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Schools



Santa Cruz Gardens School Volunteer Kay Duff

More Mothers Working

School Volunteers Hard To Find

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Before the women's liberation movement gained momentum, most people who volunteered to help out at schools were mothers.

As more women join the work force, the county Office of Education's School Volunteer Program finds its traditional pool of unpaid workers shrinking.

So, the program's directors are recruiting people who have not traditionally offered their services to schools: Students and the elderly.

In one of the county's most unique volunteer programs, fifth- and sixth-grade students from Green Acres School help feed handicapped students at the Struck and Brickley centers.

Since fall, pairs of Green Acres children have volunteered daily to help with the lunch program for special education students.

About 75 volunteers now offer their services through the county Office of Education's program, although thousands more are enlisted through individual

schools, according to program coordinator Bonnie Farrar.

"We are having difficulty getting volunteers," Farrar explained, "so we have to seek alternatives."

The most common alternatives are students.

For example, several years ago Freedom School teachers wanted to set up a tutoring program for young children.

"Freedom simply could not get an adult to volunteer in that program," Farrar said.

So, fifth and sixth graders began to tutor the younger children.

About 50 young volunteers participate in the Freedom School program, she estimated, donating "thousands of volunteer hours per year."

College students also have been enlisted to provide free services to schoolchildren.

About 35 UCSC and Cabrillo students now volunteer at county schools, according to Farrar.

UCSC students enrolled in the psychology field study program receive academic credit for their efforts.

Senior citizens also have been successfully recruited, according to the program's assistant director Jean Pfotenhauer.

A group of senior citizens living at La Posada retirement center regularly go to Gault School and listen to children read.

Most volunteers tutor students in basic skills.

"The most important thing is helping in basic skills, that's our most important job," Farrar said.

But, two other "noon enrichment" programs have recently been set up at Santa Cruz Gardens and Westlake schools.

In these programs, students can sign up for activities such as roller skating, sports, photography, weaving, block printing, and office skills, all taught by volunteers.

And, volunteers can provide a range of other services besides teaching.

One woman volunteered to do typing for local schools, Farrar said.

"This type of work is more and more needed since Proposition 13, with the cut-backs in clerical aides," Farrar said.