

HILLSDALE

# DAILY NEWS



PROBLEM-SOLVING, MORE

## Foster grandparents review rules, guidelines

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By Nancy Hastings

HILLSDALE — A foster grandparents met for an in-service at Perennial Park in Hillsdale recently, where they reviewed tips on how to maintain a positive climate in the classroom. Foster Grandparent Program Director Judy Bays, who has been with the Department on Aging since 1998, announced the same funding as last year is still available for Hillsdale County this year. "The only negative is everything is going up in price," Bays said. As a positive, new people are being hired for the three counties she oversees, including Hillsdale, Lenawee and Monroe counties.

Bays advised that if anyone knew of those who were interested in the program, they should contact her at the Department on Aging. She said mileage is paid at 55-and-a-halfcents a mile and this county's program is the only one that reimburses. For those who wish to eat a school meal, a \$2 amount is also reimbursed.

Early Childhood Specialist and speaker Gratia Karmes, who works with all eight area Head Start classrooms, said she loved the Foster Grandparent Program and was a part-time worker for the program this year. She said one of the things she has loved about the Community Action Agency is that "it's the empire of good. "There are so many avenues to help people," she said. "It's really nice as a social worker to be able to say, 'let me go down the hallway and connect you with someone who can help.'" As each of the foster grandparents introduced themselves, Karmes noted four of the eight present at the meeting work with toddlers, while the remainder work with elementary children in various schools throughout the county.

Sharrin Butcher, assisting with 3- and 4-year olds, said her experiences as a foster grandparent were "fantastic. "When I had a heart attack last year, the kids and teacher made a big poster and signed it for when I was in Borgess (Medical Center)," Butcher said. "It meant so much." Karmes said the program is "a win-win for all." Her goal is to get people to know who foster grandparents are and what they are about.

"The grandmas love it," she said. "It gives them something to do and the salary doesn't count against Social Security." While there are guidelines that everyone in the program has to follow, Karmes said those guidelines are needed for basic operation. She outlined seven tips to maintain a positive climate in the classroom, noting that positive attention while interacting with children is key. "You have to smile, have eye contact and always keep calm," she said.

Karmes also said foster grandparents should be sensitive to children who are upset or need extra support. Allowing children to make choices is helpful and if a child is misbehaving, redirecting the child to another activity is best, she said. Other tips include participating with children as partners in play, addressing comments to children rather than talking to other adults about them, to be encouraging while interacting with children and to enjoy spending time with them. Karmes summed up her talk saying that working as an early childhood specialist gives her "a lot of meaning, purpose and direction to life."

Bays said foster grandparents often tell her while they don't get rich in money, they get rich in heart. And, whenever she goes out into the community, there are success stories of how Head Start was part of that success. As a foster grandparent with Pittsford Schools for five years, Shirley Burge, 78, said the in-service provided a great deal of direction. This year, she will be helping with second and third graders.

"I've learned just how to handle children," she said. "You have to bring it to their level and correspond to them."

**How to help** Bays said a van is currently being sought to transport foster grandparents to and from training in Adrian. For more information on this or how to become a foster grandparent, contact Bays at 1-866-347-5683.