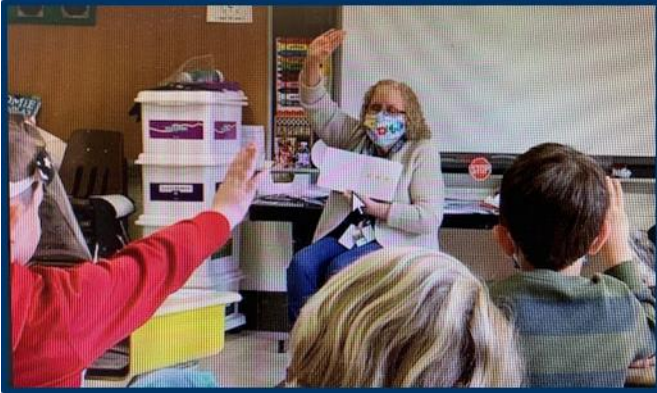


A Hero's Welcome

COVID struck and our world was turned upside down. Our priorities were put into focus. Our heroes no longer wore capes, played in the major league, starred on the big screen, nor would you find them in the Hall of Fame, or their name imprinted on a star in Hollywood. The heroes during COVID were basically unknowns; no big names, no Emmys, no Heisman Trophy, but true heroes nether the less, serving in the shadows, not under the big lights.



One such hero, they lovingly call her “Cioci” (Polish for aunt or auntie). Her come-back story, will warm your heart, just as Geri Curry “Cioci” warms the hearts and lives of the children and staff at Elk Lake Elementary School, where she serves as a Foster Grandparent.

“Cioci” Geri Curry writes:

I was a little nervous and apprehensive about returning to school. It was a whole year due to the pandemic, and I didn't know what to expect! From the moment I walked in the girls in the office were so happy to see me and so welcoming. As I walked down the hallway I could hear the one kindergarten class, which faces the parking lot, saying Cioci is here, Cioci is here! Do you think she will stop in! I have been doing virtual readings for all the kindergarten classes so that's how they knew who I was. I stopped in each classroom before going to mine and the cheers and clapping were overwhelming! As the day went by every teacher and support aides came to my class to welcome me back and at the end of the day when I was leaving our principal Mr. Weisgold came out and said he fought for me to come back and I was the only “outsider “ they had let in. And I was nervous to come back...Silly me!

Principal Weisgold writes:

COVID has certainly ripped so many things away from us over the past year. It's nice to finally feel the tides are changing. Recently Elk Lake elementary allowed fully vaccinated volunteers back into the educational setting. This meant the return of our resident Cioci (the students call her this), Gerri Curry! If you have ever seen old films of Elvis entering the building and the frenzy that ensued you would understand what her return was like here at Elk Lake this past Friday. The students and the staff were so happy to see her smiling face and caring heart. Cioci immediately jumped in with both feet as if the pandemic never happened. She was seen in the rooms hustling around, walking in lines, helping students with work and projects and most importantly waving and smiling through her mask!! At a time when we all needed a little pick-me-up our beloved Cioci stepped in. We are so excited to have her and the students missed her so much. We appreciate her selflessness and willingness to give back to the youth of this community!

Mrs. Rezykowski write:

Cioci has played a very important part in the positive atmosphere we aim to keep here at the Elk Lake Elementary School. She is always ready to share smiles, 'air hugs' and listen to all sorts of stories. This year we had a very different start to the year - having to keep socially distanced, not having visitors in classrooms, wearing masks, and washing hands a lot. Not being able to be here in person did not stop Cioci from sharing her love with the students here. Every week she would record a video of a story she would read aloud and make sure she sent it first thing Monday morning for the students to see. At times

she would share special messages with students after the story and wished them a Happy Birthday if it was their birthday week. The students loved getting her videos and once she announced that she would be able to start coming in to see them there was a roar of excitement in the classroom. On her first day back there were a few students in one class that spotted her walking toward the building in the parking lot and made sure the teacher knew she was here. The students took turns greeting her from their desks, introducing themselves, and sharing something that they couldn't wait to tell her. It was a beautiful sight to see. Cioci walked in ready to help out and share her love and joy with everyone and she certainly did just that!

Maybe you don't wear a cape or have a star in Hollywood, but you can still be a hero helping students in a local school's classroom through the Foster Grandparent Program. There are many children in your neighborhood that could use a hero, just like you.

Foster Grandparents not only enjoy the laughter and love of children and the friendship of the teachers. They also receive a tax free monetary stipend, paid time off, up to twelve paid vacations, reimbursement for travel to and from school. Don't drive? No problem, we can provide transportation.

The Foster Grandparent is seeking kid loving, income eligible, people, 55 years of age and older, who would enjoy tutoring children when the school start up in the fall.

**Please call Area Agency on Aging and ask about the Foster Grandparent Program
570-265-6121, or toll free 1-800-9824346**

The Foster Grandparent Program is federally funded by AmeriCorps Seniors. The Foster Grandparent Program is sponsored by the Area Agency on Aging for Bradford, Sullivan, Susquehanna and Tioga counties.

The B/S/S/T Area Agency on Aging, Inc. is funded in part by the Pennsylvania Department of Aging; the United Way of Bradford County; the Lycoming County United Way serving Wellsboro and southern Tioga County; the United Way of Susquehanna County and the Bradford, Sullivan, Susquehanna, Tioga Downs Regional Community Foundation. For additional information on Area Agency on Aging services, please call 1-800-982-4346.