. For the most part, programs' initial training provided a basic orientation to goals and services. Seniors learned some specific information as to what to expect from schools and from the children with whom they would be working. The FGP and RSVP programs with seniors in reading classrooms provided training specifically related to reading, literacy development, and tutoring techniques. A reading specialist, who hosted FLIP volunteers, provided training to the entire program's tutoring volunteers. Initial training set a tone for seniors' entire service experience. That first meeting let seniors know who to turn to with questions or concerns, and created a lasting impression of how responsive the program would be when they did.

Interestingly, no volunteers felt stranded by not having an intensive or extensive introduction to tutoring techniques. Most expected to receive such training and guidance from their host schools; however, the extent to which they did varied. For coordinators, the initial training's importance lay in familiarizing volunteers with the program's procedures (mileage reimbursement, time sheets, school procedures, etc.) and in making seniors feel comfortable with what to expect from their station and what to do if they encountered a problem. For seniors, the most important part of the initial orientation was learning about program goals and understanding their role in achieving those goals. This helped them understand their daily activities and long-term goals with students. Those who did receive tutoring-specific training said that it was the most valuable aspect of their initial training, citing the opportunity to practice techniques through role-plays as particularly helpful.

Ongoing training. FGP and RSVP programs used ongoing training and meetings to address issues outside of seniors' volunteer experiences. As they have for many years, NSSC programs offered quarterly or monthly in-services as a means of educating seniors on topics of particular interest to them, including physical and mental health issues, as well as government or community initiatives such as the census. In-services generally took the form of guest speakers rather than interactive training designed for skill

development. Occasionally, programs offered in-services particularly suited for volunteers in tutoring stations, such as early childhood development, but these usually occurred in the form of informational talks rather than hands-on workshops.

FGP volunteers are required to attend monthly in-services, and generally found them to be informative, helpful, and enjoyable. Most mentioned their value in social terms. RSVP volunteers in the programs studied were not required to attend quarterly in-services, and most of the seniors interviewed did not attend. Those who did were active participants in the senior center where the RSVP program was hosted.

Ongoing, skill-related training fell mostly to stations and teachers. School partners varied in the initial and ongoing training they offered to seniors. Volunteers in reading classrooms received an initial orientation to tutoring practices, reading curriculum, session structure, and resources. However, they received most of their instruction and guidance “on-the-job” from teachers, classroom assistants, or other volunteers. Volunteers in regular classrooms received no organized training, and teachers provided guidance or assistance on an individual, as-needed basis.

Because FGP and RSVP programs had volunteers placed in many different kinds of positions, monthly and quarterly in-services were, of necessity, general; they were, indeed, the only opportunity coordinators had to address seniors’ own development and concerns. However, few programs worked with stations to ensure that seniors received more extensive, ongoing training that would help them be more effective as volunteer tutors. This disconnection occurred in conjunction with several aspects of program design: programs that aimed to increase student performance (and, therefore needed structured tutoring activities delivered by trained volunteers) but did not train or ensure their volunteers received training also had weak partnerships with schools and infrequent or inconsequential communication with classroom teachers. Not surprisingly, these programs were also ones that did not have a coordinator dedicated to managing and supporting school-based volunteers. In several cases, program directors coordinated hundreds of volunteers in dozens of stations, only a few of which were in schools, with a staff consisting of themselves and a half- or full time administrative assistant.

Opportunities for feedback and interaction. Appropriate initial and ongoing training was crucial for senior volunteers to feel effective, and contributed significantly to their ability to positively impact students’ performance and attitudes. However, volunteers stated that opportunities to talk with teachers, other volunteers, and coordinators were far more valuable than any training they had or could receive. General conversations with teachers and other school personnel gave volunteers a sense that their time was valued and their efforts had impact. Volunteers learned about the school and felt more a part of its community, and therefore, were more engaged during the hours they were at school.

More significant were the conversations seniors had with host teachers before, during, and after reading sessions. Before sessions, they talked about basic things—who would work with which students, what would they work on, etc. During sessions, they turned to the teacher for assistance or guidance, had students share their successes, and otherwise addressed problems that arose. After sessions, they updated teachers on students’

progress, talked about what strategies worked, asked questions, and got a sense of what would come next. This close communication and coordination between teachers and seniors occurred in reading classrooms, where teachers were focused solely on reading instruction and volunteers' activities were structured to address particular reading skills and content. Participating in daily planning meetings made FGP volunteers at Sacajawea Elementary feel a part of the staff, a sentiment echoed by both teachers and the principal. While such conversations and involvement could ostensibly take place between regular classroom teachers and in-class volunteers—where volunteers work with students on a variety of tasks—this was not observed.

Seniors volunteering in any capacity gravitated toward each other. Their social interactions, as well as casual, inevitable interactions with teachers and work with students, made them satisfied and gave them a feeling of making a difference—even when other factors (e.g., goals, training, and session design) suggested their efforts might not directly impact student performance. As long as their basic needs were met, seniors felt good and effective, and continued to serve.

Seniors placed in reading classrooms also reported having many and meaningful opportunities to talk with other volunteers, including other seniors, community volunteers, and AmeriCorps members. They talked about general strategies, particular students, issues in education, or simply socialized. Like their conversations with principals and staff, these moments of connection with peers lent to a general sense of belonging and of being appreciated. Most Foster Grandparents valued their time with each other during monthly in-services but largely for the social interaction. More meaningful conversations about practice occurred at their schools, both with companion FGP volunteers and school staff.

While volunteers in Monmouth County's Book Club rarely spoke with teachers, they did meet each week as a group, with the coordinator, prior to meeting with students; as a result, there was a strong sense of cohesiveness among the volunteers and, more than volunteers in other programs, an awareness of the national scope of the America Reads initiative.

Volunteers with such opportunities tended to interact had a stronger sense of positively affecting students, a clearer sense of the actual impact they had, a better understanding of their role in the program, and a higher sense of satisfaction with their experience. While initial and ongoing training were important for volunteers to feel comfortable and knowledgeable, opportunities for feedback and interaction helped them feel effective and connected to their stations and programs. At school they could ask questions during sessions, find assistance from teachers and assistants, and feel part of the classroom team. Formal and informal conversations with teachers, assistants, and peers built their self-confidence and knowledge-base, and in some cases helped integrate senior volunteers into the school staff. Within the program, opportunities for feedback and interaction did not often address the substance of volunteers' work but provided two important things: social interaction with peers and access to health, financial, and social information and resources.

Aside from monthly or quarterly in-services, programs provided volunteers with opportunities to offer feedback and talk with coordinators on an individual, ongoing basis. Frequently, coordinators were seniors' primary support person for both volunteer and personal matters. The tone set in the initial orientation went a long way toward seniors' willingness to continue volunteering and their belief in a program's open-door-policy for concerns and questions, and their propensity to use it when the time came. The relationships between volunteer and coordinator fulfilled important emotional and practical needs of seniors. Coordinators did everything from shuttle seniors to and from school to helping them access social services to visiting them after surgery.

Available training and resources. Schools that hosted FGP and RSVP volunteers in reading classrooms included seniors in training and workshops offered by school staff, school districts, local universities, and others. The curriculum used in these classrooms provided volunteers with a plethora of resources and information, and working under the supervision of a reading specialist helped them use those resources most effectively. For the most part, though, programs and schools were not pro-active in their ongoing training of volunteers. The (unspoken) approach seemed to be "if a volunteer wants more information or training, she'll find a way to get it."

Training for coordinators did not seem to be a major concern for programs, though many wanted more opportunities to meet with local and regional FGP and RSVP staff to share ideas, network, and collaborate. Because many programs rely on host teachers and schools to train their volunteers in tutoring techniques, many did not find large, national trainings useful, though the resources and the pedagogical framework those trainings provide helped coordinators gain a foothold in the discipline and better work with schools. If coordinators took on a more active role in structuring tutoring sessions, these trainings and resources would be extremely helpful. Many coordinators had education backgrounds (e.g., special education, early education), which they said helped them better communicate with teachers and understand classrooms' needs.

Tutoring Environment

When it comes to tutoring, we know what kind of environment and practices are most effective, and though much of the research focuses on tutoring by professionals or paraprofessionals, general principles about effective practice for impact on student learning can be applied to volunteer tutoring programs. Invernizzi, Juel, Rosemary, and Richards (1994) identify four components of effective reading tutoring sessions: "rereading familiar texts, phonics, writing, and guided reading of new materials."¹⁵ Other research tells us that one-to-one or small group interactions are most beneficial and that talking and writing are as important as reading.¹⁶ Pikulski (1994) and Pinnell, Deford, Bryk, and Seltzer (1994) discuss instructional components more attuned to professional intervention programs that include tutoring, such as focusing on the first grade, prepared lessons, interesting books with varying levels of difficulty for students to choose from, instruction with attention to word and letter identification, as well as writing. NSSC

¹⁵ Invernizzi, Juel, Rosemary, and Richards (1994, p. 228); See also Wasik (1998).

¹⁶ See Invernizzi, Juel, Rosemary, and Richards, (1994); Juel (1996).

programs are guided by the Corporation's *Principles and Key Components of High Quality America Reads Programs* (1995), which synthesizes much of this research into several components to help programs create tutoring environments that promote positive impact on students:

- Research-based elements that produce achievement in student reading
- Well-structured tutoring sessions
- Close coordination with schools (and, by extension, classrooms)
- On-going training and supervision for tutors
- Frequent and regular sessions
- Assessment and evaluation

A recent study of AmeriCorps tutoring programs described programs with AmeriCorps tutors in relation to extensive criteria drawn from these effective practices.¹⁷ This study of NSSC programs did not undertake such a survey, but instead sought to understand in detail how a few FGP and RSVP programs have created tutoring environments and used effective practices to positively impact students; additionally, this study examined the relationship between those environments and how seniors felt about their volunteer experiences. How, when, where, and how often did tutoring take place? What were the challenges programs faced in creating environments that promote positive impact? What results did programs and teachers reported? Did the environment affect the satisfaction and effectiveness that seniors felt? These were the questions at issue in this portion of the study.

Somewhat predictably, programs with seniors stationed in reading classrooms had tutoring environments and sessions that reflect the effective practices discussed above. In those two programs (Nashville RSVP-FLIP and Vancouver FGP), seniors worked one-on-one with students in 35- to 45-minute sessions based on lessons designed by reading specialists or structured by curriculum; both used tutoring to supplement reading and regular classroom instruction. Supervision by reading specialists, access to curriculum-based resources, and easy access to student records, including instructional plans, assessment, and weekly schedules, allowed both seniors and students to be self-directed, fostering a sense of control over learning and tutoring, and strengthening the relationship between tutoring pairs.

Programs with seniors stationed in regular classrooms had the most difficulty creating environments that promoted effective practices. Seniors rarely worked in distinct tutoring sessions with individual students, and the content of their work was dictated by classrooms' daily needs rather than guided by an overall lesson plan focused on reading skills. The Book Club enrichment program had seniors working with students in small

¹⁷ Moss, Hiller, and Moore (1999, November).

groups, reading to and with pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, and first grade students in 20- to 30- minute sessions. The intent and content of these sessions were not performance-related, but tutors did create welcoming, positive spaces in which children were encouraged to participate and take risks with reading. While this program did not report on performance outcomes for students, teachers described in interviews how students experienced attitudinal changes similar to those students served by other programs experienced (e.g., increased self-confidence, self-esteem, etc.).

Where seniors were engaged in one-to-one work, programs encouraged school partners to consistently pair students with the same senior tutors, but most classrooms could not manage the same pairings on a weekly basis. This occurred because students in need outnumbered seniors, and teachers wanted all students to have the opportunity to work and connect with a senior; additionally, students' instruction in reading classrooms frequently had them engaged in different activities from week to week. In general, RSVP-FLIP seniors worked with the same students once every other week, and Vancouver Foster Grandparents two to three times a week. Readers in the enrichment program consistently worked with the same groups of students every week. Seniors in regular classrooms interacted with the same students each week, but, as described earlier, did not typically work individually or in discrete tutoring sessions with students.

Not all schools partnered with the Nashville and Vancouver programs structured seniors' activities so precisely, but those participating in this study provide insight into the steps stations and programs have taken together to create environments that promote learning and lend to impact. In addition to having volunteers placed in reading classrooms, coordinators worked with schools and teachers to:

- Set appropriate, realistic performance-related goals and objectives given both partners' needs and resources
- Align seniors' activities with program goals and objectives
- Identify appropriate locations for tutoring sessions; agree on frequency and intensity (length) of sessions
- Ensure seniors receive minimum training and/or assistance in tutoring techniques
- Create or identify appropriate assessment tools
- Assess students on skills that seniors practice with students at the beginning and end of school year

These elements allowed the FLIP program to place seniors in settings other than reading classrooms, and probably plays a significant role in those seniors'—described earlier as independent volunteers—had on student performance.

Just as those programs that created positive environments provide insight into effective program practices, those that do not, present interesting issues that must be considered.

What factors lent to the disjunction between performance-related goals and tutoring activities that could impact student performance? Schools vary in their needs and resources; not all have reading specialists on hand, classrooms dedicated to reading instruction, or other areas where individualized tutoring sessions can take place; indeed, not all schools and teachers may want to integrate volunteers into instruction in this manner. Program coordinators must strike a balance between their goals and schools' needs and resources, but the flexibility extended to schools can often devolve into miscommunication between partners and disconnection of program goals and seniors' activities.

Particularly with in-class volunteers, responsibility for structuring volunteers' activities fell on teachers; their abilities to create effective environments and structure appropriate activities were frustrated by limited time and resources, and an unclear understanding of program goals and guidelines. The helping hands of a volunteer could be quickly and aptly put to use in classrooms: decorating a bulletin board, putting away art supplies, reading to a small group of students, or running paperwork to the office. Several teachers who used seniors in helping roles saw the possibilities of their volunteers' serving as reading tutors but were not likely to introduce such changes on their own: they did not have the time to define tasks, train volunteers, and coordinate their activities on a daily or weekly basis. Nor did they think that the program would allow them to use volunteers in such a way.

It is clear that volunteers *can* impact students' performance when they work directly together, and direct service seems to give volunteers themselves more meaningful experiences. Though no seniors were dissatisfied with their volunteer experiences, in-class and enrichment volunteers did not feel as connected to their host schools or feel as effective as their counterparts who worked directly with reading teachers.

Seniors also enhanced the quality of their tutoring environments in ways not addressed by most research. Studies of elders in mentoring programs and child-elder care programs have shown that the strongest, most satisfactory relationships are formed between children and seniors when programs free pairs to connect personally: children find support and acceptance in seniors, and seniors meet their needs by providing support and acceptance. Styles and Morrow (1992) found that seniors who mentored children and youth supported their mentees unconditionally, taught problem-solving and coping skills, and took their interests seriously; this made the children feel cared for and valued. Freedman (1994) also cites the unique position senior mentors are in: an adult who is neither a parent nor a teacher. As such, they are "left free from [such] role constraints and untainted by the mark of authority."¹⁸

Much the same can be seen in programs that match seniors and children in tutoring relationships. When those seniors work individually with students, they formed meaningful, strong relationships, which in turn created a positive, unique atmosphere in the classroom where they met. "There's a sense of community," says one Foster Grandfather. "The kids and I get along as any kid and their grandparent. We love each

¹⁸ Freedman (1994, p. 66). See also Stremmel, Travis, Kelly-Harrison, and Hensely (1994).

other. There's hugging and confiding in me about personal problems. I always look forward to going to that school, and they look forward to seeing me." Teachers create welcoming atmospheres in their classrooms, for the seniors as well as children, and grandparent figures lend a degree of acceptance and consistency that can put children at ease, making learning to read safe and interesting. Senior men lend a particular quality to these environments and valued by both students and teachers. "So many of the kids need a grandfather-type," says one teacher "I had one student who lost his grandpa this year, and coming to work with his Foster Grandpa is one of his favorite things in the whole world. He comes in here every morning to give him a hug. Sometimes he won't even say a word, just give him a hug. His Foster Grandpa fills that void for him."

Tutoring Relationships

I wasn't sure I'd like it at first, says a Foster Grandparent beginning his fifth year. But the longer I worked at it, the more I like it. I was kind of embarrassed by the kids coming up to me and putting their arms around me, or yelling at me in the hallway, "Hi, Grandpa Don!" But after a while I got to kind of like it. Some of those first kids I worked with have moved on to middle school, and now I work with their little sisters and brothers. That's even more of a bonus.

Foster Grandparents often serve in the same school for many years, sometimes decades, working with brothers and sisters, sometimes the children of children they read to years before. Consistency, dependability, acceptance—both FGP and RSVP volunteers bring these qualities to their volunteer stations and add a degree of stability to children's lives, which often can be chaotic and stressful.

Program coordinators, teachers, principals, and volunteers said the relationship between a senior volunteer and a child was not only the most important component of NSSC programs but also their most valuable outcome. Yet the role of that relationship in student and volunteer performance was the most difficult for participants to discuss in detail and the least likely to be assessed or evaluated by programs or schools. Program partners and participants had a sense that seniors brought something special to their stations and the children they served, and that children gave seniors something in return. But precise reasons, evidence, and outcomes could not be articulated.

Though not exclusively studied here, the intergenerational relationships were the focus of many interviewees' thoughts about the impact of FGP and RSVP programs. Many spoke about the special bond a senior and a child formed, one that seemed to be borne out of age differences and the non-authority figure role seniors have in classrooms. "Seniors come in with a different agenda," explained Debbie Elliott, who coordinates Title I and learning assistance programs for the Vancouver School District. "They've accomplished things in their lives, and now they can just relax. They don't have the pressures that teachers do in terms of accountability. They can just give the kids love and attention." There was also a level of trust and acceptance seemingly unique to seniors and children. "A child does not have to be picture perfect and clean for a volunteer to work with them," said Jennifer Gran, coordinator of Nashville's FLIP program and assistant director of the hosting RSVP. "Seniors look at the individual person, the spirit within." And children,

teachers and volunteers agreed, were always respectful of their senior tutors and accepting without question. As one volunteer explained, “It takes a lot for a child that age not to like you.”

Seniors and children tended to gravitate toward each other, too, drawn together by their differences and bonded because of their similarities. Claudia Dalton, director of the Vancouver FGP program, explained that, “Children’s and seniors’ languages are different, their lives, their material possessions, their bodies are all different. Grandparents are quiet and calm, taking time to explain things. Kids are impulsive and want to rush things. It’s a nice balance between the two.” For Linda Taylor Day, director of RSVP of Cape May County, seniors’ and children’s emotional similarities helped create that unique, strong, accepting relationship. “As we get older, we see how we are more alike than different and that we all struggle with the same things. Seniors want the same things as the kids—they want attention, to know someone cares about them, to know that they have something valuable to give and say.” Seniors helped give children self-confidence, motivation, and a desire to learn, all of which were keys to children improving skills and reading levels. When seniors were engaged in meaningful service, they also built their self-confidence and self-esteem, learned new skills, and played vital roles in their communities.

Both senior and student come to the reading table or desk willing accept each other, and the qualities seniors bring as volunteers help build trust with children. “Older adults are consistent and dependable, and they’re patient,” says Harriet Priest, a teacher partnering with the Nashville’s FLIP program. Different aged volunteers meet the variety of children’s needs: Older elementary or middle school students speak the same language as the younger students. AmeriCorps or other college-aged volunteers are energetic and make learning playful. Connecting personally with any tutor helped a young reader develop self-confidence and motivation. And connecting to a senior tutor was sometimes exactly what a child needed to become interested in reading and school. Gladys Lahnert, a long-time Foster Grandparent in Vancouver, Washington, told the story of a third-grader with whom she worked. “When she first came to school, she rejected everybody, me included. I’d sit beside her [to read], and she’d scoot her chair back. She didn’t want anything to do with me. I tried everything. I tried loving her, and then I tried ignoring her. One day she heard another child call me grandma. She cocked her head to the side and said ‘Grandma?!’ I said, ‘Yes, I’m everybody’s grandma at school.’ Not long after that, she came up to me and said, ‘Grandma, will you help me?’

The consistency, dependability, and acceptance seniors bring to tutoring sessions created a level of comfort that allowed tutoring sessions to be a gateway to meaningful conversations. Many volunteers told stories about students venturing to ask questions about the senior’s skin color or aging faces and bodies. “Older people aren’t afraid to answer those questions,” Jennifer Gran said. “Honest questions like that don’t faze them.” In turn, seniors got to know about children’s lives, what challenges they faced and pleasures they found every day. These talks about ethnicity and race, aging and living were irreplaceable moments of learning and enlightenment, extending the importance of these FGP and RSVP tutoring programs beyond student performance and touching seniors and children in profound ways. Whether a first-year RSVP volunteer working

with a second-grader or a Foster Grandparent with a first-grader, seniors and children learned about each other and their sessions with greater understanding and empathy.

Programs' designs did seem to play a role in the kinds of relationships seniors had with students, facilitating strong relationships between tutoring pairs and enhancing their "natural" connections by creating positive tutoring environments. Volunteers who met one-on-one with students in daily or weekly sessions for focused, intensive (30 or more minutes) reading sessions described feeling closely connected with individual students and schools, as well as feeling effective and confident. These seniors were also the only ones who told "break-through" stories like Gladys Lahnert's. As in mentoring programs, designs that promote relationship development between seniors and children can positively impact volunteers' level of satisfaction,¹⁹ and this study suggests such design considerations in tutoring programs play an important role in both volunteers' feelings of effectiveness, as well as students' performance. Programs that used effective tutoring practices and created effective tutoring environments, which helped tutoring pairs develop trusting relationships, were the same ones that reported gains in student reading performance, improvement in student attitudes, and positive outcomes for senior volunteers. Their design for delivering tutoring services bolstered the connections and trust between seniors and children, creating the foundation for student (and senior) learning.

Other Factors

This study identified four factors that would likely to affect tutoring programs' positive impact on students and senior volunteers: program design, volunteer training and support, tutoring environment, and tutoring relationships. Interviews sought to detail their role and importance while also leaving room to identify other factors contributing to programs' success. The factors discussed briefly below were important to the programs' participating in this study but should not be regarded as a complete list of essential elements. Rather, they help round out the picture of program effectiveness and impact, and can aid national service programs in better understanding the assets schools bring to partnerships and how they can be used to better serve students and seniors.

- **Principal support.** Principals were often the first contact national service programs had with schools, and in several programs their support and involvement were key. Not only did they respond to invitations to partner with FGP and RSVP programs, they also actively supported teachers and seniors throughout the year. Principals helped create a welcoming, appreciative tone for senior volunteers, which was reflected in word and deed and served as a model for both teachers and students. They encouraged teachers to engage seniors in meaningful ways. While they often gave teachers resources and latitude to do so, principals remained interested in what tutors and students did, and frequently expressed their appreciation to seniors for their time and commitment. At Glenwood Avenue Elementary School in Cape May, the principal's own background in intergenerational studies moved him to create a senior

¹⁹ See Styles and Morrow (1992) and Freedman (1994).

volunteer program for students, which then eventually led him to partner with the local RSVP program.

- **School environment.** Schools' environments were shaped, in large part, by their principals. Strong leadership skills, a commitment to high academic standards, confidence and trust in teachers, a willingness to involve the community into the school: these qualities helped create school communities where seniors felt welcomed and satisfied. In one school, students and seniors thrived despite its decaying structure. "The children don't pay attention to leaking roofs," a volunteer said. "They're just happy to be at school. It's a happy, cheerful place." The volunteer wasn't bothered by the buckets catching water either. "It's not about the [physical] environment. It's about providing the hugs and motivation to the students." Other elements such as reading curriculum, academic programs and initiatives, and district policies also affected the way schools operated and how (willing and) able they were to use senior volunteers most effectively.
- **Teacher background and approach.** Teachers' backgrounds played a role in their effective use of volunteer reading tutors. Teachers who were able to effectively engage seniors in reading tutoring were not only reading specialists but had also seen other teachers work with volunteers—including seniors—early in their careers. They also collaborated with other classroom teachers and sometimes worked closely with classroom assistants; as a result, they seemed more willing to open their classrooms to volunteers and find meaningful roles for seniors in their instructional approach.
- **National service program staff and other elements.** Several factors at the program level helped seniors be effective. First, programs that could fund at least one staff person to coordinate senior tutors and school partnerships were better able to support volunteers, communicate with schools, ensure volunteers were engaged in direct service, and work with schools to assess seniors' impact on students. Second, programs' new partners were more likely to engage seniors in direct service as reading tutors than those that had worked with them for many years, using seniors to provide indirect, or helping, service to schools and students. The transition to direct and outcome-oriented service was easier when programs had dedicated tutoring or America Reads coordinators. Those coordinators' backgrounds in education or volunteer management were also valuable assets in working effectively with schools and designing meaningful volunteer opportunities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A coordinator relays a conversation she had with an RSVP volunteer who called to tell her about a tutoring session: Her student, a second-grade girl, came to their tutoring session wearing a new dress. The volunteer said, “That’s an awfully pretty dress you have on. You look wonderful.” The little girl immediately began to cry, telling the volunteer that she didn’t feel good or wonderful at all. “My Grandma tells me I’m stupid because I can’t tie my shoes,” she said.

Nearly in tears herself, the volunteer set to work. They worked on their reading and spent the last five minutes of the session practicing tying shoelaces. In only two sessions, the girl could tie her own in perfect bows.

“The volunteer called to tell me what she had done,” the coordinator says. “I’m always saying, ‘literacy, literacy, literacy’ to the volunteers and teachers to keep them focused, and she felt bad that she had taught the girl to tie her shoes. I said that was okay. That was a breakthrough!” Children bring an array of experiences and expectations to the tables they share with senior tutors that can positively or negatively affect their reading and learning during a session, as well as the whole school day. A senior’s willingness to listen, empathize, and help a child with something as seemingly simple as tying a shoe can provide the groundwork for learning. Those moments build the confidence and trust that help senior and student turn other challenges into successes.

Not all school partners have the resources to create what might be considered an ideal tutoring environment, i.e., a reading specialist, a dedicated reading or resource room, a research-based curriculum used. Without those resources, they then may not be able to provide carefully planned tutoring sessions or consistent tutor-child pairs. Indeed, schools may not want volunteers to take on such duties, opting instead to allow seniors to connect with as many children as possible in ways that do not restrict their activities and do not require extensive teacher coordination and supervision. Second, some seniors do not want volunteer experiences that are so structured or intensive. Jane Frotton, director of the Ocean Township (NJ) RSVP relayed the story of a retired banking executive who wanted to volunteer in a thrift shop. “‘I’ve worked 35 years in a bank,’ he said. ‘This kind of volunteer work makes me very happy.’” In schools, basic, indirect service can make volunteers feel good and provide valued help to teachers.

However, with careful design and thoughtful practices in management and service delivery, volunteer programs can positively impact students’ reading attitudes and performance. By providing senior tutors with training and ongoing support, programs can help seniors not only feel good but learn new skills and ideas, grow personally, and become engaged in their neighborhoods and communities. FGP and RSVP prove excellent homes for these programs because of the backdrop of support—design, training, and ongoing support—they provide to both senior volunteers and school partners.

This study helps to define elements of design and practice that contribute to students' attitude and performance improvement, volunteers' feelings of effectiveness, and programs' success. These recommendations will help programs enhance student learning, support seniors in a variety of ways, and help programs effectively report their impact to stakeholders. They are geared toward program directors and coordinators, but partnering teachers and schools, as well as funders and policymakers, may also find them instructive as they consider elements of effective programming and practice.

Program Design

- **Write specific, realistic performance-related goals and objectives.** Most programs do not write goals in conjunction with school partners, but many have benefited from consulting one school staff person (usually a reading specialist at school or district) with whom they have worked closely. This person can offer feedback and insight about realistic outcomes for students based on the nature of seniors' work. Goals and activities approved by district staff and principals are more likely to be accepted by classroom teachers.
- **Use goals and objectives (in Five Element Plan) to structure and guide seniors' activities.** Regardless of a program's purpose, its goals should help the coordinator set guidelines for seniors' activities with students, guide teachers in determining appropriate work for seniors, and give seniors a framework to understand the purpose of their time with students (and to use as a reminder to teachers when work strays from direct service to students).
- **Include goals and objectives for impacting student attitudes and behaviors.** Most programs focus on performance-related goals for students, but perhaps the most important impact seniors can have is on student attitudes and behavior. Motivation and interest in reading are key to students' learning to read. Programs, schools, and volunteers can gain a fuller understanding of tutoring's impact when goals regarding students' motivation and behaviors, as well as performance, are articulated and assessed. Assessments for such outcomes can be created with school partners or adapted from existing tools.
- **Include goals and objectives for volunteers' outcomes; assess outcomes for seniors.** Seniors gain many things from their volunteer experiences, but these valuable outcomes are rarely assessed by programs. A simple questionnaire at the beginning and end of a school year can help programs gauge their impact on seniors' self-confidence, self-efficacy, self-esteem, and other attitudes about themselves and the program. In addition, FGP and RSVP programs help seniors access important social, health, and financial resources. Rather than being seen as an added benefit, this aspect of senior national service must be considered elemental to their purpose and included in goal setting and outcome reporting.
- **Design student assessments that measure both performance and attitudes.** Several programs have been successful in designing their own assessments, and

seniors have benefited from administering them to students. Other assessments for performance are widely available to national service programs, particularly from the education training and technical assistance provider LEARNNS. Attitude assessments, such as the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey, are in the public domain. Programs like Rolling Readers sometimes also include such tools.

- **Design tutoring content based on proven practices and in alignment with program goals.** While some programs have relied on reading teachers to design and structure tutoring sessions, some coordinators must take on this role themselves, particularly when seniors are placed in regular classrooms or pull out students for individual tutoring. Research on effective tutoring provides clear guidelines for tutoring session elements, but coordinators do not necessarily need to reinvent the wheel: sample sessions are available from other national service programs and many other sources. Within a program, if one school partner uses a good design, it may easily adapt to other stations. Additionally, it is crucial for programs to use their goals to design tutoring sessions, particularly if goals are performance-related.
- **Be flexible to accommodate schools' particular needs and limits, but maintain a basic framework for tutoring activities throughout stations.** Each station brings its own personality, needs, and resources that help shape volunteers' work and experiences. However, adhering to a basic framework for senior tutoring is crucial to program success. When there is fundamental consistency in volunteers' activities across stations, reporting is easier and results more reliable; coordinators can more easily and appropriately train volunteers and communicate with school partners. Many programs have worked with old and new partners to set guidelines for seniors' activities and created streamlined tools and procedures for reporting hours and outcomes. Ongoing communication has ensured those procedures are understood and followed.
- **Communicate frequently with classroom teachers, school contacts, and senior volunteers.** Contact by telephone, e-mail, or in person can help coordinators ensure teachers understand program goals, identify training or other support needs for volunteers, and address potential problems before they become formidable. Revisit old partnerships to determine new and appropriate ways of engaging seniors in direct service. Connecting with classroom teachers in addition to a primary school contact helps them more clearly understand the purpose of senior volunteers and develop a stake in the program. Establish routine check-ins with all stakeholders, including seniors; supplement more social conversations with interactions that allow them to talk about tutoring-related topics or other significant issues.

Volunteer Training and Support

- **Orient seniors to program goals and effective tutoring practices, as well as program and school procedures.** When volunteers have a clear sense of

program goals and their role in achieving them, they can become self-directed in their work, and better address situations in which their time with students is misdirected. Several programs in this study provided introductory training in tutoring practices, which volunteers found extremely helpful. Initial orientations and trainings were most valued when they gave seniors a clear idea of what to expect from teachers, students, schools, and the coordinator, and when they understood what steps to take when they had questions or concerns. Volunteers should also receive training in basic reading tutoring techniques. Some programs used reading specialists from partnering schools to give this training to all tutoring volunteers.

- **Work with schools to ensure volunteers are oriented to their classrooms and schools and receive appropriate training.** In many cases, initial training in tutoring techniques falls to the teacher hosting seniors, but that teacher may not have the time to do so; indeed, some may not even know that this responsibility is theirs! Communicate with station contacts and classroom teachers to make sure seniors have the training and information they need. Seniors also benefit from a general orientation to the entire school; getting to know office staff, other teachers, the principal helps develop connections and commitment between volunteer and school. Knowing who to talk to and where to find resources helps a senior navigate the building and get his own or his students' questions answered. Programs have sometimes used other volunteers or students to orient new seniors to the school community.
- **Provide periodic follow-up training.** All volunteers need additional, ongoing training in tutoring techniques and other topics to help them remain effective. Such training also allows them to develop new skills and knowledge, which contribute to their feelings of self-efficacy, self-confidence, and commitment to the program and school. School partners can include senior volunteers in staff development and in-services, ensuring that volunteers have the information and skills particular to the school's approach to tutoring. Monthly and quarterly meetings of FGP and RSVP programs allow programs to address a wide range of important issues for seniors, but informational talks do not provide the hands-on, skill-related training and practice that tutors need. Programs can dedicate several of their in-services or meetings to such training or offer additional, mandatory training for those volunteers engaged in tutoring.
- **Provide opportunities for ongoing feedback and discussion among teachers and senior volunteers.** Senior volunteers benefit from formal and informal opportunities to talk with each other and their host teachers about tutoring-related topics and practices. Meetings prior to and following sessions allow both teachers and senior tutors to address important questions about session goals and concerns about students. In addition to problem-solving, these conversations are also valuable opportunities for seniors to connect to their work, teachers, and each other in meaningful ways. These conversations with colleagues serve as on-the-job training, and like ongoing training, they also help seniors build their self-confidence and become more engaged with their stations.

- **Identify and tap available resources for training.** In addition to training provided by organizations serving national service programs, FGP and RSVP programs have many resources for training and development through their school partnerships. Several programs in this study worked with stations and other partners to provide volunteers with important training. Seniors have participated in trainings and workshops offered by local colleges and universities, district Title I staff, school staff, and curriculum development companies. Program coordinators should also consider training in tutoring techniques and related topics so that they can better assist volunteers.

Tutoring Environment

- **Work with school partners and host teachers to design effective reading tutoring sessions.** With program goals as a guide, coordinators must work with teachers to create tutoring environments that promote student learning and volunteer effectiveness. Senior tutors should work with students individually or in small groups for 30 to 45 minutes. Sessions should be structured based on a classroom's curriculum or on a format developed by the volunteer program, which includes practices or elements research shows to be effective. Seniors should meet with the same students regularly, and the place they meet should be quiet and comfortable with minimal distractions. If possible, the senior volunteer should have easy access to both reading resources and the classroom teacher. When school partners know the goals of a program and guidelines for volunteers' activities at the outset, they can determine if they have the resources to host national service senior tutors.
- **Encourage schools to integrate senior volunteers into their community.** Seniors can be valuable assets to students, teachers, and staff. And when seniors are meaningfully engaged at their stations, they can gain a great deal from their volunteer experiences. While some volunteers may want to commit only the few hours they spend in a classroom, others want the opportunities for personal and professional growth found they participate in the larger classroom or school community. Host teachers can help seniors connect with the classroom by dedicating even a small space particularly for them, engage them in work-related conversations, and include them in classroom activities. Classroom teachers can also help the rest of the school identify and welcome FGP and RSVP volunteers.

Tutoring Relationships

- **Understand and talk about the value of intergenerational relationships to school partners , volunteers, and other stakeholders.** Every child benefits from the individual attention of a volunteer, and seniors bring dependability, commitment, and unconditional caring in addition to a lifetime of experience. Yet the defining characteristic of FGP and RSVP tutoring programs—intergenerational relationships—is not often clearly understood as a contributor to

program success. Senior volunteers are valued for their special qualities, but coordinators, partners, and funders must also understand that these qualities lend to the outcomes programs report. In mentoring programs, relationship development is the key to positive outcomes for children and youth. In tutoring programs, relationship development often takes a back seat to session content, but those relationships, particularly with seniors, can foster students' personal growth and understanding as well as academic performance. The relationships can improve volunteers' attitudes and motivate seniors to become engaged in their communities, and life, as well as providing them with opportunities for skill development. These outcomes are valid, important, and should be considered in reports on program outcomes and impact

Policymakers and funders must also provide guidance and support that foster effective design and practice in national service tutoring programs. They should provide coordinators with access to relevant material resources, clear procedures and reporting that help coordinators set appropriate goals and establish effective partnerships, and appropriate training and support in both volunteer management and tutoring programming.

The results of this study confirm what research says: volunteer tutors are most effective when they tutor students from lessons drawn from research-based curricula or material and have access to reading specialists. They suggest that the importance of these elements isn't only in creating a controlled environment for tutoring—where volunteers focus on appropriate skills and use appropriate techniques—but also that they create an environment in which volunteers are supported by readily available resources and included in the network of educators, staff, and other volunteers. Other elements such as principal support, school environment, and teacher background seem to play roles in creating such environments. Further research into the relationships of all of the elements of design and practice in program impact and volunteer effectiveness is warranted.

Common sense suggests that these relationships are positive and good. This study helps to articulate the role of intergenerational relationships in tutoring programs and lays the groundwork for further research into their impact on student learning and behaviors, and volunteer motivation and satisfaction. It is easy to brush aside the relationships at the core of these programs, deeming them “soft,” unmeasurable, or at least secondary. Equally so, student performance and assessment can take a back seat to the more compelling, if intangible, aspects of those intergenerational exchanges. Ultimately, though, this study seeks to show that performance and relationships go hand-in-hand in these programs. Neither must be brushed aside or undervalued. Instead, they should be considered together, and their reciprocal relationship supported and cultivated by careful program design, appropriate training and support, and effective practices.

There is much more to understand about the impact of these and other tutoring programs on students, volunteers, schools, and communities. Further research may help to show more precisely the changes in students attitudes and behaviors. Focusing on senior volunteers' motivations and outcomes is also an important area of study. Many fields, including education, national service, volunteerism, and child care, could also benefit

from further investigation into the dynamic of intergenerational relationships and their impact on children and volunteers. At the very least, it is hoped that this study will initiate conversations at the local level among partners about how national service programs can work with teachers and schools to create or refine senior volunteer programs to better serve children, seniors, and communities.

PROGRAM PROFILES

This study is based research and work in the field of national service, senior service, and many interviews with NSSC coordinators, and five programs are profiled here. Volunteers, teachers, project coordinators, program directors, and other stakeholders in these five programs participated in in-depth interviews and provided reports and other information about student and volunteer outcomes. Protocols for those interviews can be found in Appendix A and B. These profiles are not meant to be models, but they are generally representative of the kinds of NSSC tutoring programs throughout the country.

Monmouth County RSVP

Book Club

Oakhurst, New Jersey

The Monmouth County RSVP in New Jersey connects seniors and children through an enrichment program called Book Club. Book Club matches volunteers with small groups of children, who are primarily in pre-kindergarten through first grade in several north-eastern New Jersey communities. Volunteers spend the majority of the weekly 20- to 30-minute sessions reading books, and talking with the children about what they have read. The goal of this time together is to give students more exposure to books and reading, particularly in small groups where they can ask questions and interact with the text more thoroughly and personally than in a large, classroom group. Volunteers focus activities and conversations to build particular skills. Rather, the book—the experience of the story—is the core of a session.

Program Design

The goals of Book Club focus on instilling the love of reading to children, primarily to those who are at risk of reading failure. These goals are met by providing children with extra reading time in small groups, exposing them to high quality books, and providing high quality books to their schools. An auxiliary goal of assisting students in meeting the state standards in reading is served by volunteers' work with students.

Schools are identified as potential partners by their percentage of free-lunch students, and principals are contacted by letter. Principals like the program for its intergenerational component as well as for its low-maintenance design. Principals choose appropriate classrooms or solicit all teachers for interest, and arrange for space for Book Club meetings if necessary. All students in a classroom participate in reading sessions. Teachers are drawn to the program because it provides students with extra time and exposure to reading and requires relatively little coordination and oversight. A key for many of them is that the program is “ready made;” their participation requires no extra planning; indeed, the Book Club sessions give them an extra 20 to 30 minutes to plan other lessons or grade.

The low-maintenance, low-involvement design means that partnerships between schools and the RSVP program are relatively basic. Schools only need to commit to welcoming the volunteers and designating several classrooms to participate. The goals of the program can be met with little involvement of the school beyond providing the environment in which volunteers can do their work and perhaps sharing information on students' performance.

No structured assessment of volunteers' impact on students is done. At the end of the year, teachers receive a form, the Reading Checklist, that is both an informal report on the impact of volunteers and an evaluation of the program. Based on their recollections and classroom assessment, teachers report on whether the program has helped students "use listening, speaking and viewing skills to assist with reading; listen and respond to whole texts; understand that authors write for different purposes, such as informing or entertaining; and use reading for different purposes?" These questions use language identical to that in the program's goals and objectives. From their informal observations, participating teachers report changes in students that include increased participation in large group discussions, particularly from children who have been quiet or reticent to participate when the entire class reads aloud. Volunteers have also noted changes in students, including improvement in attention span and increased interest in reading.

Perhaps the most important aspect of Book Club's design is its clearly defined goals—by ensuring school partners' understanding of its limited goals and volunteers' narrowly defined activities, the coordinator can spend more time recruiting volunteers to serve at schools on a waiting list, supporting current volunteers, and helping all stakeholders maintain the integrity of the program.

Volunteer Training and Support

Training occurs primarily as an orientation before volunteers attend their first Book Club session. The project coordinator conducts the training, which focuses on the basics of reading to young children—how to engage the story and the children. Typical developmental characteristics are also covered so that volunteers know what to expect from pre-schoolers, kindergartners, and first-graders. The orientation also covers school procedures, mileage reimbursement and other program procedures, and an overview of the reading resources available through the program library. Because Book Club focuses on enrichment activities, volunteers do not receive training on more advanced concepts and tutoring techniques.

Follow-up training is offered in the form of a refresher course at the beginning of each year. Returning volunteers may attend to reacquaint themselves with tips and strategies and to pick up any additional information.

A guide, found in the front of each book, can also be considered a support tool for volunteers. They can glean general strategies from these specific suggestions and apply them to their general approach when reading with the children. These guides were written by the coordinator and highlight the learning components volunteers can emphasize when reading (e.g., onset rhymes, etc.).

Book Club volunteers build their capacity as readers through the ongoing communication and support offered by the coordinator and other volunteers. Volunteers meet prior to and following each session. These conversations afford opportunities to discuss difficulties, enjoyable books, successful practices, and changes they've seen in children. With the coordinator present, these informal meetings can provide valuable two-way feedback as well as instructional opportunities. Additionally, they give volunteers a sense of connection to both the coordinator and the other volunteers; rather than coming to the school, reading for an hour, and leaving, they see themselves as part of a group and a larger effort with a particular purpose. A monthly newsletter, written by the coordinator, also plugs in volunteers to a program that might otherwise seem a scattering of individuals and efforts; the newsletter allows the coordinator to communicate with volunteers and recognize their accomplishments.

The design of Book Club places the coordinator at the center of communication and support with all stakeholders. While the informal meetings between her and the volunteers create strong connections for ongoing support and feedback, she also serves as the main contact between the volunteers and the teachers whose students are served. Conversations between volunteers and teachers are infrequent even when sessions are in classrooms. As students transition in and out of time with their Book Club readers, teachers focus on moving students to the next activity, and volunteers go to their next class or their meeting place to return books and check in with each other. The coordinator uses some of that time to check in with teachers, particularly to find out what the class will be working on in the coming weeks so that she can better select books for the readers.

Tutoring Environment

Volunteers and groups of students meet one time a week for 20 to 30 minutes, generally reading two to three books at each meeting. The program coordinator brings a collection of books from the RSVP library from which the volunteers choose. In some cases, volunteers bring books they have checked out from the public library or that they have purchased; these are generally donated to the program collection. The reading material is loosely related to classroom themes and topics in that the books volunteers choose from are about topics the students are studying, such as months and seasons of the year. This correlation is done through informal conversations between the coordinator and classroom teachers.

Each volunteer has her or his own style and flair they bring to the reading, but all generally follow a similar structure. They begin by talking with students, doing a picture walk, reading the story, and stopping to ask or answer questions and talk about illustrations. Each book in the program's library features a kind of guide the coordinator has written and placed in an envelope on the inside cover. The guide summarizes the story, explains the skills or concepts it employs (i.e., onset rhymes, etc.) , and suggests questions the reader can ask to emphasize those skills and concepts. The extent to which volunteers used these guides varies.

From week to week, volunteers generally meet with the same groups of students, which were initially formed by classroom teachers based on how children interacted with each other or, in some cases, simply how children were sitting in the classroom. Reading sessions may occur in the classroom, with children and their readers separating into groups and occupying different areas of the room. In other cases, teachers bring students to the gymnasium/lunchroom where sessions occur. In either situation, the feeling is one of excitement and fun, for both the students and the volunteers. Typically, Book Club volunteers are the only reading volunteers students work with during the week. Some volunteers read at more than one school, devoting two to ten hours a week to the program.

Teachers do not actively supervise or participate in reading sessions, though they are often present. While volunteers are with students, teachers use the time to plan for the next class activities or grade, occasionally intervening when a student becomes overly excited or distracted from their reading group. The RSVP coordinator participates in reading sessions at each school and, thus, is also available to address any problems or questions; however, volunteers mostly deal with such group dynamics on their own.

Tutoring Relationships

Not all Book Club volunteers are senior citizens. The program engages a wide variety of volunteers to spend one hour a day reading to pre-kindergartners, kindergartners, and first-graders. Characteristics typical of senior volunteers—patient, dependable, consistent—seem to be shown by all of the volunteers, regardless of age. Certainly students benefit from the extra exposure to reading and having a consistent reader, but because pairs meet only once a week, for a brief period of time and in small groups, the relationships are rather superficial.

On the other hand, senior volunteers felt that they benefited from their experiences. They gained pleasure and satisfaction from the time they spent with children, feeling as though they helped teach students both the importance and pleasure of reading. They also derived satisfaction from the conversations and connections they had with each other.

Other Factors

Other factors lending to Book Club's success include principals' support and program staff. The program coordinator's close coordination and involvement has been key to both volunteers' and teachers' satisfaction. Additionally, the program leverages RSVP and America Reads money with support from a local foundation and Reading is Fundamental (RIF) materials.

Monmouth County RSVP

Jane Frotton, Director

Debi Ackerman, past coordinator of Book Club

1900 Route 35

Oakhurst, NJ 07755-2758

Participating schools: River Plaza Elementary School, Middletown, NJ; Ocean Avenue School, Middletown, NJ

RSVP of Cape May County

Rio Grande, NJ

Atlantic County RSVP

Atlantic City, NJ

Senior volunteers assigned to a classroom, working closely with a teacher to help students on a variety of tasks—for many, this may be the most familiar model of senior national service programs. Both RSVP programs in Cape May County and Atlantic County, New Jersey, have school-based volunteers working in this capacity. Seniors serve as assistants might, responding to the changing needs of the classroom: on one day, the volunteer may work with several students on in-class or homework activities, and on another work with a student to help him or her understand with the lesson being delivered. A program of this type may aim to impact student performance, but because volunteers' work varies in content and purpose, that impact is mostly indirect. Volunteers provide teachers with assistance and, perhaps, some students with individualized attention. In both of the programs profiled here, seniors are placed in first through third grade classrooms. Volunteers sometimes focus on reading-specific activities but might also pursue other types of work depending on the kind of classroom they are in and the time they volunteer.

Program Design

Through volunteers' work with students in classrooms, the Atlantic County RSVP seeks to improve students' grades in reading and math by 20%, while RSVP of Cape May County aims to improve alphabet recognition, understanding of printed concepts, and ability to write block letters and numbers in 20% (or 8) of the children served.

RSVP volunteers have been in schools in Atlantic County and Cape May for many years, and while the relationships between program and school are positive, the extent of communication and cooperation to structure volunteers' activities remains low. Teachers structure volunteers' daily and weekly activities. Communication between those teachers and RSVP coordinators are key to ensuring those activities are in line with program goals and appropriately contribute to students' improvement. At Lafayette Elementary in Atlantic County, the school counselor serves as the RSVP point person. In large school with more than 1,000 students (serving kindergarten through eighth grade), the demands on the counselor's—and the teachers'—time severely limit the kind of coordination and oversight of volunteers typical of some programs. On the other hand, in Cape May's Glenwood Avenue School, with only little over 300 students (kindergarten through fourth grade) a volunteer coordinator can easily communicate and coordinate with both teachers and the RSVP director.

While other programs provide highly structured environments to ensure results, the loose, responsive design of the Atlantic and Cape May programs help schools meet the overall

needs of a school This approach to senior service in schools tends to be more informal and less structured in its design and delivery of services, which provides flexibility for volunteers and teachers to better meet students' changing needs; oftentimes, it allows volunteers to create a special niche within a classroom or school. Because volunteers' work varies across and within classrooms, organized assessment of their impact on students is often a challenge. Coupled with infrequent communication with teachers who coordinate volunteers' work, assessment can be a weak component. In the programs studied here, assessment is informal; progress is gauged through teachers' reports of students' improvement. All participants, including students, value volunteers' presence, and teachers report seeing impact on their students as a result of seniors' work in classrooms. Teachers are, indeed, the best source of information on how students have performed and how they have responded to working with their volunteer tutors. However, this design could accommodate more feedback and assessment should directors and stakeholders want to gather more precise information on the impact of senior service in classrooms.

Volunteer Training and Support

Seniors receive an orientation from RSVP directors, covering basic administrative matters such as transportation, reimbursement for travel costs, hours required, and school procedures. However, because their work is defined and directed by the individual teachers they are placed with, seniors rely on teachers for the most relevant information and instruction they need. Because volunteers work closely with teachers, questions and problems can be addressed as they arise.

These programs are relatively small, facilitating close personal connections between directors and volunteers, and directors and school staff. Both programs are coordinated by the RSVP directors, and one has a 1/2 time administrative assistant. Volunteers see or speak with directors weekly or bi-weekly, and their interactions are mostly casual and conversational; in several cases, the director serves as volunteers' main transportation between home and school. In Atlantic County, teachers and the director have periodic contact, primarily to gauge students' and volunteers' performance. Both schools have staff other than classroom teachers serving as the RSVP programs' primary contact; this contact (in one case a school counselor and in another a volunteer coordinator) works with the director to place volunteers in new classrooms. In Cape May, the school contact acts as director's main source of information about volunteers' impact on students; there is little substantial contact between her and classroom teachers.

Volunteers receive an orientation from directors but no specific tutoring or other related training. Neither program receives America Reads funding so that their resources for training are balanced with other program needs and volunteers who serve in many other settings.

Ongoing communication and support among volunteers, teachers, and program directors is strong, particularly between seniors and the teachers. While they are connected with the RSVP program, senior volunteers are relatively autonomous and identify more with classrooms and schools than with the national service program. In Glenwood Avenue

Elementary School in Wildwood (Cape May), several volunteers have served with RSVP for many years, and their commitment to the school stems from long-time involvement—their children had attended the school and two of their daughters currently teach there. These seniors are recognized, welcomed, and valued by the entire school—principal, teachers, staff, and students. In Lafayette Elementary in Ventnor, near Atlantic City, the sense of belonging and support, for seniors and students alike, grows out of individual classrooms.

Tutoring Environment

In both programs, seniors' work varies across and within classrooms. Each teacher who hosts an RSVP volunteer decides, usually on a daily basis, with whom the volunteer will work and on which activities. Tasks and activities differ based on topics covered in class and all of the students' needs. Volunteers might sometimes work with all students in a classroom or with several whom the teacher wanted to receive individualized attention with particular exercises or skills. Ostensibly, volunteers could provide one-to-one tutoring to particular students, but this does not occur on a regular basis, and volunteers' time in the classroom is not regularly divided into distinct sessions. If individual attention does occur, it was usually for a few minutes with each student.

The extent to which teachers incorporated seniors (and their skills) into instruction varies. For example, in a first grade classroom, the RSVP volunteer often reads to a group of four students while the teacher works with another small group and other students work independently on computers or with games. The teacher places students with the senior based on their need for extra reading time. At other times, the volunteer works with a small group of students playing a phonics game or writing and illustrating stories. These sessions with small groups last approximately 15 to 20 minutes, and the remainder of the volunteers' time—45 minutes to an hour—is spent assisting the teacher and students with other projects.

In a third grade classroom, the volunteer takes on much the same assistant role, but works individually with students on particular tasks, rather than with small groups. This volunteer helps students with the writing and speaking skills they will need in the fourth grade; particularly, fourth graders at this school must write and deliver a speech, and the volunteer helps them hone those skills by listening to students' compositions and offering assistance with pronunciation, spelling, and speaking. In this situation, the volunteer meets with each student for a few minutes each.

In both programs, volunteers are usually in classrooms two hours, one day a week; some stay as long as four hours and come two days a week. Rarely do volunteers work at length with individual students. However, consistently being in the same classroom connects volunteers with the teacher and all students; it seems that the more volunteers do direct service with individual or even small groups of students, the stronger that sense of attachment on everyone's part. In fact, many volunteers are associated with particular teachers and classrooms by the entire school.

The extent to which volunteers have supervision from teachers depends on the nature of the work teachers entrust to them. Teachers are always in the classroom with volunteers, often planning the next lesson, grading, or working with individual or small groups of students. Teachers often direct volunteers' work by initially conferring with them about what will happen in class that day, and then volunteers are on their own for the remainder of their block of time.

Placing volunteers in a regular classroom lends itself to two different but equally beneficial approaches. In one, the volunteer and teacher work closely, with the volunteer taking on a role similar to a teaching assistant and becoming incorporated into the teacher's instructional approach. Without clear requirements or suggested guidelines, teachers are left to do so on their own initiative. Many teachers partnering with both of these programs do take this initiative; usually these are second- and third-grade teachers. In the other approach, the volunteer works most closely with an individual or a few students, acting as a kind of personal tutor to those who need extra assistance, which the teacher cannot always give; two seniors in the Cape May program work in this way, working closely with several Spanish-speaking students learning to read and write in English. This seems a function of the volunteers' skills and self-direction rather than an outcome of program-wide design and practice.

Tutoring Relationships

Structured reading tutoring programs tend to put reading and impact at the center of their concerns, i.e., service design, delivery, and assessment. These sites' loosely structured volunteer programs concentrate their energy on facilitating senior-child relationships for their inherent value, for as many students as possible. Senior volunteers are often important figures in the classroom notwithstanding their ambiguous roles.

Seniors' relationships with children in the classrooms they serve in give them feelings of enjoyment and usefulness. However, these volunteers do not describe their experiences and outcomes as specifically or strongly as volunteers in structured tutoring programs. To be sure, though, what they experience and what they give to the children and school provide them with enough satisfaction and purpose to keep them returning to their volunteer stations, sometimes for many years. Seniors' direct and individual work with students is sporadic in both of programs, so that the relationships they form with students are somewhat limited. Instead, the most significant connections they have are with teachers and to whole classrooms or schools. In Glenwood Avenue, volunteers seem to particularly identify themselves with the entire school community, which is likely enhanced by the principal's commitment to involving and recognizing seniors school-wide. One husband and wife volunteer team, whose children attended the school and two of whom returned as teachers, have given their time for many years; other couples and individual volunteers who are long-time, if not life-long residents of this small community, have developed strong, lasting connection to Glenwood Avenue, as well as other non-school volunteer stations. Somewhat differently, volunteers at Lafayette, near Atlantic City, feel most strongly connected and committed to their host teachers and classrooms. Students' faces may change from year to year, but volunteers' place in

classrooms remains the same, and their relationships with teachers often evolve into close partnerships.

Children working with RSVP volunteers in these programs are no less in need of individual attention, particularly from seniors. Glenwood Avenue students often find the only stable adult in their lives are RSVP “grandpals.” At Lafayette, where more than six languages are represented in one third-grade classroom, seniors also bring patient, consistent attention. For children whose grandparents live across the country or in another country, senior volunteers are important figures in their daily lives, opening up a world of mutual understanding and caring.

Other Factors

At Glenwood Elementary in Cape May County, the principal and staff have been key to the program’s success. The principal, Herbert Frederick, began his own senior volunteering program—prompted by his study of intergenerational relationships in graduate school—and later partnered with RSVP, letting it take on the volunteer management role. Poverty and substance abuse are high throughout the county, but the small school is an oasis for all children in the community. The principal and staff have made it a welcoming, happy place, where standards for performance and behavior are high, and where children can find consistency and caring. RSVP volunteers are an integral part of that environment.

RSVP of Cape May County
Linda Taylor Day, Director
4005 Route 9 South, Social Services Building
Rio Grande, NJ 08242

Atlantic County RSVP
Elinor Press, Director
323 Madison Avenue
Atlantic City, NJ 08401

Participating schools: Glenwood Avenue School, Wildwood, New Jersey; Lafayette Elementary, Ventnor, New Jersey

Nashville RSVP

Friends Learning in Pairs (FLIP)
Nashville, Tennessee

Friends Learning in Pairs (FLIP), a project of the Nashville, Tennessee, RSVP, has two approaches to structuring intergenerational reading tutoring. At McCann Elementary in Nashville, seniors work primarily with second-grade students receiving instruction from a reading specialist. These volunteers are placed in the reading classroom and work directly with the reading specialist, who is also the FLIP program’s primary school contact. At Hermitage Elementary in Hermitage, just outside of Nashville, volunteers work

individually with students in first through third grade who have been identified by teachers as need extra reading time. Seniors' reading sessions are scheduled by the school's volunteer coordinator, who serves as the primary go-between for volunteers and classroom teachers and is FLIP's school contact. Reading sessions generally take place outside of the classroom in an area determined by the volunteer. All senior volunteers are guided by the same goals and receive the same training and support from the program, but the nature of their work with students and the support they receive from schools varies based on how each school has incorporated senior volunteers. While the FLIP program does not distinguish between the two types of programs, I discuss them separately because how tutoring occurs and how volunteers are supported differ significantly.

Program Design

The FLIP program seeks to improve the reading level of 80% of students served by at least a half grade level. This is to be achieved by volunteers working with students on skills such as letter and word recognition, letter-sound correspondence, spelling, and comprehension. Through individual work with at-risk students, seniors will also help improve their self-confidence in academic skills and help them develop constructive relationships with seniors.

FLIP has two coordinators who work with seniors and school partners throughout the large Nashville and Davidson County area; a primary coordinator, also the program's assistant director, is located at the RSVP main office in Nashville, and a second coordinator at a satellite senior center in eastern Davidson County. Next year a PNS grant will fund a third coordinator who will expand the program into more schools in a neighboring county. This design helps maintain the integrity of what seniors do and how they are supported while ensuring that the individual needs of schools are understood. It also ensures frequent communication with the program's many and scattered partners.

Volunteers receive the same initial training, which covers basic strategies for reading with and tutoring students. However, resources and priorities at individual stations vary, so that at McCann, seniors' sessions are derived from a research-based curriculum and structured by a reading specialist each week, and seniors at Hermitage are largely self-directed in their tutoring, both in terms of structure and content. While all volunteers feel that they have good and positive contact with FLIP coordinators, their description of contact and connections with students' classroom teachers varies based on where they were located. McCann seniors work under the direct supervision of the reading specialist, who is available before, during, and after sessions to answer questions and discuss topics of interest. Hermitage seniors rarely speak with students' classroom teachers; their primary contact with school staff is with the volunteer coordinator who schedules their sessions. Volunteers at Hermitage express a desire to know more about how their students are performing in class and how their tutoring relates to classroom work as well as to other tutoring and work done by AmeriCorps members at the school. Although these seniors are not any less satisfied with their experiences, indirect communication with classrooms seems to affect the degree to which they feel connected and effective.

Assessment is a strong component of the FLIP program. Prompted by another funder's need for outcomes-based reporting, the lead coordinator developed an assessment based on Jerry L. Johns' Basic Reading Inventory Performance (BRIP) in conjunction with district and school staff. This modified BRIP is a simple tool that assesses students' alphabet and word recognition skills, skills most likely to be addressed and impacted by senior volunteers. Volunteers themselves administer the assessment at the beginning and again at the end of the year. When school partners agree to participate in FLIP, they also agree to allow volunteers to use two sessions to assess students' performance. Those partners have found great value in the results; they provide a snapshot of how students are faring and allow volunteers to better understand their impact and, perhaps, how to better focus sessions. This seems particularly important for the self-directed volunteers at Hermitage, but there is no indication that they do so any more or less than those at McCann.

The FLIP program as a whole conducts a year-end evaluation for volunteers and all school partners. This feedback, along with that received throughout the year, is used by coordinators as they reflect on and refine the next year's work. In the past, evaluation comments have led to a more streamlined process for schools to report volunteers' hours. In the coming year, the program will work to make the assessment process less cumbersome and more efficient in terms of coordinators' time and materials used.

While all partnering schools must agree to the same conditions of volunteers' tutoring—one-on-one, reading, first through third grade, assessment at the beginning and end of the year, and other basic support of volunteers—the McCann partnership appears to be stronger and more active than with Hermitage, and McCann seniors seem to have a closer connection to their station and a better understanding of their role in the program and impact on students. This is likely a function of the tutoring environment—where seniors are placed—as well as how they are integrated into the classroom and supported by the teacher. The backdrop of support in this situation promotes volunteers' feelings of satisfaction and effectiveness, and thus may assist them in being more effective tutors.

Volunteer Training and Support

All FLIP volunteers receive the same initial training delivered by coordinators and sometimes including reading specialists or other teachers from partnering schools. The training focuses on tutoring techniques and developmental stages of children; volunteers also have opportunities to practice what they've learned in role plays and other hands-on activities. The initial training also covers administrative concerns such as RSVP procedures for mileage reimbursement, reporting hours, and school procedures. Volunteers leave with a clear understanding of the goals of the FLIP program, school and teacher expectations, and their role in the school. The initial training helps volunteers feel comfortable with the program and with their abilities to carry out the work.

Follow-up training is offered quarterly to all RSVP volunteers, many of whom are placed in non-educational volunteer positions. Training, workshop, or presentation topics can range from children's health and well being (e.g., awareness of youth issues and concerns, recognizing and reporting abuse) to seniors' own health and well being (e.g.,

osteoporosis, depression) to public awareness and information (e.g., the census). Occasionally, training is focused on reading and tutoring techniques or issues. Most volunteers interviewed for this study do not attend these meetings and are not involved with the senior center that hosts the RSVP program. Those volunteers say they do not attend because they do not feel they need any follow-up training, do not find interest in the topics covered, or do not have the time to attend either because they have other activities that kept them busy; some live too far from the center to make the trip worthwhile. Those seniors who attend the senior center for social, recreational, or other events also generally attend the RSVP in-services.

All volunteers in this program identify ongoing support components as the most important elements leading to their feelings of comfort, satisfaction, and effectiveness as tutors. In addition to the initial training, McCann seniors draw on the support, expertise, and resources of the reading specialist with whom they work. Volunteers' work with students is structured by clear weekly lessons and understood through the lens of the reading curriculum's plan and approach. The structure provided by the reading classroom and curriculum enhances volunteers' understanding of how children learn to read and their role in that process. The resources—teacher and material—help improve volunteers' self-confidence and sense of self-efficacy. The constant presence of a reading specialist provides volunteers with expert guidance; meeting to review lessons and students' progress allows volunteers the opportunity to ask questions, give feedback, reflect on their students' progress, and refine their approach to tutoring sessions. These FLIP volunteers in particular have a well developed vocabulary around reading concepts and practices, much of it a result of the close relationship with the reading specialist and the many opportunities they have to talk with her and each other about their work.

By contrast, FLIP volunteers who work independent of each other and of classrooms do not have ready access to such resources. The volunteer coordinator is their primary connection to the school in addition to the students they read with, but that relationship does not seem to provide significant support: the coordinator greets volunteers and gives them a schedule of students to be tutored. Volunteers do not formally gather prior to meeting with students, but they can talk individually with the coordinator or informally with other volunteers about questions or concerns. The relationship between the volunteer and classroom teacher is not substantive, and their conversations are usually no more than casual and brief. When volunteers pull out students for tutoring, the teacher remains engaged with the rest of the class on the task at hand. Feedback and communication from the classroom teacher occurs through the volunteer coordinator. These seniors did not seem to feel as connected with their stations or as effective in their work as those stationed at McCann. However, none felt unprepared or unsupported.

While volunteers at Hermitage do not work directly with a reading specialist, they benefit from the RSVP program's broader resources. Teachers, reading specialists, and staff from other schools and the district offer training to all of the program's volunteers. Additionally, access to program-wide resources and positive, frequent communication with the volunteer coordinator, RSVP coordinators, and other volunteers provide a crucial network of training and support that make the volunteers feel comfortable and effective.

Though most seniors do not see their RSVP coordinators frequently, they are key to volunteers' positive experiences. Coordinators speak to each volunteer monthly, either in person or by telephone. Staff stress an open-door policy for volunteers—if they ever have a question, problem, or concern, coordinators are always available to assist. Though most programs would agree they have a similar approach, FLIP succeeds in practice, largely because coordinators are solicitous of volunteers' comments and thoughts, and are responsive to their concerns. Volunteers hear the “message” frequently, hear their comments taken seriously, and see concerns addressed quickly.

This same open communication and support characterizes the relationship between the school contacts and coordinators. They speak frequently, usually monthly, and meet at for planning sessions at least twice a year, once at before the beginning of the year and once at the end. Coordinators visit schools periodically, and these informal meetings may often result in impromptu planning or problem-solving sessions. Each interaction provides an opportunity to problem-solve and plan because coordinators are pro-active in getting feedback.

The size of the FLIP program and the design of satellite site coordinators extends the web of communication and support for volunteers. Though more levels of communication might mean more opportunities to lose track of questions and needs, the satellite design minimizes this by empowering extension-site coordinators to make decisions regarding partners and volunteers. Close communication between FLIP and far-site coordinators, particularly around guidelines for partners, and standard training for volunteers ensure consistent services and confident volunteers at *all* schools.

Tutoring Environment

At McCann, the content of tutoring sessions with seniors is drawn from the school's reading intervention program, Accelerated Reader, and the reading specialist's lessons. Students identified by an assessment administered by the reading specialists are pulled out of regular classrooms and receive remedial reading instruction every day, for about one hour a day, from the reading teacher. All of the work, including volunteers' efforts, are aligned with the students' home classroom's activities.

Volunteers use Accelerated Reader and other books, games, and other activities, which are color-coded by degree of difficulty. The content of sessions is based on an initial weekly lesson delivered by a reading specialist. Each student has a file kept by the teacher, charting their progress and performance; volunteers use students' files to determine the books from which to choose and to record activities completed during sessions. These files, along with the teachers' lesson, act as session guides for the volunteers. Additionally, the teacher meets with all volunteers prior to sessions to outline the week's lesson and to add any special instructions for particular tutor/student pairs. Volunteers do not instruct students, but rather provide them individualized time to practice new skills and help them become comfortable with new concepts. Students read to volunteers from books they choose, work on spelling and vocabulary, take comprehension tests, and review any problems they had on the test before moving on to another book. Accelerated Reader has a motivational component built in: each

comprehension test a student passes earns them points that can be redeemed for prizes and gifts such as pencils and stickers.²⁰

Sessions last 30 to 45 minutes, and seniors work primarily with second-grade students. Senior-student pairs usually meet once a week, generally with the same partner; however, because the teacher wants each student to have the opportunity to work with a senior tutor, students may only meet with a senior once every other week. Students work with other community volunteers, including students from nearby Vanderbilt University so that they may meet individually with a volunteer tutor two, sometimes three times a week. The teacher uses Mondays, when there are no volunteers in the classroom, to deliver the week's lesson to students and plan their individualized lessons with volunteers and herself.

Volunteers work under the direct supervision of the reading specialist, who also serves as McCann's parental outreach coordinator, computer lab teacher, and back-up principal. Volunteers work individually with students in a particular area of the classroom, usually at the same table or carrel each week. While volunteers are working with individual students, she instructs small groups of students or individuals. The teacher is readily available during sessions when questions or problems arise. The lesson plan or guide she provides at the beginning of sessions also serves as a supervisory tool, structuring volunteers' time.

The atmosphere of the classroom where FLIP volunteers and students meet is positive and caring. Teachers and volunteers cite several instances in which students complain at "graduating" out of the program and returning to their regular classroom for reading instruction. Students do not have the sense that being pulled out of their classrooms is a punishment; instead, they see the reading room as a fun place where the teacher and many volunteers care about them, give them individual assistance, and encourage and praise their learning. The interplay of the teacher's emphasis on improvement and performance, the volunteers' understanding of the importance of reading, and the sincere caring of both teacher and seniors help encourage and support students in their reading endeavors.

At Hermitage, volunteers work individually with students 30 to 45 minutes, once a week. The structure of their time together allows for focused and consistent work on reading than in programs that have volunteers placed in regular classrooms, but not as much as those with volunteers in reading classrooms. A session consists of a student and senior reading a book and, perhaps working on related activities. The book may be chosen by the student, the teacher. If a student comes to a session without a book, volunteer and student will choose one from the library. Volunteers' training is the primary guide in how they focus their sessions, helping them identify and practice skill-related concepts and activities. Teachers may ask that the volunteers concentrate on particular activities, but for the most part tutoring sessions are ancillary to classroom instruction. Teachers can

²⁰ The teacher in this classroom has limited the number of time students can redeem their points to two: near Mother's Day and Christmas, and she encourages students to "spend" their points to get gifts for friends and family members.

decline the volunteer or ask that she come at a later time if they determine the student should continue with classroom work; this has occurred as students were preparing for an upcoming state exam. Students generally meet with the same senior volunteer each week and do not work with other reading tutors.

Seniors find their own space in the school to read with students, usually a quiet corner in the hallway or library. Neither the volunteer coordinator nor the classroom teacher supervises tutoring sessions. The volunteer coordinator may work with a classroom teacher to plan the activities or identify material a student can work on during sessions, but volunteers are mostly self-directed during sessions and guided by their understanding of the program's goals and training. They can also use the initial BRIP assessment results to shape the content of his/her time with students. For some volunteers, this independence often seems like disconnection from teachers and the impact of their work.

Tutoring Relationships

Teachers and coordinators cite the value and importance of intergenerational relationships in much the same terms as those in other programs. Seniors' consistency and dependability make them reliable volunteers which, in turn, helps them build trusting relationships with students. McCann students also work other young adult volunteers, and though the teacher sees her students benefit from any individualized attention from any adult, she thinks the level of trust and bonding between a senior and a student is unique. While college-aged volunteers provide relationships similar to that with an older sibling, seniors seem to develop a degree of trust and acceptance with children that allow them to have meaningful conversations and poignant moments of learning and enlightenment.

Other Factors

Program Staff. FLIP's satellite coordinator design allows it to expand volunteer opportunities while maintaining the quality of tutoring and support. In order to serve such a broad area, the program has applied for and been awarded additional grants—Program of National Significance (PNS) to be specific—to fund additional coordinator positions that will serve outer-lying areas in need. These co-coordinators can reach out to more schools and maintain close contact throughout the school year. They can recruit and place volunteers in schools closer to volunteers' homes and provide quality training and support on a frequent basis. Expanding staff in order to expand services has also allowed more volunteers to become involved with schools in their own neighborhoods and towns.

Partnerships. A recent grant from a local sports team foundation will help the program build a lending library for senior volunteers serving in all FLIP schools. The library will be available this coming school year.

Nashville RSVP
Anne Helgeland, Director
Jennifer Gran, RSVP Assistant Director, FLIP Coordinator
1801 Broadway
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Participating schools: McCann Elementary, Nashville, TN; Hermitage Elementary, Hermitage, TN

Vancouver Foster Grandparent Program

Vancouver, Washington

The Vancouver Foster Grandparent Program was formed in 1977 and was one of five demonstration projects to show that FGPs could be successful in community settings. The program, now housed in the Community and Housing Services area of the city's Community Services Department, was also a pilot site for Programming for Impact. Two school partners that worked closely with the FGP director to institute PFI participated in this study, Sacajawea and Lincoln Elementary Schools. In both, seniors are placed in classrooms where students receive instruction in reading and other subjects. Both classrooms use the Help One Student to Succeed (HOSTS) curriculum, which incorporates volunteers into students' literacy and reading instruction. HOSTS was created in 1971 and piloted in Vancouver schools; these teachers have since modified and adapted the approach and resources to fit their needs.

Program Design

In conjunction with teachers hosting Foster Grandparents, the FGP program set a goal of assisting half of the children in these classrooms gain in academic proficiencies so that they would rise to the mean or average of the class by the end of the school year. Assessment of students was conducted by reading specialists as part of students' whole instructional plan, which included Foster Grandparent tutors.

The design of the Foster Grandparent Program as a whole certainly lends to its effectiveness; seniors in classrooms 20 hours a week allow them to take on unique roles, develop their skills and nurture all children in the school. There are also elements particular to the Vancouver schools, school district, and program that have helped volunteers and teachers better assist students and succeed in school.

There are strong communication links and relationships among teachers, volunteers, and program staff. The design of the program, the commitment of program staff, and the caring of Foster Grandparents, and the school district's commitment to welcoming community volunteers have helped institutionalize the program in individual schools and the district office. A strong and active advisory council, which includes school district personnel, teachers, other station representatives, business and community members, and an FGP volunteer, works continuously to understand how to better serve students, support volunteers, and maintain positive partnerships, and connect with the community at large. Not every school partnered with the program has had equal success in weaving Grandparents into the fabric of the classroom or school. The unique qualities of the classrooms, schools, and the district have helped them make the most of the program's assets.

The Vancouver FGP evaluates its performance by reviewing schools' assessment reports and through year-end surveys of teachers, school staff, volunteers, and other partners.

The close and long-term relationship with the schools and the district allow for ongoing fine-tuning of current projects and developing new ones. The advisory council also serves as an evaluative body where genuine, meaningful reflection and planning occurs.

Volunteer Training and Support

Foster Grandparents receive a basic orientation to the program, addressing both administrative and general service-related aspects. Administrative issues make up a significant portion of the training because of the unique features of Foster Grandparents—time sheets, stipends, and other paperwork. Although the initial session may cover the basics of child development and the role of Foster Grandparents, most content-related training is left to individual schools.

Follow-up training is significant component of the FGP program. Volunteers are required to attend monthly in-services that address topics similar to those offered by the RSVP programs—child development, child welfare, senior health and well being, and public service events. The 80-odd volunteers gather each month listen to guest speakers and share stories about their “grandchildren,” some of whom other Grandparents have worked with at different schools. Program staff also use the time to hand out stipends, collect new time sheets, and recognize volunteers for their accomplishments.

Volunteers draw on their schools’ and the district’s array of resources for training and support; reading specialists often act as the liaison with other teachers and resources, including ELL, special education, district Title I staff, and local colleges. Several volunteers have received follow-up training in reading and tutoring techniques at workshops provided by their host schools, the school district, and the education department at the Vancouver campus of Washington State University.

With consistent and long-term placement of seniors in classrooms, communication and support take a different tone and shape. Some Grandparents have been in the same school for more than five, ten, even fifteen years—longer than some teachers and principals have! Grandparents become part of the school community and integral to the classroom. At Cedar Lodge, Grandparents are considered part of the staff and work closely with both teachers and teaching assistants to understand and meet each students’ needs. Informal conversations become opportunities to address important, substantive issues—several Grandparents cited lunch as a time when key conversations about students occurred.²¹ With Grandparents in classrooms four or five hours a day, they have become reliable members of students’ personal and academic support network.

Monthly in-services help create strong relationships with the program staff. The social and informational aspects of these gatherings also connect volunteers to each other and to their community in ways that other seniors do not experience. Most seniors valued these gatherings for their social purpose, finding more pertinent support at school.

²¹ School partners provide lunch to many Foster Grandparents as part of the in-kind contributions to the program.

The integration of Foster Grandparents into classrooms and schools reflects district policy of reaching out to the community and providing every student with individualized attention. The Vancouver School District is a long-time partner of the Vancouver FGP program, and that positive partnership has helped shape a new handbook, which will aid teachers and principals in welcoming and effectively using all community volunteers.

Tutoring Environment

Students at both Sacajawea and Lincoln are pulled out of their regular classrooms into the reading or resource room, and receive reading instruction for about an hour every day. Both schools use HOSTS resources, particularly books, games, and other activities.. The resources include books, games, phonics cards, and other skill-related activities that reinforce concepts and skills teachers address through direct instruction. There are also forms and log sheets for the volunteer to record students' activities and performance during sessions. The teacher and teaching assistant use logs to gauge students' progress or identify potential problems. Throughout the district, the HOSTS approach is used, but each reading specialist has adapted the resources to fit more precisely with their own instructional approach, students' needs, and schools' resources

At Sacajawea, volunteers work with students 30-45 minutes a day on reading, spelling, vocabulary, comprehension, or writing, based on an individualized course of instruction the reading specialist has set out for each student. FGP volunteers work with students from first through fifth grade. Using such a curriculum provides clear guidance to both volunteer and student for what to do and when. At Lincoln, volunteers are even more self-directed because of sessions have a consistent structure: students read a book of their choice (based on the appropriate level noted in their files) to or with the volunteer, write a brief explanation of the book under the tutelage of the volunteer, and then read the report to the reading specialist. A volunteer works with a student on reading a book, understanding what happened, writing about the story, helping the student identify correct spelling, punctuation, and mechanics.

All Foster Grandparents are in their classrooms 20 hours a week, usually taking the form of four hours a day, five days a week. Senior-student matches are usually consistent, and though students may not work with the volunteers every day—they are scheduled by the teacher or teaching assistants based on a course of instruction, perhaps twice a week—students see the volunteers every day.

In both classes, volunteers have personal areas—a table, desk, or carrel—where they meet with students. Some areas are decorated with posters and stickers, and the children identify them with particular volunteers. At Sacajawea, Foster Grandparents have their own area within the larger classroom where they meet with students and keep their resources. At Lincoln, volunteers' areas are spread throughout the large room, which houses the English Language Learning teacher, counselors, and others.

Both schools create a positive environment for students who are pulled out for special instruction and make seniors an integral part of that environment. Sacajawea's is called Cedar Lodge—keeping with the Northwest theme of the school—and Lincoln's The

Learning Center or TLC. Teachers, students, the entire school and parents identify the classrooms by name, lending to their positive, fun, and caring atmospheres. Cedar Lodge and TLC students do not regard being pulled out of regular classroom as a stigma or punishment. Those positive environments—with individualized attention and caring adults—bolster students’ self-confidence, giving them an added advantage in catching up with their peers. These classrooms also give the Foster Grandparents feelings of belonging, confidence, and effectiveness.

FGP volunteers in these two schools work under the supervision of reading specialists.²² Cedar Lodge hosts both reading instruction and special education, and the two teachers work closely together to structure Foster Grandparents’ time, share resources, and plan students’ instruction. The reading specialist works with her own teaching assistant and other teachers to direct students and oversee volunteers’ activities. TLC hosts Title I and other programs, and these teachers and resources also support Foster Grandparents. At both schools, the structure of the HOSTS program is clearly laid out with stepped lesson plans, a database of resources, and a schedule of senior-child pairs so that volunteers and students always know what to expect and what to do. Additionally, the structure of the FGP program itself, with volunteers in the classroom 20 hours a week, has allowed many volunteers to develop into autonomous, confident, and knowledgeable assistants. When instruction and volunteering work in concert, as here, daily tutoring seems to direct itself, allowing teachers, teaching assistants, and volunteers to concentrate on tutoring content rather than administrative concerns.

Tutoring Relationships

The frequency with which Foster Grandparents are in classrooms allows them to form strong, lasting bonds with students reminiscent of mentoring relationships. Some seniors have worked with the same students for two or three years, and some have been in schools so long that they now tutor the children of students they worked with years ago. The value of these long-term intergenerational relationships has significant impact on both students and seniors. In conjunction with reading instruction, consistent and structured tutoring by seniors has helped all students served improve their skills and reading levels, as well as their motivation and behavior in both reading and regular classrooms. Seniors feel satisfied and effective, and all speak specifically about the pleasure, confidence, and sense of self-efficacy they gain from being included in lesson planning, classroom activities, and the school community. The strong relationships they form with students also lends to their feelings of connection and effectiveness.

Foster Grandparents are motivated to serve for much the same reasons as RSVP volunteers. They want to stay active and feel useful, and the rewards they receive from the children and schools are more than what they ever expected. Though no Foster Grandparent mentioned the stipend or other support such as transportation and meals (provided as part of partners’ cost-sharing) as a motivator for joining or staying involved,

²² Each school in the Vancouver School District is allotted a 1/2 time reading specialist. Both Sacajawea and Lincoln have provided additional funds to make theirs full time.

these are crucial components of the support structure that make such volunteer commitments possible for some seniors.

Vancouver Foster Grandparent Program
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APPENDIX A

Volunteer Protocol

How long have you been a volunteer tutor with this program?

What made you decide to do this particular volunteer work?

What have your own reading experiences been like?

Could you describe how you see your role in your students' reading development?

What would you say the goals of your reading tutoring are?

How well do you think the goals are being met?

What do you think is the most effective part of this program?

If you could change one thing about this reading program, what would it be?

How often do you communicate with teachers about students' progress?

About what's happening in the tutoring sessions?

How often do you communicate with your program coordinator about what's happening at the school or in sessions?

Can you recall for me your initial preparation or training for working with young readers?

What was most useful about that preparation?

Can you describe any follow-up to that training?

How would you characterize students' current attitudes about reading?

About reading sessions?

About school in general?

Can you share with me a story that you think captures the impact or the importance of the work you do with students?

I'm interested in how tutoring affects students' attitudes about reading and school in general. Could you talk to me a little bit about how you think students' attitudes about reading have been affected by what you do in tutoring sessions?

I'm also interested in the intergenerational aspects of these relationships—a senior forming a relationship with young readers. Could you talk to me a little bit about how you see this relationship affecting students?

How has this kind of volunteer work and your relationship with children affected you? Is your experience what you expected?

How would you characterize the school's approach to volunteer tutors?

How aware do you think the school is of the impact of the tutoring program?

How aware do you think parents are?

APPENDIX B

Teacher Protocol

How long have you had volunteer tutors working with students in your classroom?

What led you to have volunteers do this kind of work in your classroom?

Could you describe how you see the volunteers' role in students' reading development?

What would you say the goals of the reading tutoring are?

How well do you think the goals are being met?

What do you think is the most effective part of this program?

If you could change one thing about this reading program, what would it be?

How often do you communicate with your program coordinator about what's happening in the sessions?

Did you work with volunteers to help them prepare for working with young readers?

In what ways do you communicate with the volunteers about student progress? About what's happening in the general classroom?

How would you characterize students' current attitudes about reading?

About reading sessions?

About school in general?

Can you share with me a story that you think captures the impact or the importance of the work volunteers do with students?

I'm interested in how these tutoring affect students' attitudes about reading and school in general. Could you talk to me a little bit about how you think students' attitudes about reading have been affected by the tutoring sessions?

Have you seen any impact in their performance in reading and school?

I'm particularly interested in the intergenerational aspects of these relationships—a senior forming a relationship with young readers. Could you talk to me a little bit about how you see this relationship affecting students?

Have you seen that these relationships have affected the volunteers? In what ways?

What do you think is the most important aspect of the RSVP volunteer tutoring program for students?

What other factors do you think have influenced these changes in student attitudes and performance?

How aware do you think the school is about the impact volunteers are having?

How aware do you think parents are?

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