

EFFECTIVE PRACTICES OF FOSTER GRANDPARENTS IN HEADSTART CENTERS

BENEFITS FOR CHILDREN, CLASSROOMS, AND CENTERS

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PREFACE

There is much discussion of *effective practices* and various models have been proposed to define and validate them. This study is presented as one of several models which we believe will contribute to a purpose for which there appears to be much consensus. This purpose is to identify as effective practices those behaviors and activities that contribute to organizations and which help them to achieve their ultimate goals or outcomes.

The basic elements of the model piloted here are:

1. field nomination of effective practices in the area of interest
2. identification of similar activities in the literature with a theoretical and research basis
3. identification [in the literature when and replicable standard

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INTRODUCTION

The Foster Grandparent Program (FGP) is a federally funded program authorized by Title II, Part B, of the Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973 and re-authorized by the National and Community Service Act of 1993. The program is administered by the Corporation for National Service (the Corporation).

The FGP offers opportunities for income-eligible people ages 60 years and older to provide ongoing supportive person-to-person services in health, education, welfare, and related settings to children and youth having exceptional or special needs.

Nationwide, there are more than 25,000 Foster Grandparent volunteers. Ninety percent of them are female, and half are in their seventies. The largest number of volunteers serve in public or private school settings, day care centers, and Head Start programs.

History of the Program

The FGP began in 1965 as a national demonstration effort under the Office of Economic Opportunity's (OEO) enabling legislation. The first 21 projects resulted in approximately 800 Foster Grandparents serving children to age five in institutional and community settings. In 1969, the FGP was transferred to the Administration on Aging and authority was extended to serve children up to age 17. In 1971, the FGP moved to ACTION and the age of persons served was extended to 21 years. Since 1993, the FGP has been a part of the Corporation through which over 25,000 Foster Grandparents serve almost 90,000 exceptional and special needs children on an ongoing basis.

PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY

The purpose of the study was to learn more about what Foster Grandparents *do* in Head Start centers and how their contributions benefit the children they serve.

The FGP is designed to be meaningful to the Foster Grandparents themselves and to provide support and companionship to the children it serves. Past research has focused on the benefits that the seniors derive from the Program. This research focuses on how children benefit from it.

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This study was done to lay a foundation for future quantitative studies of FGP results and impacts for children in Head Start. The Head Start program was chosen for several reasons:

- ✂ The study was exploring new territory; the decision to conduct an in-depth qualitative study limited the number and type of stations that could be included in the design.
- ✂ A sizable number of Foster Grandparents currently serve in Head Start stations—over 4,000 (16%) in the 1996/97 school year covered by this evaluation.
- ✂ Head Start represents a high growth area for FGP. Between 1995 and 1997, Head Start placements increased 33 percent, growing from 12 to 16 percent of total placements.
- ✂ As Head Start expands its services to include younger children, there is considerable potential for growth.
- ✂ Policy issues about Foster Grandparents in schools where the largest number serve (over 9,000 or 36% of Foster Grandparent placements) are expected to be addressed through other studies.

This study addressed the following objectives specified by the Corporation:

- ✂ Increase knowledge about what Foster Grandparents *do* in Head Start stations that may contribute to positive results for children;
- ✂ Increase knowledge about the effects that the FGP may have on children;
- ✂ Identify practices that either help or hinder Foster Grandparent contributions to positive results for children; and

SITE SELECTION

Six sites were selected from nominations by State Directors and FGP Projects. Sites were selected first, for their use of effective practices of productive roles for Foster Grandparents. Geographic and ethnic diversity were secondary considerations, along with logistical issues.

Six FGP projects with volunteers serving in Head Start centers were selected for this study from nominations by State Directors and FGP Project Directors. Sites were selected first, for their use of effective practices of productive roles for Foster Grandparents. Geographic and ethnic diversity were secondary considerations, along with logistical issues. Only sites with three or more volunteers were selected so that data collection would not be disrupted if the Foster Grandparent became ill or was

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absent for any reason during the site visit. Also, because the data were being collected toward the end of the 1996/97 school year, it was important that the Head Start center be involved in regular programming and not a summer schedule.

The selected sites were drawn from five cluster areas of the United States (Table 1). They included projects serving urban and rural populations. As a group, they represent diversity in the race and ethnicity of the children served. Ethnicity of Foster Grandparents was not a criterion for site selection, though the final sample was diverse, including Black, Hispanic and White volunteers. The Head Start stations each had three or more Foster Grandparent volunteers, and the size of the stations ranged from 3 classrooms and 55 children to 10 classrooms and 200 children. Most of the Foster Grandparents had worked with the selected FGP projects and Head Start centers for 15 or more years.

METHODS

Once the projects were selected, local FGP/Head Start staff at each site selected one *study* classroom of children 4 to 5 years of age who were served by a Foster Grandparent volunteer.

This group of six classrooms, one from each site, and their respective Foster Grandparents are the main focus of this study.

Data were collected by Westat staff during site visits conducted in late May and early June 1997; four two-person teams spent 3 days at their respective sites. Data were collected through intensive observation of one *study* classroom at every site, open-ended interviews with FGP project directors and Head Start administrative and teaching staff, as well as focus group and individual interviews with Foster Grandparent volunteers.

In addition, a telephone survey of Head Start staff at the local FGP projects was conducted in November 1997. This survey was to clarify issues pertaining to FGP rules and regulations that emerged during the site visits.

In each of the six study sites, the site visitor team observed the one study classroom for about 4 hours to learn about what the Foster Grandparents do and how what they do may contribute to positive child outcomes. Each observer took detailed notes that described the number and characteristics of the children and adults present in the classroom, the physical layout of the room, schedule of activities, what the Foster Grandparents did, the nature and quality of their interactions with children, and how the children responded to the Foster Grandparents. At the end of the day, the site visit team members met for 2-3 hours to discuss their observations and overall impressions.

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Table 1. Characteristics of the Sites

	SITE 1	SITE 2	SITE 3	SITE 4	SITE 5
Cluster	Atlantic	North	South	West	Pacific
Urbanicity	Mixed	Urban	Urban	Urban	Rural
Total Number of FGP Volunteers	10	3	4	5	5
Total Number of Classes	10	3	4	9	8
Total Number of Children	200	55	55	214	144
Race/Ethnicity of Children^{1,2}	White Hispanic Black	Black	Black	Hispanic	White Hispanic
Race/Ethnicity of Volunteers	Black White Hispanic	Black White	Black	Hispanic	Hispanic White

¹Black includes African American as well as recent immigrants from Africa and children from islands in the Caribbean.

²At multi-ethnic sites, racial and ethnic groups are listed according to their relative proportions from largest to smallest.

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The Arnett Scale of Caregiver Behavior, which measures the caregiving behavior of individual adults in a classroom, was used to provide consistency in reporting across sites (see Table 2). Overall, the scale was useful for summarizing key elements of the Foster Grandparents' interactions with the children, determining within site inter-rater reliability, and organizing data to substantiate summary judgments. Behaviors on the scale are associated with positive development and outcomes for children.

EFFECTIVE PRACTICES

Findings from this study show that the majority of Foster Grandparents engage in a wide range of activities and interactions that contribute positively to children, classrooms and stations. These behaviors are described well by 14 items of the Arnett Scale of Caregiver Behaviors. A sizable body of evidence shows that these caregiver behaviors are associated with positive developmental outcomes for children. For this study, these items were organized into three general categories: (1) engages in positive person-to-person interactions with children, (2) develops or reinforces pro social behaviors and (3) provides children with constructive guidance and feedback. Contributions at the classroom and station levels include: (1) increased opportunities for all children in the classroom to receive individualized adult attention, (2) a calming influence on the classroom environment, (3) behind-the-scenes support that facilitates smooth transitions from one activity to the next, and (4) continuity for children when teaching staff are absent or leave.

Types of Foster Grandparent Support to the Children

Foster Grandparents were observed to provide support to the children in five outcome areas: emotional well-being, self-esteem, social skills, language development, and cognitive development. Table 3 presents a summary of the activities and interactions we observed the Foster Grandparents doing that have potential for contributing to positive results for children. Activities and interactions that contribute to children's emotional well-being, self-esteem, and self-efficacy are considered primary because they are the foundation for contributions in other domains.

Emotional Well-Being

In classrooms where the Foster Grandparents consistently demonstrated positive caregiver behaviors, Head Start teaching staff said that the children benefit enormously from the emotional support they get from the Foster Grandparents. Two characteristics of the volunteers' interactions with the children were observed to contribute to this outcome:

They provided nurturance so the children felt cared for. According to Head Start staff, the children know that the Foster Grandparents are there for them and seek them out. These Foster Grandparents communicate that they care through the warm and gentle ways they approach and respond to the children. For example, they convey warmth by smiling at the children and touching them and interest by listening attentively to the children when they speak.

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Table 2. Arnett Scale of Caregiver Behaviors (Select Items)

Engages in Positive Person-to-Person Interactions with Children	1. Speaks warmly to the children (e.g., positive tone of voice, body language)
	2. Listens attentively when children speak to her (e.g., looks at children, nods, rephrases their comments, engages in conversations)
	3. Seems to enjoy the children (e.g., conveys warmth by smiling, touching, taking children's conversations seriously)
	4. Seems enthusiastic about the children's activities and efforts (e.g., congratulates children, states appreciation for their efforts)
	5. Pays positive attention to the children as individuals (e.g., speaks to individual children, uses their names, calls attention to prosocial behaviors, comments on their strengths)
	6. Talks to the children on a level they can understand (e.g., uses terms familiar to children, checks for clarification)
	7. When talking to children, kneels, bends or sits at their level to establish better eye contact (e.g., ensures connection when having a conversation)
Develops or Reinforces Prosocial Behaviors	8. Encourages the children to try new experiences (e.g., suggests friends do it together, helps children start, introduces new materials)
	9. Encourages children to exhibit prosocial behavior (e.g., sharing, cooperating, pairs socially skillful with those children that need practice)
	10. Promotes leadership skills (e.g., uses jobs to help routines like line leaders, clean-up inspector, talks about children's contributions to the group)
Provides Children With Constructive Guidance and Feedback	11. When children misbehave, explains the reason for the rule they are breaking (e.g., discusses consequences, redirects behavior, discusses what to do instead)
	12. Exercises firmness when necessary (e.g., clear and direct directions, checks for understanding)
	13. Expects the children to exercise self-control (e.g., to be non-disruptive for short group, teacher-led activities; to be able to stand in line calmly; reminds children of expectations; and asks for cooperation in supportive ways)
	14. Assists children in making productive choices (e.g., uses a planning process or discussion to outline choices during activity periods, narrows choices when children have difficulty)

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Table 3. Potential Foster Grandparent Contributions to Child Outcomes

<p style="text-align: center;">PRIMARY CONTRIBUTIONS</p> <p>Emotional Well-Being</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">✂ Provides nurturance so that children feel cared for✂ Calms children who are anxious, tired or cranky so they can participate in activities <p>Self Esteem and Self Efficacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">✂ Provides undivided attention so that children feel valued✂ Structures activities in ways that children can experience success <p style="text-align: center;">SECONDARY CONTRIBUTIONS</p> <p>Social and Behavioral Skills Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">✂ Encourages children to cooperate and share with one another✂ Encourages development of positive health and nutrition habits✂ Encourages good manners and self reliance✂ Redirects undesirable behavior to desirable behavior✂ States reasons why a particular behavior was desirable or undesirable <p>Language Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">✂ Helps children from non-English speaking households learn to communicate in English✂ Provides children with speech delays or impediments or shyness opportunities to develop their self-expression skills <p>Cognitive Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">✂ Encourages preliteracy skills✂ Encourages numeracy skills✂ Helps to expand children's knowledge base

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- ***They calmed children who were anxious, tired, or cranky.*** One teacher said she could not recall very many days that she did not see a tired or anxious child walk up to the Foster Grandparent and point to the rocking chair. Nearly every teacher we interviewed said that an important part of what many Foster Grandparents do is take children who are upset or cranky aside and calm them. A walk around the yard or time spent in a Foster Grandparent's lap—rocking or singing/talking quietly—can soothe the child and turn her or his day around.

The children with emotional problems almost gravitate toward the Foster Grandparent. Her calm demeanor and body language help these children calm down and get focused. I often ask her to spend time with one particular boy . . . He just falls into her . . . and the child becomes her only concern . . . It doesn't matter if it takes 10 minutes for him to calm down, a half hour, or longer . . . That's a major part of what she's here to do. It's an important contribution.

Self Esteem and Self-Efficacy

Teachers reported that the Foster Grandparents effectively contribute to the children's growing sense of self and feelings of self-worth. Our observations of the Foster Grandparents' interactions with the children corroborated their reports. We identified a number of ways the Foster Grandparents in these classrooms acknowledged the children for who they were and what they did.

- ***Foster Grandparents gave nearly every child their undivided attention at one time or another over the course of the day.*** The Foster Grandparents had one or more one-to-one interactions daily with nearly every child in the classroom. Some of these interactions were initiated by children who approached the Foster Grandparent to ask a question, to talk, or to show the Grandparent something that they did. Others were initiated by the Foster Grandparent. In the effective classrooms, the Foster Grandparents acknowledged each child's effort to communicate with a verbal response and/or a physical gesture. Through their body language, facial expressions, and words, they expressed genuine interest in whatever the child was doing or saying.

In several classrooms, the Foster Grandparents were observed to be especially attentive and patient to children who were either shy or withdrawn, delayed in their development of language, had speech impediments, or were from non-English-speaking households. The Foster Grandparents sat down with the children, asked them questions, waited patiently while the child formulated and expressed a response, and communicated verbally or non-verbally that what the child said was important and worthwhile.

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[The] Foster Grandparent was passing out stickers to the children and had six of them gathered around her. She let the children select their stickers one-by-one. After the first child selected his sticker, she asked him questions about the picture on the sticker, why he chose the one he did, and what he planned to do with it, before turning her attention to the second child. Thus, she gave each child individual attention. The children seemed to respect this process, waiting patiently for their time with the Foster Grandparent.

✂ *They structured activities so that the children could experience success.* Foster Grandparents who consistently demonstrated positive caregiver behaviors helped the children successfully complete complex tasks by breaking them down into simple steps. For example, in one classroom the Foster Grandparent transformed a complex and mundane set of tasks (preparing the tables for lunch) into a learning experience for the children. The Foster Grandparent gave each child a specific task to complete. Three boys were asked to count out six knives apiece. The Foster Grandparent then asked them to pick up the knives by their handles and lay them out one-by-one next to the spoons that another three children had counted out. When all the flatware was laid out in this way, the Foster Grandparent showed the children how to pick up one knife, one fork, and one spoon by their handles and roll them into a napkin. Following her demonstration, the children proceeded to roll up the remaining sets on their own while the Foster Grandparent helped individual children improve their method and reinforced their efforts. When they were finished, the children were proud of their work and ready to proceed to the next task.

Social and Behavioral Skills Development

The importance of a child's social and behavioral adjustment to later success in school is a cornerstone of the Head Start program and approach to early childhood education. The Foster Grandparents who consistently demonstrated positive caregiver behaviors contributed to and reinforced social skills and behaviors in the children. The following presents an overview of various effective practices that we observed in these classrooms:

✂ *The Foster Grandparent encouraged the children to cooperate and share with one another.* In one classroom, a child asked the Foster Grandparent to play a game of Chutes and Ladders. As they were setting up the game board, two other children asked if they could also play. The Foster Grandparent told them that they should ask the first child if they could play. He said yes, and the grandmother commented on how nice it is to have friends who want to play with you. They played the game, which included lessons in taking turns, sharing in the excitement of a fellow player's good fortune (sportsmanship), counting (cognitive skills), and staying in the board squares (a fine motor skill).

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- ✂ ***They modeled and encouraged development of positive health and nutrition habits.*** We observed numerous occasions when the Foster Grandparents modeled positive health and nutrition habits (e.g., covering their mouths when they sneezed, washing their hands before they handled food or utensils, and eating vegetables or fruit); labeled the positive behavior for the children (e.g., “when I sneeze I cover my mouth so the germs don’t spread to others” or “I eat spinach because it makes me strong”); and reinforced the children when they showed positive health or nutrition behaviors (e.g., reinforcing them for brushing their teeth after each meal, trying new foods and drinking their milk at lunch).
- ✂ ***They modeled good manners and self-reliance.*** What we observed during breakfast at one site is illustrative. The meal was served family style, and the children at the Foster Grandparent’s table were expected to serve themselves and pass the serving platter along. They also poured their own milk and juice from pitchers and had unfolded napkins in their laps. Throughout the meal, the Foster Grandparent praised the children for asking to have the milk served, saying please and thank you when asking for or receiving something, and so on. At the end of the meal, the Foster Grandparent began to clean up—describing what she was doing and encouraging the children to follow suit. Almost all the children cleared their places, following her example. When the Foster Grandparent noticed that one child ran off to play and left his dirty glass on the table, she sent her helper to remind the forgetful child to put his glass in the bin.
- ✂ ***They redirected undesirable behavior to desirable behavior, when needed.*** For the most part, the children in the effective classrooms were very well behaved. However, during our classroom observation, several children used inappropriate language. Each time they did, the Foster Grandparent asked them to “use their words”, a cue taken from an anti-violence curriculum. Each time they used their words correctly, she recognized it and encouraged them. On several occasions we saw her reinforce children for using their words correctly in front of those who had used inappropriate language minutes earlier, thereby labeling appropriate language for the children and giving them examples that they could emulate.
- ✂ ***They briefly and calmly stated the reason why a particular behavior was desirable or undesirable.*** In the effective classrooms, the Foster Grandparents frequently and consistently “caught the children being good”. They did this by acknowledging the child, labeling the specific behavior, and explaining why the behavior was important or appreciated.

During one play session in a sandbox, one child began to dump her sand cakes outside the box. Calmly, the Foster Grandparent told her not to do this and explained that the sand must stay in the sandbox so that it will be there the next time some one wants to play with it. The Foster Grandparent helped the girl put the sand back into the box and patted her on the back when they were finished.

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Language Development

In some of the classrooms in the study, teachers mentioned that the Foster Grandparents have helped some children learn to speak English and others who had speech and language problems or were shy. In every case, improved speech was attributed in part to the Foster Grandparents' diligence in spending time with the child, listening carefully to what she or he was trying to communicate, and reinforcing the child's efforts. In one classroom, a child spoke very softly and slowly. Instead of rushing him or letting another child interrupt, the Foster Grandparent put her hand on the child's shoulder and, through her expression, let the child know what he had to say was important and worth waiting for.

In one classroom, a child spoke very softly and slowly. Instead of rushing him or letting another child interrupt, the Foster Grandparent put her hand on the child's shoulder and, through her expression, let the child know what he had to say was important and worth waiting for.

Cognitive Development

Foster Grandparents also contributed to the children's development of cognitive skills and concepts. The Foster Grandparents stimulated the children intellectually and engaged them in activities or conversation that advanced their preliteracy and numeracy skills and expanded their general knowledge bases. These were rarely structured or planned; instead, they were embedded in whatever was happening at the moment.

Some of the Foster Grandparents seemed to have a knack for recognizing and capitalizing on teachable moments with the children.

✂ *The Foster Grandparents developed or reinforced the children's preliteracy skills.* They sat and read to children, individually and in small groups, and asked children to choose a book and tell them the story based on the illustrations. In one classroom, a group of children were cutting pictures out of magazines. The Foster Grandparent said that it is fun to cut out the letters in your name and glue them onto a sheet of paper. With her help, all of the children began looking through the magazines to find the letters in their names. When another child could not find a "V," the Foster Grandparent wrote the letter on a piece of paper, showed it to the children, and asked them to help him find one. The children remained interested and engaged in the activity until the teacher announced that it was time to clean up. Further, the children's accuracy and confidence in letter and name recognition were improved or reinforced.

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✂ *They developed or reinforced the children's numeracy skills.* When playing board games, for example, the Foster Grandparents asked each child to say what number the arrow was pointing to when it was his or her turn to spin. When a child did not recognize a number or had trouble counting, the Foster Grandparent enlisted the other children to count along with her and the child. Counting was incorporated into a variety of other tasks, including counting utensils during meal prep and counting scissors during activity prep. Thus, opportunities for children to practice and learn about numbers occurred naturally and routinely in activities with effective Foster Grandparents.

They expanded the children's knowledge base. In the context of a wide range of activities--for example meals, play, daily hygiene routines and others--Foster Grandparents extended or reinforced the children's grasp of concepts and facts. Most often, these lessons were imparted through conversations with children in one-on-one or small group activities. The content areas varied widely and included subjects that were raised by the children or were of special interest to the Foster Grandparent.

Types of Foster Grandparent Support to the Classroom

Teachers and other Head Start personnel mentioned ways that the Foster Grandparents contributed positively to the classroom and station milieu. Some of these contributions are described below and shown in Table 4.

✂ *Foster Grandparents increase the amount of individualized attention the children are given.* The volunteers respond to diverse needs of the children—e.g., answering their questions and responding to their requests for assistance. When they are not there, the teacher and assistant have to do these things which detracts from the time they have for the children. One teacher described the days when the Foster Grandparents are out as "hectic."

✂ *They contribute a calming influence to the classroom environment.* Nearly every Head Start teacher and director described ways that many of the Foster Grandparents contribute to the overall management and tone of the classroom.

"In September the kids come to school denurtured . . . Many have not had a lot of positive verbal interactions in their homes. The Foster Grandparents all speak very softly. If the kids want the grandmas' attention, they have to listen carefully to whatever the grandmas are saying. Over the year, the children mimic the volume and tone of the seniors' voices. It's easy once they learn that in the classroom they don't have to shout to be heard."

✂ *They provide behind-the-scenes support that contributes to a smooth transition from one activity to the next.* According to teachers, the Foster Grandparents often prepare or organize the materials for the next activity ahead of time, which facilitates a smooth transition from one activity to another.

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- ✂ *They provide children with the continuity they need when the teacher is absent or leaves.* In one classroom, the teaching staff had turned over twice in less than 1 year. The Foster Grandparent was the only adult that the children had met in September who was with them the entire year. Teachers in two other study sites mentioned that the Foster Grandparents provide stability for the children and guidance for the substitutes on days when they are absent.

- ✂ *They educate the community.* At two sites, the directors of Head Start mentioned how the Foster Grandparents expanded the network of people who know about and contribute to their programs. The Foster Grandparents talk to their neighbors, members of their church groups, and other seniors about the mission of Head Start and the range of services the center provides. The Program has also motivated individuals and groups in the broader community to knit mittens for the children or donate a variety of other goods and services.

Table 4. Foster Grandparent Contributions at the Classroom and Station Levels

- ✂ Increase the amount of individualized attention the children are given.
- ✂ Contribute a calming influence to the classroom environment.
- ✂ Provide behind-the-scenes support that facilitates smooth transitions from one activity to the next.
- ✂ Provide children with the continuity they need when the teacher is absent or leaves.
- ✂ Educate the community.

Effective Practices of Teachers and Schools

We were able to identify five classroom practices that contribute to the effectiveness of the Foster Grandparents. These effective practices are described below and shown in Table 5.

- ✂ *Classroom teachers model positive caregiver behaviors.* Classroom teachers appear to influence how Foster Grandparents interact with children. In classrooms where the Foster Grandparents consistently demonstrated positive caregiver behaviors, the teachers also were observed interacting proactively with children and modeling a wide range of developmentally appropriate practices. The teacher's behavior and leadership style strongly influenced what the Foster Grandparents did with the children.

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- ✂ *Classroom teachers communicate with the Foster Grandparents.* In the more effective classrooms, teachers communicated to the Foster Grandparent the activities or events planned for the day. The teachers guided the Foster Grandparents to children in need of special attention and periodically acknowledged their positive interactions with children and other contributions verbally or with a smile or a nod of the head.
- ✂ *Teachers talk to the Foster Grandparents about the needs of specific children and the sorts of activities or interactions that would help them.* Teachers have access to confidential information about each child's special physical, behavioral, emotional, or cognitive needs and family living situation. In effective classrooms, the teachers explain the child's special needs to the Foster Grandparents in ways that do not violate the privacy of children or families. These teachers also suggest specific things that the Foster Grandparents can do to help individual children.
- ✂ *Classroom teachers and Foster Grandparents transform mundane classroom chores into enjoyable and productive learning experiences for the children.* In the effective classrooms, the Foster Grandparents used setting the table at mealtime as an opportunity to teach personal hygiene around food, counting silverware, and balancing trays. The children enjoyed helping the Foster Grandparents and considered themselves special on the day they were selected to do so. In addition to these benefits for the children, teachers said most Foster Grandparents enjoy and feel comfortable doing this task and that it provided the children with a smooth and orderly transition between activities.

Table 5. Effective Teacher/Foster Grandparent Relationships

- ✂ Classroom teachers model positive caregiver behaviors.
- ✂ Classroom teachers and Foster Grandparents communicate with one another.
- ✂ Teachers talk to the Foster Grandparents about the needs of specific children and the sorts of activities or interactions that would help them.
- ✂ Classroom teachers and Foster Grandparents transform the most mundane classroom chores into enjoyable learning experiences for the children.
- ✂ Foster Grandparents have a place and time to gather and interact with one another about their service to children.

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✂ *Foster Grandparents are given a place and time to gather and interact with one another about their service to children.* Providing opportunities for the Foster Grandparents to interact with one another has a positive effect on their morale, motivation, and overall effectiveness. During breaks, the Foster Grandparents shared their experiences in the classroom with one another celebrating their successes, describing activities that the children especially enjoyed, and sharing strategies that worked for them in challenging situations.

Summary of Major Findings

Evidence from our intensive observations of Foster Grandparents in six classrooms show that the majority of Foster Grandparents engage in a wide variety of activities and interactions that are associated with positive developmental outcomes for children in five areas: 1) emotional well-being, 2) self-esteem; 3) social and behavioral skills development, 4) language development, and 5) cognitive development.

In addition, findings from this study show that the majority of Foster Grandparents engage in a wide range of activities and interactions that contribute positively at the classroom and station levels. These contributions include: 1) increased opportunities for all children in the classroom to receive individualized adult attention, 2) a calming influence on the classroom environment, 3) behind-the-scenes support that facilitates smooth transitions from one activity to the next, and 4) continuity for children when teaching staff are absent or leave.

The aforementioned contributions to children, classrooms and stations were observed among Foster Grandparents who demonstrated a variety of positive caregiver behaviors and served in classrooms where certain practices were implemented. In the effective classrooms, Foster Grandparents demonstrated various positive caregiver behaviors. Broadly, these Foster Grandparents:

- Engaged in a range of positive person-to-person interactions with assigned and other children over the course of the day—for example, by listening attentively to the children and acknowledging their progress and accomplishments.
- Developed or reinforced prosocial behaviors through modeling, encouraging children to try new activities with friends, and acknowledging individual contributions to a group activity or task.
- Provided children with constructive guidance and feedback—for example, by helping children make productive choices and redirecting misbehavior.

EFFECTIVE PRACTICES OF FOSTER GRANDPARENTS IN HEADSTART CENTERS

Other practices identified by this study point to the important mentoring that teachers in effective classrooms provide to Foster Grandparents. The following classroom/teacher practices were present in the four classrooms where Foster Grandparents demonstrated consistent positive caregiver behavior and absent in the remaining two. In the effective classrooms:

- Classroom teachers modeled and reinforced a variety of caregiver behaviors.
- Classroom teachers communicated with Foster Grandparents in ways that informed the Foster Grandparent about activities or events planned for the day, guided them to children in need of special attention, acknowledged their contributions to children and the classroom, and periodically reinforced the Foster Grandparent's positive caregiver behaviors.
- Classroom teachers and Foster Grandparents approached all tasks, including the more mundane household and custodial ones, in ways that transformed them into enjoyable and productive learning experiences for children.
- Classroom teachers encouraged or reinforced Foster Grandparent efforts to serve designated exceptional or special needs children in the context of ongoing classroom activities.
- Stations offered the Foster Grandparents a place and time to gather and interact with one another about their work with children.

As the above findings indicate, the Foster Grandparents demonstrated positive caregiver behaviors that a sizable body of literature shows are associated with positive outcomes for children.