

PARENT CORNER

Grandparents Can Make a Difference

By Patricia von Oelhoffen

The invitation read: “The wisdom and life experiences that grandparents bring is important to our students. You are invited to share those experiences with your grandchild’s class.” And so, walking hand in hand with my grandson Brendan, I entered his school cafeteria on a bright sunny Tuesday morning. The laughter, the clatter of trays and cutlery, the food aromas – all were familiar from my own elementary school days. From the children’s excitement, however, it was clear that this was a special occasion. As the students and grandparents greeted one another, their warmth and pleasure were obvious. After all, we were guests at the Kapolei Elementary School (KES) annual Grandparents Day celebration.

After a warm welcome from school administrators, we ate our breakfasts, finishing just as the bell announced the first class. Off we went to meet Brendan’s teacher and classmates. In his classroom, we observed and participated in the morning’s activities. We learned that at KES, students are taught the “three bees” – be safe, be respectful, and be responsible. The names of students who practice this behavior are displayed on the “beehive wall” near the school library.

Next, we talked about how many different ethnic groups live here in Hawai’i, and how important it is to understand and respect cultural differences. We wrote our own “bee stories,” which would be displayed with the pictures taken of each grandchild and grandparent. As we made our farewells to old and new friends, students returned to their classrooms and grandparents headed off to their homes or workplaces. I believe that others felt, as I did, that something very special had taken place and that we had all gained from the experience.

What Grandparents Do

Grandparents are often thought of as having the best of both worlds – sharing the good moments but not the difficult ones. The reality is that many grandparents play important roles in children’s daily lives, often living in the same household and sharing responsibility for them. Grandparents are an important generational link, helping young ones understand the past and encouraging their hopes and future goals.

In Hawai’i and elsewhere in the Pacific region, parents’ support structure is most often the extended family. Many parents hold more than one job, and between long work hours and household responsibilities, they find it difficult to spend enough quality time with their children. Grandparents can assist by participating



Photo: Tatiana von Oelhoffen

▷ Patricia von Oelhoffen with her grandson, Brendan von Oelhoffen.

in developmental and learning activities like reading and homework. They may also attend performances, games, and practices, as well as special events like birthday parties.

Grandparents contribute to children’s school experiences as well. They can accompany parents to school events or substitute for them when necessary. These occasions provide opportunities to meet and talk with teachers and visit classrooms. Communicating with teachers becomes easier once that first personal contact has been made.

How You Can Help

Grandparents perform valuable services for the community as well as for the family by helping out at local schools. The sidebar lists a variety of ways in which you too can contribute, including tutoring. Schools like KES offer trainings conducted by reading teachers, and those who participate come away better equipped to help their own grandchildren as well as to tutor other students. But no matter what activity you participate in, your unique skills and perspectives will be appreciated. By volunteering as little as one hour a week, you too can make a difference.

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Ten Ways You Can Make a Difference

- Tutor students (in reading, language arts, mathematics, or science)
- Tutor or translate for English language learners
- Assist special education students with physical impairments or learning disabilities
- Read stories
- Supervise arts and crafts projects, sports events, and other activities
- Serve as a classroom, library, or office assistant
- Oversee homework and after-school recreational activities
- Act as a street crossing monitor
- Chaperone field trips
- Give a tour of your workplace or teach children about your business