

# Foster Grandparents Have Lifelong Impact

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When we envision our Foster Grandparent Program (FGP) Volunteers hugging one of their kids, we usually see them with a preschooler. We don't think of those hugs going to a young adult. But, because of the longevity of many of our volunteers and the lasting bond that they make with the children and their parents, reunions with their former students, now fully grown, happen quite often.

I had a unique perspective on The Foster Grandparent Program as both a schoolteacher who was served by our "grandparent volunteers" and now as an FGP Caseworker. My favorite benefit of the program is the enduring love I have witnessed between the older adult volunteers and their kids.



## Ms. Laura's Enduring Love

When I started as a teacher in 2005, a Foster Grandparent was already serving in the volunteer role and had been there many years. Her name was Laura Watson, and she would rock, feed, play, read, and interact with each child. It was a joy to have her in our school. When the children started to talk, they would call her "grandma." Each morning the children would leave their parents and run or crawl to Ms. Laura for their hug.

Ms. Laura loved and supported the children and was there for the parents. She would talk with the parents and give them advice. She formed a close bond with some of the families, and they would regularly bring their children back to visit as they grew so they wouldn't

forget their grandma. Especially on birthdays and holidays, they would stop by the center and give her hugs and gifts. As the years progressed, the children Ms. Laura cared for came back on their own as teenagers and then young adults, still calling her grandma.

When I left the school to work at The Senior Source, I was fortunate enough to be assigned to my former childcare center and would often see Ms. Laura. In 2015, she suffered a fall in her home and had to stop volunteering. I kept in touch with her and learned some teachers and parents would drive to her home to visit and bring food. When she passed in 2016, a large and loving community came to pay their respects, including some of her “children.”



### **Foster Grandparent Program is a Lifeline**

Ms. Laura often said that the Foster Grandparent program had been her lifeline. She did not have children of her own and lived alone. After Ms. Laura retired, she was lonely, depressed, and inactive. She told me she could “feel her body shutting down.” When she found The Senior Source and The Foster Grandparent Program, she knew volunteering with children was her calling. The flexibility of the hours and a stipend to offset some of her expenses was a bonus. Being a grandma allowed Ms. Laura to make a difference in many lives, young and old. She made lifelong friendships and served her community well.