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Event title: Leading the Conversation - Designing and Implementing Effective Volunteer Programs Focused on Literacy
Date: March 27, 2014
Location: Boston Children’s Museum

Boston-based Generations Incorporated executive director and team leader speak on panel of national and local experts on effective volunteer programs focused on literacy.

From left to right: Patrick Corvington, The Campaign for Grade Level Reading; Joan Kelley, Harvard Graduate School of Education; Patricia Larts, AARP Experience Corps; Mary Gunn, Generations Incorporated; Elizabeth Miller, Massachusetts Reading Corps; Shannon Langone, Springfield College AmeriCorps and Massachusetts Reading Corps; Kelly Kulsrud, Strategies for Children. Photo credit: Alyssa Haywoode for Strategies for Children

Mary Gunn is the executive director of Generations Incorporated, which hosts the highly recognized AARP Experience Corps Program for the Greater Boston region. She has developed a
highly effective literacy volunteer program which uniquely engages older adults. She speaks around the country about this model.

**Patricia Larts** is a long time member of the Boston community. In her retirement, she has served as a literacy volunteer for Generations Incorporated, and most recently is the Team Leader for the program at the Trotter Elementary School. Prior to retirement, Pat worked for the Massachusetts Teachers Association. She was also a finance analyst for the Polaroid Corporation for many years.

**Generations Incorporated** strategically uses volunteers to impact children’s early reading proficiency, a key predictor of future academic outcomes. In Boston, 68% of third grade students scored below proficient in reading in 2013. Well-trained volunteers can be a crucial community supplement to school-based early literacy strategies.

Generations Inc. currently engages 250 volunteers over the age of 50, although, Gunn says, “Some people lie about their age just to get into the program.” Half are AmeriCorps members, the other half are volunteers who do not receive stipends.

To become more effective, Generations Inc. looked at literacy research and developed relationships in the Boston and Revere public schools to ensure alignment. That meant working with school officials and understanding the specific goals of individual schools.

To ensure volunteer engagement and effective implementation toward impact, Generations Inc. has a management program that screens, trains, places, and most importantly, supports volunteers. “Training once in September isn’t enough,” Gunn said. Volunteers get ongoing support once they’re in schools. The program runs in nine Boston schools, three Revere schools, and four community-based after school programs. Each building has a team of 15 to 20 volunteers and a team leader who is also a volunteer.

After working for two years as a classroom volunteer in Boston’s William Monroe Trotter Innovation School, Patricia Larts is currently a volunteer team leader managing 14 older volunteers, although, she adds, “Mary has said ‘older’, but I use ‘seasoned.’”

Larts works to build relationships with principals, teachers and volunteers “so that we can be one in the school.”

Sharing feedback from two volunteers ages 79 and 83, Larts said, “So I asked: Why are you here?” The answer: “I’m here for the children because I do want them to be successful. And the other part was: for me, so I can keep my mind and I can keep my body going.”

http://www.strategiesforchildren.org/

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