

Parent Care: Trio illustrate the value of Legacy Corps

by Marsha_Kay_Seff

I recently spent a delightful afternoon chatting with a three-generation trio.

They hooked up about a year ago in Legacy Corps. It's a multigenerational program that offers respite for family caregivers, socialization for older folks and mentoring for teens, including foster children, children raised by grandparents and those from low-income families.

San Diego County homeowner Mary G., 80, who lives alone, was playing hostess to Barbara Love, 60, and Tierra, who at 16 asked to use her middle name only. She has been in foster care since she was 6 and joined the Corps two years ago. Now she has two mentors.

The trio shop or run errands, take Mary to doctors or simply chat in her living room while Tierra frames the jigsaw puzzles the octogenarian builds.

Sometimes Barbara offers Mary a "second opinion." But, she says, laughing, "It's not always welcome."

Mary, a widow and former special ed technician, isn't idle in between visits. She volunteers for her church and American Legion post, helps feed the homeless and collects clothes for people in need.

She and Barbara first met through their volunteer work. The younger woman suggested she join Legacy Corps.

A few months after signing up, Mary was standing in line at the DMV to renew her license and she passed out. She lost the license and didn't get it back until October.

But with the care from her younger friends, Mary, who has glaucoma, says she doesn't drive much.

Barbara, who retired from a bakery store, has been with Legacy Corps for the last year. "This way, I can deal with youth and the more senior."

Like the rest of the adult Corps volunteers, Barbara puts in 450 hours annually, including training sessions. For all that, she earns a \$200-a-month stipend for gas, "before taxes." And with the rising price of gas, she says, the stipend isn't nearly enough. Unless the organization can find the money to give her one of its few gas cards, she might not re-up next year.

Tierra, like the other teen volunteers, puts in 150 hours a year, earning \$200 a month, half of which she spends. She saves the rest and is hoping for a college scholarship.

Though the program grants volunteers 18-plus with 450 hours of service and \$1,250 toward college, Tierra is too young.

I point out, however, her volunteer work is bound to help her get financial help.

It's sad that even good news doesn't make Tierra smile. I wonder how difficult and lonely life as a foster child has been.

When Barbara met Tierra, the beautiful teenager constantly wore a hooded sweat shirt that hid her face. But, her mentors say, she has thrived with their support and rarely even wears the sweat shirt.

"Tierra is a good kid," Barbara says. We've become friends."

Mary adds, "She's one I'd put my foot down for. She's worth it."

Legacy Corps is a partnership of San Diego County Aging & Independence Services and New Alternatives. Part of an initiative developed by the University of Maryland's Center on Aging, the local program is supported by annual grants totaling about \$270,000, according to John Scholte, Legacy Corps program director.

Currently, there are 17 volunteer pairs in San Diego East and South counties, with many more families hoping for respite. The corps will be recruiting from January through March, and, Scholte says, it could expand with more volunteers.

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