

Kids at nursery love foster grandparents

It was just Samantha Chin's second day at the Boulder Day Nursery, and she was feeling right at home. It wasn't the toys or other small children she made a bee-line toward, but an elderly woman with short gray hair sitting in a miniature orange plastic chair.

Samantha's mother, Wendy Chin, said after her first day her nearly 3-year-old daughter told her, "I saw a grandma who has white hair, and I like her."

Cared for by her own grandmother during the day until she started at Boulder Day Nursery, Samantha immediately gravitated toward Louise DeSersa, a 78-year-old "foster grandparent" who graces the day care classroom five mornings a week.

The Foster Grandparent program matches limited- or low-income seniors with volunteer opportunities where they can share their skills and experiences with others while remaining active in the community. For the small, non taxable stipend of \$2.55 an hour, seniors across the state volunteer in hospitals, schools, adolescent shelters and day care centers.



KRISTIN DIZON

"Rather than sit at home and do nothing, I wanted something to fill my time," said DeSersa, who came to Boulder Day Nursery after her husband died in 1987. A mother of eight and grandmother of "many," DeSersa said she likes working with children 20 hours a week because it keeps her feeling young and energetic.

"They add a whole other dimension to the program," said Steve Calander, executive director of the nursery. "A lot of children don't have that link to their extended families."

The nursery was started in 1918, just before DeSersa was born, to meet the needs of working women who had joined the war effort. Child care at the time cost 10 cents an

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KERRY HULLER / For the Camera

Kaleb Atchison, 2, shows Louise DeSersa a blue-haired troll at the Boulder Day Nursery on Thursday morning. DeSersa volunteers at the nursery every day as a foster grandparent to the children.

Kids at day nursery love 'grandparents'

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hour; now the non-profit nursery offers a sliding scale to parents of various incomes for infants to pre-kindergarten age children.

DeSersa and her three fellow foster grandparents at the nursery offer a diversity link as well as a generational one to the youngsters. DeSersa is an Oglala Sioux, two of her colleagues are Latino women and another is a Vietnamese man.

"I don't know what it is — old folks and young folks get along really well," said Carole Larsen, head teacher of the infant class. "They communicate."

Paid for by a combination of federal grant money with some funds from local organizations, the foster grandparent program is run by the Colorado Branch of the Volunteers of America in Denver. Besides the

stipend, participants receive transportation assistance, meals and training, said Cathy Coward, coordinator of the program.

Surrounded by colorful toys, painted hand-prints, stuffed animals and the children's morning snacks, DeSersa encouraged Samantha to drink her glass of milk and nibble on her toast. She also reads to the children, teaches them about sharing and playing together and imparts pearls of knowledge, like how to use a spoon. Along the way there are plenty of hugs and sentences that often end with the word "honey."

"As long as I can get out of bed, I'll keep going," DeSersa said.

For information about becoming a foster grandparent in the metro area, call Cathy Coward at 447-2340.