

GRANDFRIENDS are just that — senior citizens who give their time once a week — and sometimes more — to work with young school children.

A Grandfriend will read you a story, help build a tower of wooden blocks, play make-believe, stroke your head or just sit and talk.

Sponsored by the New Horizons program of Health And Welfare Canada, the project took off with a \$10,225 grant in February 1973. In 1974, it was awarded an additional \$6,235 for further expansion.

Says Jane Jones, chairwoman of the group which currently involves close to 40 volunteers in Winnipeg's schools and daycare centres: "As older folks, we do not intend to take on the responsibility of organizing or disciplining the children. Rather, we will be their special friends and work towards increasing their language powers and social development."

"There are any number of enjoyable tasks we could share with these little children. Many teachers of this age group say they badly need this sort of help and many youngsters require a lot of attention the teacher does not have the time to provide."

The benefits to the children are many. They have an older person with whom they can associate and interact; society being as mobile as it is, most children have never had the opportunity to know or relate to any person older than their parents or teachers.

Children also benefit by hearing about experiences not mentioned in their textbooks. Such as: How did the Grandfriends bake before electricity? Wash clothes without hot or cold running water? Farm with a horse and plow?

At John M. King School, where 20 Grandfriends spend part of their

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week, resource teacher Bob Davies describes the Grandfriends project in this way: "This allows us to move into other areas of learning programs instead of keeping strictly to the regular curriculum. With volunteers, we can pinpoint problem pupils and work with them. In the area of learning problems, we have a preventive program by having the Grandfriends pick up problems in nursery school, kindergarten and grade one that otherwise might not be discovered until a child is in grade three."

Grade one teacher Carolyn Lumsden admits she can do more in the class with another person in the room: "It's very hard with 28 kids. With a Grandfriend helping out, it makes things much easier. Kids learn in so many ways. Many kids need individual attention. A teacher by herself can't possibly give this kind of attention. These people are very, very warm. They mix with the kids, and the children love them."

Mary Capri, pre-primary grade one teacher, has a Grandfriend who spends 20 to 25 minutes with each child in her class. "She spends her day working with individual children. She takes them aside, walks with them, teaches them printing — whatever they need."

Grade one continuing teacher Brenda Sorensen finds that the children relate to the Grandfriends: "These people are easygoing and are a wealth of information. The children enjoy having an older person in the room. It's a new face, a new person. They have someone to tell their exciting things to."



And John M. King School is a happier place since the Grandfriends came in, according to Principal Georgina Samuels. "They care. They talk, and the children look forward to these one-to-one relationships."

Paul Resnik, a Grandfriend, gives a half-day a week to the children at William Whyte School. Other days he's busy with his responsibilities as vice-president of the Selkirk Senior Citizens Centre.

"Kids like me and I like kids," he says. "I love hearing 'grandpa' when I walk through the school. It makes me feel good."

Gladys Koppers, a Grandfriend since the project first started, says: "I think lots of them are starved for attention. I love them. I don't know what I'd do if they didn't want me. I'd have to be really sick to miss a day."

Gladys Corrie became a Grandfriend answering through a newspaper ad. "I am a grandmother but my grandchildren are in Calgary," says Mrs. Corrie who is very popular among the young children because of her special talent — playing the piano. "I like playing for the children and they love to march around. It makes me feel good to see the little ones having so much fun."

Elizabeth Gill, a retired executive secretary whom children call Aunt Bett, says the project means so much to the participants. "It's great therapy. Most of our own children are married and away. I didn't want to spend my time going from luncheon to luncheon. Women of my age have time, love and affection. The children always seem to want to touch us. It's so nice to be needed."

And that really is what it's all about.

GRAND FRIENDS