



Glenda Stone, Foster Grandparent volunteer in Tooele County

AmeriCorps Seniors Foster Grandparent Program

Supporting early literacy through consistent, caring one-on-one support

AmeriCorps Seniors is a national service program that engages adults age 55 and older in meaningful volunteer service. Through the Foster Grandparent Program, trained older adult volunteers provide consistent, one-on-one support to students, helping strengthen foundational literacy skills and improve academic outcomes. Foster Grandparents serve alongside educators to support students who need additional help, particularly in reading and early learning.

Why literacy support matters in Utah

Utah is experiencing a critical moment in early literacy. According to the Gardner Policy Institute's report *The Future Is Watching: Understanding Utah's Early Literacy Landscape*, just over half of Utah students are reading at grade level in the early grades. Schools can benefit from additional supports to help students build foundational reading skills early, and Foster Grandparents are part of that solution.

Aligned with what works

Research shows that intensive tutoring, particularly one-on-one support, can produce meaningful gains in literacy. The Gardner Policy Institute notes that effective interventions include frequent, targeted support delivered multiple times per week. Foster Grandparents complement this approach by providing:

- Consistent one-on-one or small-group reading support
- Reinforcement of foundational literacy skills
- Additional practice time for students who need it most
- Encouragement and relationship-building that increase student engagement

Volunteers work under teacher direction and follow school-identified priorities, reinforcing core instruction.

Foster Grandparents support literacy and learning by:

- Providing one-on-one reading practice and fluency support
- Reinforcing phonics, vocabulary, and comprehension skills

Volunteers typically serve 15 or more hours per week. The program is provided at no cost to schools, and volunteers are trained, background-checked, and placed under school direction. In addition to academic gains, schools benefit from strong intergenerational relationships that support student confidence and engagement.

Foster Grandparents are trained and prepared to support literacy success:

- Comprehensive screening: State and FBI background checks prior to placement
- Pre-service training: 20 hours, including child development and growth mindset
- Ongoing training: 24+ hours annually, with topics such as:
 - Phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension
 - Supporting positive behavior and engagement
 - Confidentiality and professional boundaries

Program Impact

“These kids need a lot of help and Grandma Sharla is with them helping them get where they need to go. The students she works with are the ones that face the most hurdles in life. She meets them where they are and helps them with what they are missing.”

-Ms. Rosie, teacher in Moab

Over the past year, volunteers across the state supported 134 students and contributed more than 17,700 hours of service. Of those students, 84% showed measurable academic progress, as reported by teachers.

These local results are supported by national research. Studies have found that students paired with older adult volunteers demonstrate significant gains in reading comprehension, writing ability, and general academic achievement (Gilchrist, 2014; Lee et al., 2012; Gattis et al., 2010; Isaki & Harmon, 2015; Galbraith et al., 2015). Additionally, students benefit from increased focus, improved classroom behavior, and greater engagement when supported by consistent, caring older adults (Cohen-Mansfield & Jensen, 2017; Biggs, 2014; DuBois et al., 2011).

UServeUtah is actively expanding our Foster Grandparent program and is ready to bring caring, trained volunteers into additional classrooms. By partnering with us, your school can provide students with individualized literacy support, strengthen teacher capacity, and contribute to measurable academic progress, all at no hiring cost.