

## Sally Vyvyan

### *AmeriCorps Seniors Lifetime Impact Volunteer*

When asked at Westby Elementary “How do you spell awe-inspiring,” a likely response is that it is spelled S-A-L-L-Y for Grandma Sally. For nearly two decades, Sally Vyvyan has positively impacted students and classrooms at Westby Elementary as an AmeriCorps Seniors volunteer with the Foster Grandparents Program that is currently operated by the Southwestern Wisconsin Community Action Program.

Sally has made a significant impact for Westby students since 2002, providing at least 15,000 hours of service to make a difference in their education. Sally typically volunteers 20 hours or more per week during the school year. Her commitment to her students continues after leaving school for the day, as you can often find Sally at the town library researching the challenges children face and how they might impact their ability to learn. She strives to apply the knowledge to best serve her students, saying her greatest joy is seeing how the children she works with progress from her help.

Sally works with almost every classroom through the 3rd grade at the school and she typically has between 10-15 specific students each year. The difference she makes for her students is tangible. Her students have had a success rate of over 90% in achieving the goals set by the school since 2017. While she has certain students assigned to her each year, the teachers at Westby note that all of the students benefit from her as a positive role model and through the encouragement she brings as she helps students with academics and social and life skills.

One example of these efforts comes from the Book Club that she created for students with a wide range of reading levels to help better prepare students for reading and help them see viewpoints from several different perspectives. More than just reading the books, Grandma Sally’s book club researches the book they read, the origin of stories, and the author. Participating in the Book Club has brought greater enjoyment of reading to her reluctant readers, and she hopes it will help students fall in love with reading.

This is not the only lasting impact she has on these students, even though the first students she worked with graduated several years ago. The connections she made have continued through high school and even being invited to some of their weddings. Sally said that “for me to be thought about after they graduate high school and to see what they have become and do with their lives is touching.”

When the COVID-19 pandemic shut down in-person learning and prevented her from working with her students, she looked forward to the chance to return to the classroom. Following the availability of COVID-19 vaccines, Sally quickly jumped at the opportunity receiving it would provide, and ultimately became the first Southwest CAP volunteer in her program to return to school. It turned out that she was not the only one eagerly awaiting her return, as she found a giant “Welcome Back Grandma Sally” sign made by the students when entering the school and was then greeted by every student and staff member lining the hallways clapping to welcome her back.

When reflecting upon her service and honors she has received, including the Presidential Award in 2012 for 10,000 hours of service, Sally describes being grateful for these, but that “there is no award greater than a child’s smile, hug, or respect.” Over her nearly two decades of service, she has received hundreds upon hundreds of these, while make a lasting difference for the students at Westby Elementary School.

