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Kay Dobec still gets a huge kick out of being around young kids.

"They are so honest and innocent. They are themselves. They tell you how they feel and what's going on in their lives," she said.

The 66-year-old Palmer Road resident speaks from experience.

She taught kindergarten students for 36 of her 37 years in education (the other year was teaching Grade One).

And, even in retirement, she is around children, including singing with them in the Interlink Choir and visiting them at her former school — Our Lady of Fatima — for fundraising barbecues and graduations.

"I can't get enough of their happiness and joy," she said. "At that age, they are so carefree. They don't have a care in the world."

Being around her young students was also good "therapy" after her husband, Greg, died unexpectedly, in 1986.

"They helped get me through my loss."

The Ingersoll native followed her mother's footsteps into teaching.

After graduating from a London high school and completing teacher's college, Dobec began her career by teaching a kindergarten class at Port Credit. One of her first students was Helen Johns, now Ontario's agriculture minister.

She married in 1960. Greg was also a teacher and they instructed in Oakville, Burlington and London before moving to Belleville in 1973.

While her husband joined the former Hastings and Prince Edward Counties Roman Catholic School Board, Dobec took a year off and enrolled in some real estate courses.

She sold real estate for a few years before deciding to return to teaching in 1979 with the local Catholic school board.

"I enjoyed selling real estate. It was a totally different world from teaching," said Dobec.

Her kindergarten career took her to Georges Vanier, St. Joseph's, St. Michael's and, for the last eight years, at Our Lady of Fatima. She retired in 1994.

She cherished every minute of her time with kindergarten students.

"Everything is exciting to them at that age. Back then, kindergarten was normally the first time they were in a large group and doing things together."

She is still around children, albeit as a retired teacher.

For three years, she co-ordinated the "Rainbows for Children" program for children of divorced, separated and deceased parents at the Belleville Family YMCA.

She currently serves on a special committee that solicits artwork from elementary and high school students for public display at the Quinte Exhibition in May and during the fall fair.

Five years ago when the Interlink choir was

formed, Dobec volunteered to drive some of the senior choristers.

"But I got roped into singing in the choir by Marg Credico and I'm still singing away," she laughed.

The Interlink choir is an inter-generational program that brings seniors and elementary students together through music. They rehearse separately every week and hold joint rehearsals a few times a year before their big public performance in May.

Dobec is one of 30 seniors in the choir. She and the others are matched with 27 Grade 3 students at Holy Rosary School.

Dobec's partner is a Grade 3 boy "and we both sing beside one another. We are also penpals and exchange letters three times a year."

Dobec enjoys the choir, calling participants "a great social bunch. There is a real bond because a lot of the members have been with the choir since it started.

"Being in the choir gives me a chance to return to school and be around the young kids again," she smiled. "Being around them keeps you young and on the go."

Dobec also spends a lot of time with her three children and eight grandchildren.

"I make sure that I see my grandkids in their activities," she said.

She also is involved in other community organizations.

She is secretary of the Retired Teachers of Ontario group for the Quinte area — it has almost 800 members — and is president of the Ladies Auxiliary of the Knights of Columbus.

Dobec organizes a monthly 'coffee club' event for local retired Catholic teachers and drives some of the residents in her apartment building to medical and dental appointments and shopping.

"For myself," Dobec takes aquaswim three times a week at the Sir James Whitney pool following knee replacement surgery last February, attends Probus Quinte West club meetings, and enjoys her season tickets at both the Pinnacle Playhouse and Royal Alex Theatre in Toronto.

"I'm a people person and I enjoy being involved with people...and it's always nice to run into my former students and see how they're doing in their own lives," said Dobec.