

Hurray for Grandparents! ... an untapped resource for our schools

by Dr. Ettie Zilber

School community constituents typically include students, parents and educational faculty, in a triad relationship. At the American School of Guatemala, we are in the process of adding another constituency group to the equation-grandparents (and great-grandparents, too).

We are an anomaly among most of our international schools, but consider ourselves fortunate that we can count on this fourth constituent group.

At ASG, almost 80 percent of our students are host country nationals, living within the bosom of their extended family. Of these students, 37 percent have one parent who is an alumnus of the school and 8 percent have two parents who are alumni. Among these students, we also have those whose grandparents are alumni. Another important characteristic of our school is that 60 percent of our students begin their education in Kindergarten and continue straight through until graduation. Thus, this school is truly considered a second home for the grand majority of our community members. As a result, the community feels a vested interest in the long-term success of the school.

After a recent restructuring of our active PTA into various governance and work committees, we decided to introduce a new committee for great-grandparents. The group of pioneer volunteers brainstormed the variety of ways in which grandparents could offer their services and skills to the schools. The ideas flowed, because the possibilities are endless:

7. Participate in Career Day, sharing their academic and professional experiences

8. Share their life-lessons learned, describe the challenges, ups and downs of how they achieved their goals, failed, rose above them and started again. The importance of such accounts is to demonstrate to our youths that traversing life from point A to point B does not always happen in a straight line, nor is the path padded with cotton-wool. Most stories actually describe a more zig-zag reality.

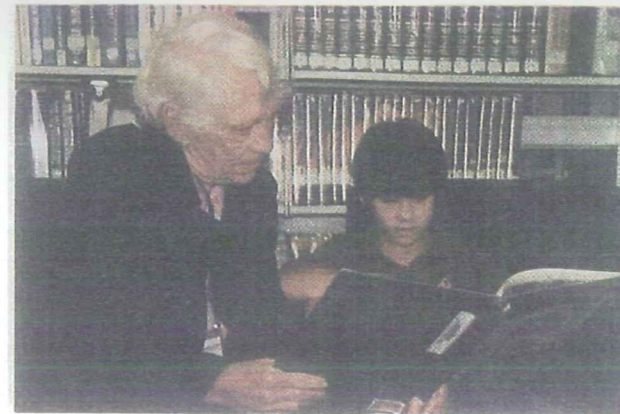
Another way grandparents can offer invaluable assistance to our school is by sharing their personal oral histories. Oral history projects are becoming more common and desirable because we have realized the importance of preserving eyewitness accounts for posterity.

Speakers who can relate firsthand experiences of historical events, describing, for example, their steerage-class ocean voyages to a new land, their trials and tribulations trying to get an education, their hunger pains or their war experiences...will mesmerize our students by making the study of history tangible, comprehensible and memorable.

Recent advances in technology have made these projects even more viable and accessible. We plan to film or tape these sessions and create an Oral History Archive to be used for future activities.

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Grandparents can:

1. Help in our magnificent Library/Media Center, reading to children, helping with the collection and assisting during our two Book Fairs

2. Help in our PTA-shops, selling wonderful snacks to hungry children during recess hours.

3. Share their unique talents with our students, cooking, playing an instrument, or painting

4. Offer service to the community, fundraising and raising awareness to their dedicated charity.

5. Assist the PTA in the major annual events, organizing our famous Turkey Bowl in November, *Noche de Luces* (Night of Lights) in December, and/or Festival in March, to name a few.

6. Assist classroom teachers by reading to children, telling stories or sharing their various cultural specialties and backgrounds.

Needless to say, most international schools are characterized by a shortage of grandparents in close proximity. However, how often do grandparents come to visit their children and grandchildren? Try to book them in advance, even for a short visit. What about grandparents of host country national students? They would surely want to get involved in raising awareness about their culture and the history of their country.

The value to your school may be unquantifiable, but Grandparents certainly will add value to your programs. I encourage other schools to seek out this invaluable human resource.

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