



## **GRANDPALS CELEBRATES 20 YEARS!**

*Their voices would change, they became the characters and suddenly the story came alive. They were pirates or wolves or princes and princesses; the world had slipped away. And so you might remember that special time when someone read aloud to you.*

We often find great impact in the simplest of things. Reading aloud is one of those “simple things.” Now research confirms what we sensed all along, that reading aloud is one of the most important steps in literacy. It enhances classroom instruction and has significant academic benefits.

Our GrandPals program is a learning and reading program pairing older adults with students in the Princeton Schools, and is centered on the wonderful activity of reading aloud. It is an opportunity to work within the community and make a significant and lasting impact on a youngster.

For the people involved, GrandPals is a wonderfully evolving story. Olivian Boon, the GrandPals coordinator, said that she “loves the relationships that develop between the children and the GrandPals and among the GrandPals themselves. They share stories, get to know each other, delight in each other’s company, and in the company of authors and artists through the books they read.”

How does GrandPals work?

GrandPals is a joint program between the Princeton Schools and the Princeton Senior Resource Center. This program of reading to kindergartners started in 1997 at Littlebrook School. Riverside School adopted the program in 2006. The success of these programs encouraged us to expand to Community Park in 2012 (where the classes extend from pre-school through second grade), and to Johnson Park in 2015.

More than 100 GrandPals from Princeton and surrounding towns read at least once a week to approximately 250 children in 14 different classes. By the halfway point of this year, they had already volunteered more than 1460 hours of time with the children! The GrandPals range in age from 47 to 95. Some do multiple sessions. Although some have had previous teaching experience, many have not. Training and support are provided by Olivian Boon, Sallie Meade (Associate Coordinator), and school personnel. There is a strong partnership among the GrandPals, the teachers, and the school librarians.

The excitement of the school year begins when the teachers get the list of GrandPals who have signed up for their class. The teachers have gotten to know the GrandPals over the years, and are thrilled to see familiar names. They know which GrandPal they can assign to the shy child, to the overly active child, to the child who needs special encouragement, to the child who needs someone to listen to him.

The bonds between the children and the GrandPals are formed quickly. You can sense the excitement of the children when they come into the library and run towards their GrandPal, calling out to them. Many GrandPals comment that coming to GrandPals and being with the children is the highlight of their week. Their commitment to the children can be seen in the number of years some have devoted to this program.

For some children, whose families live far from grandparents, their GrandPal fills the role, even if it is only at school. As one child whispered to her GrandPal at the end of the school year, "Will you always remember me?"

One of the principals said, "The GrandPal program is not just an extra activity; it is an integral part of our school program that furthers the mission of our school." A teacher summed up the value of the program this way: "The GrandPals provide a calm person and a book, which is what children in this busy world really need." Another teacher commented as she looked around the library at all the groups reading, chatting, laughing, "Wonderful! Look at this. Who could say anything other than wonderful!"

As we celebrate our 20th anniversary, we look forward to many more years of reading, talking, and sharing that wonder. We welcome new volunteers. Come join us! Call Olivian at 609.924.7108

Olivian Boon

*GrandPals Coordinator*