

Becoming a Classroom Foster Grandparent

A report from AmeriCorps provides evidence that consistent volunteering can improve the health and well-being of people age 55 and older.

The study examined how participation in national service contributes to changes in health and well-being of AmeriCorps-Seniors volunteers in the Foster Grandparent program—who tutor and mentor at-risk youth.

According to the research, volunteers report much higher self-rated health scores, which is considered a valid marker of actual health, compared to older adults in similar circumstances who do not volunteer.

They also reported feeling significantly less depressed and isolated compared to non-volun-

teers.

After two years of service, 84 percent of older adults reported improved or stable health.

Thirty-two percent of volunteers who reported good health at the beginning of the study reported improved health at the two-year follow-up.

Of those who reported five or more symptoms of depression at the beginning of the study, 78 percent said they felt less depressed two years later.

Eighty-eight percent of the volunteers who first described a lack of companionship reported a decrease in feelings of isolation after two years.

Among those who initially reported a lack of companionship, 71 percent reported an improvement in their companionship status.

AmeriCorps-Seniors provides opportunities to Americans who might not otherwise have the opportunity to serve their community due to financial or other barriers—80 percent of volunteers in the study reported a household income of less than \$20,000 per year and one-third reported a

lasting condition that limits basic physical activity.

Open to Americans 55 and older with incomes up to 200 percent of the poverty line, the program is unique among volunteer organizations in that volunteers earn a small stipend.

While the large majority of volunteers reported joining service for altruistic reasons, close to one-third had an underlying financial reason, due to the stipend, for volunteering.

To become a Classroom Foster Grandparent volunteer, one needs to be 55 or older, be income eligible and enjoy working with children.

They receive a small stipend, clearances, travel and training.

Classroom Foster Grandparents can serve from five to 40 hours per week.

For more information on the AmeriCorps-Seniors Foster Grandparent Program and other B/S/S/T Area Agency on Aging, Inc. services please call 1-800-982-4346.

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