

Youth and Seniors together at the Boys & Girls Club

by Maureen McGarry

Strengthening inter-generational ties can create better understanding between generations. Preparing children for the complex world can come from more than family. With single parent and two working-parent households, the need for adult/child connection and support from the community is an essential part of our modern world.

Although they may seem unlikely partners, school age youth and seniors have an opportunity to share skills and talents through the Boys & Girl Club of the Redwoods. Both generations benefit. Youth gain from the knowledge and expertise of seniors. Seniors feel less isolated and gain from youthful energy and perspective.



Volunteer Jerry Nelson stands in front of the door of the Clubhouse- one of several locations for the Boys and Club of the Redwoods.

Jerry Nelson is a semi-retired volunteer who is looking for more volunteers. "Volunteers are an essential part of any non-profit. They provide an invaluable assist for the kids."

The Boys & Girls Club of the Redwoods has a list of possibilities where senior volunteers can get involved. From group classes in art, media, jewelry or cooking, to one-on-one music lessons or academic tutoring, there are plenty of options.

"We've been getting some retired teachers to volunteer as tutors. They pick the age and subject matter and even the time that they want to volunteer. It is usually

between 3 pm and 7 pm on weekdays," reports Nelson.

Nelson has a long history with the Boys & Girls Club. He was a volunteer when the club opened in 1972. He became the director after graduating from college in 1974 and served for almost four years. He then joined

the Boys and Girls Club of Santa Rosa where he served as a Program Director for 8 years.

There are three sites for potential volunteer activities. The Clubhouse is at 3117 Prospect Avenue in Eureka and serves children 5 to 12 years old. Also in Eureka, the Teen Center is at 3015 J Street and serves 12 to 18 year olds. There is also a program

in Loleta at 700 Loleta Drive. Efforts are being made to establish a site in McKinleyville. A criminal background check is required at no cost to the volunteer.

“For one-on-one mentoring, we set up the match and make sure it’s comfortable for both the child and the volunteer,” says Nelson. “The thing that is great about this is that we have programs that are flexible. Seniors can come in with something they have a talent for and share it with the kids. Volunteers can propose new programs if they have ideas.”

Paid staff members are always available and volunteers are not left on their own. All supplies are provided.

Monica Rose is the Area Director for the Boys and Girls Club of the Redwoods. “Volunteers are greatly appreciated by both members and staff. It is wonderful to see adults volunteers bring in their hobbies to share with our members. This gives our youth the opportunity to experience something fun and exciting – possibly for the first time.”

The Boys & Girls Club is funded primarily through fundraisers that take place approximately 4 or 5 times a year, and by individual donations and grants.

The cultural differences between generations –style of clothes, hair, taste in music- can often present challenges. Mutually beneficial, these volunteer opportunities contribute to positive relationships and emotional well-being for the young and the old. The collective experiences of generations sharing and working together make understanding the past and the present easier for all involved. Participating in activities at the Boys and Girls Club offers seniors the opportunity to stay young at heart.

For more information about volunteering, call Monica Rose between 9-5, Monday through Friday at 444-0184 or email malcorn@bgcredwoods.org .