

Green Mountain Foster Grandparents are people age 55 or over who provide one to one and group assistance with children. Grandparents serve as mentors, tutors and role models to youth. Foster Grandparents provide 10–40 hours of volunteer service each week. They receive a modest stipend and other benefits. Foster Grandparents provide services in a variety of settings. These include daycare, elementary schools, high schools, Head Start Programs, libraries, after school programs and recreation centers. This program serves Rutland, Addison and Bennington Counties. It is the goal of the program to enable limited income persons 55 and over to remain physically and mentally active and to enhance their self-esteem through continued participation in needed community service. In addition, this will enable children to achieve improved physical, mental and social development, as well as assistance with their educational needs. The Foster Grandparent program is funded through the Corporation for National & Community Service.



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Meet Linda LaBerge

Linda was born in Middlebury, VT and grew up on the family dairy farm in Shoreham. She was the second born and only daughter, along with three brothers, Jeff, Tim and Patrick. Linda says she was always a “tom-boy” no matter how hard her mother tried to make her a “girlie-girl.” She could do simple sewing, knit, crochet and embroidery by the time she was 5. “My mother used to call me her little Carey Nation because she felt I was always standing on a soap box preaching about fairness and equal treatment. I still didn’t get to drive the tractor like my brothers did!” she laughs.

Her Dad was always her hero. He taught her many things in life including a good work ethic. When he was 25 years old, he lost his right leg in a farm accident. That didn’t slow him down of stop him from anything. He still worked the farm until his retirement. He would also still hunt, fish and even water ski! He taught Linda that she could do whatever she set her mind to do.

After high school, Linda married her first husband. They had their first son, Corey and their only daughter, Casey. Linda did factory

work assembling fuel systems for helicopters and airplanes. She really missed working outside. After being laid off several times, she decided to apply for a job with a construction company. “We installed traffic signals, runway lighting and railroad crossings” she explained.

After 10 years she moved on to a paving company and learned to run heavy equipment. During a seasonal layoff, she took a class to get her commercial driver’s license (CDL). She then went to work driving a truck and installing water pipes, sewer and storm drains. She continued to take many classes at the Associated General Contractors Academy in Montpelier, and earned many certificates in construction. “My proudest time in my career was being a project coordinator introducing women to heavy highway construction. This was made possible through the VT Agency of Transportation and the Associated General Contractors” she notes.

Unfortunately, she retired as a working foreman early due to health issues.

Linda and her second husband had 2 more sons, Gabe and Wyatt.



Linda LaBerge

Her oldest son, Corey, was a carpenter building homes, but sadly she lost him to suicide when he was 32. Her daughter, Casey, has two daughters, Jenna (15) and Nevada (10), and she works for the Waybury Inn. Her son, Gabe, is married to a beautiful redhead, Courtney, and they have one son, Hudson (8 months). “I always joked that their kids would be “ginger babies” even if they weren’t red heads” laughs Linda. Gabe works for a plumbing company. Her youngest son, Wyatt, is working in a machine shop and loves to tease Linda about anything and everything. She says she gives it right back to him! They all live less than 8 miles from the farm that Linda grew up on.

“Remember, happiness does not depend on who you are or what you have, it depends solely upon what you think.”

Dale Carnegie

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Linda LaBerge (cont. from page 1)

Linda left a part-time job at a convenience store when her mother was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. She took care of her and her parent's house at that time. After surgery and a year of chemo, she went into remission. Shortly after that, they discovered that Linda's Dad had kidney cancer. It was a tough couple of years. After her Dad passed, she saw an ad in the newspaper looking for Foster Grandparents. "This was perfect for me! I love kids, and I could still take care of my Mom" Linda says.

Linda started at Mary Johnson pre-school in Middlebury, but after a couple months there was no need for a grandparent there with all the special educators coming in. She transferred to Otter Creek Childcare and says she was in heaven! The classroom was full of 2 & 3 year olds, a great age to explore, imagine and play! Those kids helped Linda get through her grief and stress by making her laugh and smile everyday.

Unfortunately, Linda came down with the flu, and because of her emphysema was hospitalized. She is now on oxygen because of this. When she returned to Otter Creek, the kids wanted to know why she had oxygen and she told them her lungs did not work very well. She compared it to running really fast and far and the oxygen made it easier to breathe. She would take off the oxygen and let them feel it on their arms and they said it tickled. "Some days I was the most popular person on the playground because everyone wanted to be tickled! I think this has helped show the kids that having a disability doesn't make you all that different."

Linda loves to garden. Her children will tell you that her house is a jungle because of all the houseplants. "I guess you could say that I'm not happy unless I'm getting dirty!" Linda also enjoys reading, knitting, crochet and needlepoint. She likes to keep a stash of baby things that she has made to give to new parents that she knows.

Linda's doctor has not allowed her to go back to Otter Creek since COVID hit because of her emphysema. She is hoping to be able to return sometime this summer or early fall. She says she misses her little friends. Being a Foster Grandparent helps to keep her young. "I hope that I make a difference in someone's lives because this program has made a difference in mine!" Linda smiles.

Linda you definitely have made a difference, not only as a Foster Grandparent, but in all that you have done in your non-traditional roles in life promoting that women can do whatever men can do if properly trained and willing! We are proud of you!



Volunteer Possibilities

Tapestry—After School Programs West Rutland 3:00 to 5:30 & Proctor Elementary 2:15 to 5:15

Sacred Heart School—Bennington, positions available in classrooms. Must complete safe environment protocol and background checks at the school

Grace Christian School—Bennington, Combined 3rd/4th Grade classroom needs grandparent to work with students

VAC — Red Room (2 year olds). Very active children need loving, consistent grandparent as role models and mentors. Patience, kindness and tolerance a plus.

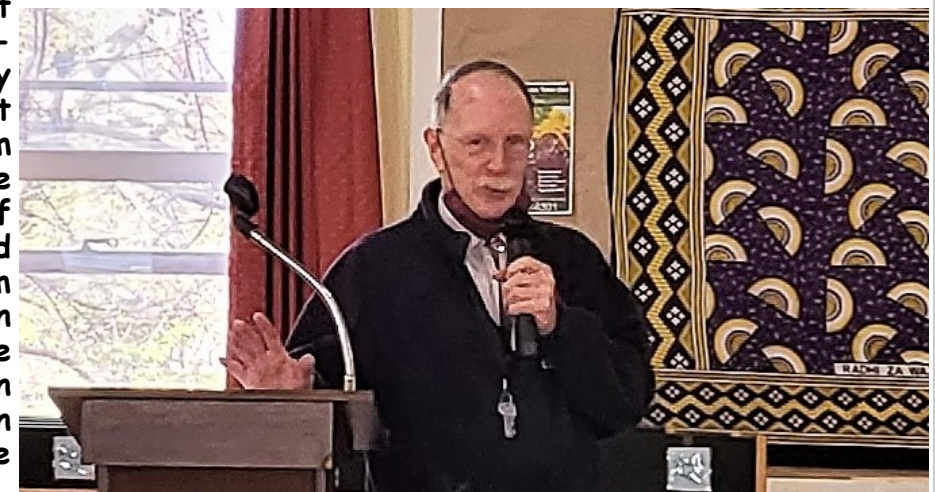
RCPC—Rutland site needs active grandparent willing to volunteer with pre-school, 2-3 year olds and younger children. Lots of play, action & up & down abilities involved! Patience and flexibility a plus.

Other: Other openings possible dependent on school needs.



Tom Estill—Chestnut Trees

In the early 1900s a blight was accidentally brought to the United States on a naturally immune Asian Chestnut tree. Unfortunately, the American Chestnut trees were not immune to the blight and became infected. Over the years, the blight spread over the whole Eastern coast infecting all the trees it came into contact with. No American Chestnut trees were immune and billions were lost, along with a number of industries and a way of life for many which centered around that once majestic tree. Trees which survive today came from the sprouts of older trees, but eventually they too, will succumb to the blight. Tom Estill, a Foster Grandparent at Christ the King School in Rutland, VT, and a member of the Board of Directors of the Vermont/New Hampshire chapter of the American Chestnut Foundation gave a presentation on the history of blight to the Green Mountain Foster Grandparents on March 30th. At the conclusion of the talk, Tom passed out four American Chestnut tree seeds to twelve Foster Grandparents and gave them directions on how to plant the seeds. The Foster Grandparents will then plant the trees at their schools on April 29th, Arbor Day. By keeping these trees alive, scientists will buy time to hopefully develop a blight resistant American Chestnut tree in the near future. They're currently working on three different ways to do just that. Tom has already planted these starter trees at most of the Rutland City Schools and he currently maintains them until they can make it on their own. It's Tom's hope to one day have American Chestnut trees growing on the grounds of every single school in Vermont.



Volunteer Appreciation in Fair Haven

Grandma Bea Bowen is honored in Patricia Robert's kindergarten class in Fair Haven for Volunteer Appreciation Month. Obviously lots of hugs and love were shared!



We're Baaaaack!!!

We had our first "in-person" in-service in two years without masks on March 30th and it was so wonderful to be back together seeing everyone's smiling faces! We had a hot pork sirloin dinner to take home with us, too. Arwen Turner, Executive Director, from Come Alive Outside was the guest speaker and she told grandparents about some wonderful programs they offer to get people outside and active year round.



Come Alive Outside Programs

NatureRx is a program to help people live healthier lives. Being active outdoors and connecting with nature is an established way to improve health and wellness. Community Health and CAO have partnered to provide two 12-week cohorts April - June and August - October. If your provider is with any Community Health Clinic ask them for a referral to participate in the program. A CAO NatureRx coach calls participants once a week to set goals and encourage progress. Group walks and garden experiences at the Vermont Farmers Food Center happen multiple times each month.



Our Adult Winter Wellness Passport inspires participants to explore their communities through fun activities January - March. In 2023 RSVP Foster Grandparents can have free access to a new passport app with all the fun activities right on their phone, or get a paper copy if preferred. Participants can earn prizes with the number of activities completed and be entered in a grand prize drawing.

Our Kids' Passport program runs December - March and June - September. Like the adult version, kids and grandparents will find activities in four categories: Make Your Own Adventure, Investigate Local Parks, Discover Local Foods and Explore Your Community activities. Every K - 6th grade student in Rutland County receives a passport. This activity guide is a great way for grandparents and kids to get active outside together.

CAO has three Mile-A-Day challenges: 30 miles - 30 days (starting mid April), 100 miles - 100 days (running June - Sept) and 50 miles - 50 days (October - November). This program has been in Rutland for many years - run by RAPAC for a while. Participants can now download the Mile-A-Day app: track daily movement, be part of a team, get encouraging messages and win prizes!

Notes from Maryesa

Happy Spring Everyone! It was wonderful to see everyone in person at the in-service in March. As we near the end of the school year I want to thank each and every one of you for all your hard work and dedication to the Foster Grandparent Program. It has been a tough two years with the COVID-19 Pandemic but it seems that we may finally be on the mend and getting back to normal.

I am excited to announce that we will soon be planning for the next school year (2022-2023). With that being said, I would like to invite you to invite a friend to join our Foster Grandparent Program for the upcoming school year. You personally have seen how rewarding being a Foster Grandparent is so that you can help us spread the word on the work you do to help the many children in our community. It is Foster Grandparents like you that help us grow our program. If your friends hear how rewarding the work you are doing is, they may want to join our team too!

We are excited and hopeful that COVID will allow us to hold an outdoor recognition event. Please be on the lookout for more information about the outdoor recognition event. We will be sending more information out soon.

With our recognition around the corner I want to let everyone know that April 17th, 2022 through April 23rd, 2022 is National Volunteer Week. National Volunteer Week is so important and I want to thank you for the numerous hours of service you provide to our community. You make a huge difference in the lives of the children you work with everyday. They will remember you for years to come. I still remember my classroom grandma I had in first grade at Northwest School many years ago. Thank you so much for your continued commitment to our program and dedication over the years. I look forward to working with all of you and I am excited to grow our program in our community. Happy National Volunteer Week!

I look forward to seeing everyone at the next in-service. I would like to remind everyone that these in-services are mandatory and everyone is required to attend for us to be compliant with our federal regulations. If in the future you know you are going to miss an in-service or have to call out for an in-service, please let us know as soon as possible so other arrangements can be made.

I hope everyone has a wonderful Spring and a warm Summer. I look forward to getting to know everyone better and growing our program. Thank you everyone and I will see you soon!

~Maryesa



Marion Jones Honored at Retirement



Marion has decided to retire from FGP after fifteen years. She was honored by the Rutland County Parent Child Center where she has been serving for the past several years. The children's hands were traced on a poster and she was presented with a nice warm blanket. Marion plans to spend

time this summer going to the lake with her daughter and grandson and she says, "I will miss everyone, especially the kids, but it is time to do family things." Good luck and we will miss you!

