

Reading with Residents

*Samuel E. Hubbard Elementary School
Forsyth, Georgia*

Rosy-cheeked children from Samuel E. Hubbard Elementary brightened the lives of 80 nursing home residents last year during their long-standing Reading with the Residents series. Over the course of the last school year, the program sent 102 students to a local assisted-living home to entertain senior citizens by reading aloud their favorite books.

The school's Action Team for Partnership (ATP) developed the field trips in 2002 to help boost students reading levels and strengthen community ties. Through reading to the elderly, they hoped students would develop a sense of pride in their education and respect for their elders. They knew seniors would appreciate the visit.

The program begins every year with a call to the nursing home's activities director. An ATP member works with the director to set dates for the monthly visits. Teachers receive a schedule for the year and information about the home to distribute to students. Each month a sign-up sheet circulates the classrooms. Teachers select two students from each class to visit the nursing home.

The ATP publicizes the event in the school's newsletter. Photos from the field trips are usually featured in the school year book. The local newspaper also features the program.

On field trip day, 10-14 students from grades K-5 hop on a bus and travel to the nursing home. Parent volunteers and ATP staff chaperone the students. On the bus, the ATP leader gives students a short talk on what to expect at the home. The group arrives at 10 a.m. and is immediately escorted to the home's cafeteria. Nursing home staff introduces the group and students take turns reading their favorite book or a story they wrote recently. After the readings, students and chaperones divide into smaller groups to read to room-bound residents. At the end of the visit, around 11:30, students gather back in the lobby where residents share the home's various resident pet

dogs, cats, and birds for the children's enjoyment. Students receive hugs and candy upon their noontime departure.

Community response to the project over the years has been overwhelmingly positive. "It has meant so much to our residents to have children visit each month and read to them... the hugs and smiles they receive from children mean much more than words ever could," the nursing home activities director wrote in a recent thank-you note.

"Our Reading with the Residents program is a world-class opportunity for children to be exposed to generational culture. It helps children build relationships with senior citizens. It also helps build character values, such as assisting others, respect, and a sense of community," the school's assistant principal shared.

The event costs \$250 to implement annually. The school uses Title I funds to cover the expenses—primarily associated with transportation.

The school plans to continue the program next year. They are looking for ways to increase the amount of time students spend at the nursing home, as well as increasing the number of participating students.

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