

Mary Ann Steep *Senior Corps Volunteer of the Year*

Over the past 22 years as a volunteer with the Foster Grandparents Program through Southwestern Wisconsin Community Action Program, Mary Ann Steep has easily given over 20,000 volunteer hours to the Argyle School District, impacting the lives of countless students and peers. The school district has a singular building for grades 4K-12. With an enrollment of just 302 students, it is on the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction Sparsity list, meaning that because of its small population, it lacks the opportunities and resources of more populated school districts. Mary Ann is one of its most valuable resources, serving as a caring, enthusiastic volunteer that is devoted to providing as much as possible to the children of her community. Mary Ann is embedded in classroom activities and while she focuses on students with special needs, all students benefit from her patience, knowledge and guidance. According to the 2017-18 DPI Argyle Elementary School Report Card, 31.2% of Argyle students are economically disadvantaged and 18% have a disability, so the consistent presence of Mary Ann in the classroom makes a considerable difference for the students.



Mary Ann understands that students learn in many different ways and at various paces. She uses her patience and encouragement to guide her students to success. She makes sure that every classroom activity, from milk count to calendar time, is an opportunity for learning academic skills such as counting, patterns, letter sounds, motor skills, and social and healthy living skills. Mary Ann uses creativity and her years of experience to help her students be engaged in the classroom. She goes far beyond her daily volunteering by using her sewing and crafting skills to make various gifts for the students. These include gifts for Valentine's Day, Halloween, and Christmas, as well as Healing Feeling Dolls for adults and children in the community coping with grief.

One of the things she enjoys most about being a FGP volunteer is the hugs she receives, not only from the "littles" in the 4K classroom, but from students at every grade level. "I love the hugs you get from the students," she said. "Even the students I see in the hallway, they either always say hi or give you a hug. You can't beat that!" Some of these students have been assisted by Mrs. Steep, but many others simply recognize that she is a positive influence and want to thank her for her dedication. Mary Ann is now seeing some of her former students' children, attesting to her longevity and commitment to her role at Argyle. As 4K teacher Mrs. Dammen says, "Mrs. Steep is just wonderful!"