
A BUSINESS PARTNERSHIP WITH SUNRISE ASSISTED LIVING

Highlands Elementary School

Naperville, Illinois

One school improvement goal for Highlands Elementary School encouraged intergenerational understanding and provided opportunities for students and seniors to learn about each other's unique life experiences, skills, needs, limitations, and responsibilities. To achieve our goal, a team of teachers, parents, and Sunrise Assisted Living staff brainstormed ideas that would: 1) allow seniors the chance to share their knowledge/experience with students as well as get out into the community, and 2) offer students a unique educational experience and demonstrate to them the impact of "community service."

The team sent a list of the more than fifteen ideas to all the teaching staff prior to summer break. Then in the fall, we held a staff meeting at Sunrise Assisted Living to give teachers a chance to tour the home, meet the staff and residents, and then sign up for specific programs they wanted to sponsor in their class. The team also provided an overview of the partnership to Home and School and all the Highlands' Cub Scout and Brownie troops so they could look for possible tie-in activities. Articles in the school newsletter shared information and contact numbers with all Highlands parents.

In its first year, this partnership grew into a very special relationship between Highlands and Sunrise. Every grade level interacted with the seniors. Sample activities included:

- A fifth grade class visited Sunrise each month for a pre-planned "knowledge share." Students interviewed the seniors about their experiences during World War II for their history reports.
- Several grades created "Happy Notes" and "Class Books" for the residents that were tied to a specific aspect of their classroom curriculum.
- Seniors attended several school assemblies and musical performances.
- Home and School held one of its monthly meetings at Sunrise.
- The art department displayed student projects on a special bulleting board at Sunrise.
- The Sunrise Program Coordinator volunteered once a month at Highlands Pennysaver Bank, and one of the residents volunteered in the Learning Resource Center twice a month.
- Brownie Troops and Cub Packs completed community service projects for Sunrise.

The local newspaper, *The Sun*, highlighted the intergenerational partnership activities in a December 3, 1999 article. According to one teacher, as quoted in the article, the life experiences of the seniors help the students make connections between their classroom lessons and real life. “That’s what we’re about at Highlands—helping kids make connections,” she said. Collaborating with the community is proving beneficial for seniors, families, school staff, community members and, most importantly, the students at Highlands Elementary School.

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