

# Program fills human needs

Sixty-three year old Dolly Herren knocks on the door of the modest row house at North Hill Farms. She is greeted by a frail 92-year-old woman with snow white hair and an aluminum cane. Mrs. Herren envelopes the tiny lady in a hearty hug.

As Catherine Joyce pulls away from Mrs. Herren's embrace, she asks in a booming voice, "How do I look now that I've stopped drinking?" Both women burst out laughing.

At the Detroit Baptist Children's home in another part of town, Carrie Karfonta, 69, sits at a dining room table with two retarded teenage boys, helping them build a color ful structure with blocks.

"I came upstairs yesterday and I found two of the boys who don't get along well folding up bedspreads together and I thought, 'Isn't that nice!'" Mrs. Karfonta remarks.

"I thought about that last night when I was lying in bed and the tears just started to come to my eyes. You know, you just learn to love all these boys so," she says.

MRS. HERREN and Mrs. Karfonta care for the frail elderly and children with special needs through two different volunteer efforts—the senior companion program and the foster grandparent program.

Local projects of both programs are sponsored by Catholic Social Services of Oakland County ACTION, the federal volunteer service agency, administers the programs on a national basis, in addition to VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America), RSVP (Retired Senior Volunteer Program), University Year for Action and the Peace Corps.

The 11-year-old foster grandparent

program boasts 14,157 volunteers. There are 49 foster grandparents in Oakland County. The two-year-old senior companion program lists 1,914 volunteers serving nationwide. Forty senior companions serve in Oakland and Livingston counties.

Eligibility requirements for senior companions and foster grandparents are the same. Volunteers must be at least 60 and in reasonably good health. They must not exceed income guidelines. Income criteria differ from state to state. In Michigan, the yearly income limit is \$3,090 for single persons and \$4,135 for couples.

Compensation for serving is also identical. Volunteers receive a non-taxable stipend of \$1.60 per hour for 20 hours of service each week. They also receive a transportation allowance and a daily on-the-job meal when possible.

At this point, the programs take separate paths. Senior companions provide attention to older people, while foster grandparents offer individual care to children. Foster grandparents serve in institutional settings and senior companions usually visit clients in their own homes.

Often these visits enable elderly clients to maintain an independent life rather than live in a nursing home or other institution for the aging.

Preston Murray, project director for both programs, says it's easier to describe what senior companions don't do rather than what they do.

"They don't go into any situations as a chore-service worker; they don't displace a paid worker and they don't perform duties or roles of a medical nature."

What they do is best shown by ex-

ample. Mrs. Herren, for example, is a logical senior companion for Catherine Joyce.

"MRS. JOYCE. That's my baby. She's a dear," beams Mrs. Herren. Mrs. Herren's 92-year-old friend has a vibrant personality equaling that of her ebullient senior companion. Mrs. Joyce's only problem is that "I'm just wearing out."

Mrs. Herren takes her client to church and to see her son, who is confined to a convalescent home, thereby saving Mrs. Joyce a \$7 taxi fare which she cannot afford. But most of the time, the women just enjoy one another's company.

"Old people are worse than anybody for gossip," Mrs. Joyce confides. "I am a mouthy one," her senior companion admits.

"Aren't we both!" Mrs. Joyce replies.

Through the daily visits and frequent phone calls, the women have become close friends. Mrs. Joyce calls her friend "my guardian angel. I never knew how nice it was to have somebody come and see you. Whenever she goes, she brings sunshine with her."

Senior companions also are assigned to group settings. At the Grove-

crest Convalescent Center, most of the 57 residents are gathered in the bright multi-purpose room playing bingo. Six blue-robed senior companions are helping the players locate B2 or G4 on their cards.

FOSTER GRANDPARENTS serve at seven host settings in the Pontiac area, including day care centers, a juvenile detention center, shelter homes for neglected and abused children and homes for the mentally retarded.

Mary Teague is the manager of the Antioch Day Care Center where 60 children and nine foster grandparents gather every day.

"It's marvelous!" Mrs. Teague says. "We have teachers and young adults who work here but there's nothing like grandies. Half the kids here don't have much of a home life. The grandparents give them a great deal of love."

The grandparents are enthusiastic about the program and the outside activities that go along with it. Last summer the entire group went on an overnight trip to Toronto, Ontario.

Georgia Fillipin, 66, clasps her hands together as she recalls the adventure. "It was the beautifullest thing that ever happened. Oh, it was so sweet!"

**M**ore than can have communion is nothing else, can sympathetically eat together, can still rise into some glow of brotherhood over food and wine.  
*Thomas Carlyle 1795-1835*

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