

Help children become better readers

To “make a difference” in a child’s life is a daunting promise. Children are affected each day by social interactions, family dynamics, and the implications of structural inequities, all which may result in them being set back academically. In fact, literacy rates in early elementary school have proven to be a foreboding indicator of a student’s success down the line in the rest of their academic career, and beyond. Fourth-graders who can’t read at grade-level are four times less likely to graduate from high school. Without a strong reading and fluency foundation, children are being faced with obstacles that challenge them throughout their school experience. And that’s where AARP Foundation Experience Corps volunteers come in.

AARP Foundation Experience Corps (EC) is a national, intergenerational volunteer-based tutoring program that is proven to help children who aren’t reading at grade level become great readers by the end of third grade. The Portland chapter of EC is housed within local nonprofit Metropolitan Family Service (MFS), whose mission is to “help people move beyond the limitations of poverty, inequity and social isolation” -- and EC seeks to do just that. Older adult volunteers are placed in a neighborhood school and matched with several students identified by their teachers as struggling readers, working together for several hours each week. In addition to this one on one intensive reading time, volunteers also spend time with the other students in a classroom, all the while building rapport with students, serving as an additional positive adult in the classroom who the kids can look to as a role model.

Volunteers get to see their students learn and grow, as readers and as humans, and that relationship aspect of this volunteer commitment is impactful for all. Take Pete Christelman, for example, who is a current Experience Corps volunteer at Sacramento Elementary school. His background as a mortgage originator makes for an interesting contrast between his professional and his volunteer lives. Pete works with students in second through fifth grades, so he gets to spend time with children going through all different stages of their growth and development. While Pete may not have had many experiences working with kids prior to EC, he no doubt is able to connect with them in a unique way. When asked what his favorite part of the program has been thus far, he smiled and said, “I’m not sure who is getting more out of this-- the children, or myself. It’s helped me to think more clearly, and it’s caused me to be softer in my dealings with people.” Further, he is finding the power in “being useful” and hopes to impart this important message onto his students to help them become responsible and helpful people: “If you want to be happy, be useful. And you’ll find that it comes back to you, and you feel so much better about yourself.”

If you’re interested in investing in the success of Portland’s students, consider applying to be an Experience Corps mentor. By committing 4-10 hours a week, you can help students get up to their grade’s reading level, setting the foundation for academic promise in the years to come. By serving as a volunteer, you will be able to make a difference in a kid’s life. Literacy opens so many doors, all of which aid students along their path.

For more information please about volunteering for the 2021-22 school year:

Email: volunteer@mfs.email

Call: 503-290-9427, or

Join a virtual informational chat: <https://zoom.us/j/7361049406>

- June 29th at 10am
- July 16th at 2pm
- July 29th at 10am
- August 11th at 2pm