

Volunteers can help

Some parents can't wait to get their youngsters safely off to school and out of their hair at the age of five. Another group, however, are following their youngsters into the classrooms and finding out how parent volunteers can help teachers cope with all the tasks that go with teaching a room full of busy little people.

Parent volunteers are welcomed at most of the schools in Halton Hills and can find themselves doing anything from tidying up the classroom to listening to a student read.

Sandy Gardner became a parent volunteer at Harrison Public School in Georgetown for the first time last year.

She had two sons in the school, one in Grade 1 and the other in Grade 3.

She had always worked until her children were born and once they were both in school full time she found herself at loose ends wondering what to do. A friend offered her a temporary job

but when it finished after six weeks she was glad.

"I found I wasn't ready to go back to work yet," she explained. "By the time I got the boys out of the house at eight and myself ready for work at eight-thirty I was worn out. And I wasn't home when the boys got home from school as I felt I should be. I was glad when the job was finished."

VOLUNTEER

When the letter arrived from the school asking for parent volunteers she decided to sign up and see what it was like. Basically she wanted something that got her out with people.

The biggest misconception the public seems to have about volunteers she finds, is the idea that they teach.

"We don't teach," she stressed. "We may do drills to reinforce what the teacher has taught but we don't teach. That seems to be very hard to make some people understand."

She worked two mornings

a week in her son's first grade class last year and hopes to go back to that age group again since she enjoyed them so much. The teacher assigned her jobs when she arrived and they varied from week to week. Sometimes she played phonics or counting games with groups. Sometimes she listened to them read. Sometimes she took them to the library and read to them which helps their listening skills. Some days she cleaned up after a painting session or tidied the classroom. Her all time favourite job was listening to the children's show and tell items.

Even walking around the classroom supervising the students while they worked on assigned tasks gave her a feeling of helping.

"It must be frustrating for a teacher to be busy with a group on a lesson and have to interrupt her train of thought to tell another child how to spell cat," she said. "I could answer questions like that

and make explanations for the kids working at their seat so that the teacher could concentrate on the group she was teaching. But I wasn't teaching."

DISCIPLINE

Mrs. Gardner is a firm believer in discipline and doesn't think youngsters should get away with anything in school.

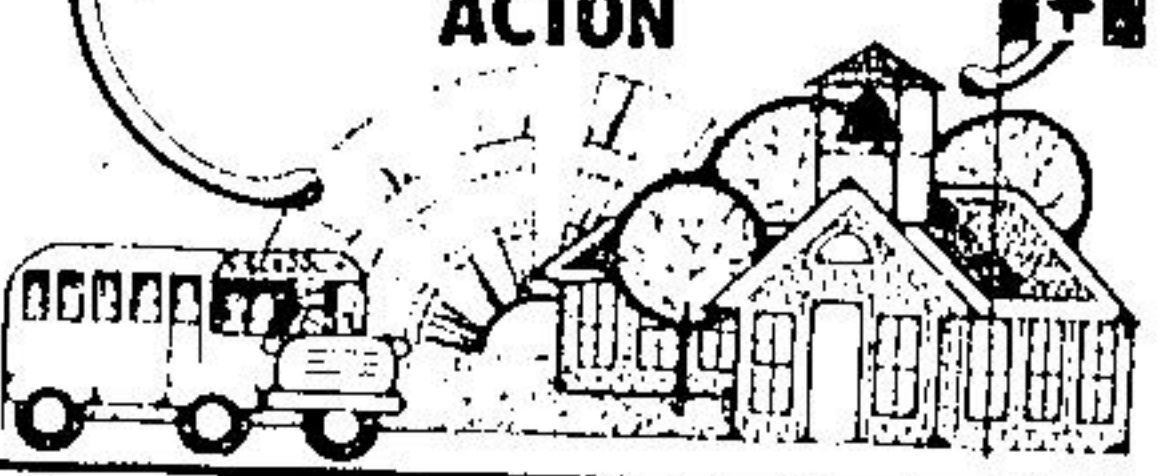
"If they get really unruly I just tell them I didn't have to be here listening to them," she said. "I tell them I could be at home doing the washing and ironing but I came to school because I wanted to help them and I like them. If they don't want to settle down and listen I can go home. That always settles them right down. But a teacher hasn't got that hold. They know she's being paid to be there so she can't leave."

One nice part of being a volunteer is knowing you don't need to feel guilty if an emergency arises and you have to miss a day, she said.

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Able secretary tackles any job

There's more to being a secretary than knowing typing and shorthand if you wind up working in a school.

School secretaries do the usual office duties but also find themselves doing public relations, a bit of first aid, a spot of disciplining, the odd bit of comforting and even a bit of sleuthing when something or someone goes missing.

Grace Harrison began as a part time secretary in Glen Williams for the Esquesing Area Township School Board in 1966 and is still at it. The last six years she has been permanently based at George Kennedy Public School in Georgetown.

When she started out the Esquesing Board allowed a school an hour per week per classroom. That gave her four hours a week at Glen Williams. Then she branched out and in the end she was working part time in Norval, Pineview, Glen Williams and Limehouse.

Since the secretary is usually the first person people meet when they enter the school she finds herself doing a lot of public relations work. Often when parents are upset about something that has happened to their child at the school they will call up and sound off at her. Sometimes that's all they need, an ear to listen to them. Other times she passes them on to the teacher or the principal depending on what the situation requires. But the ability to listen tactfully is essential.

She also gets calls from parents, especially of kindergarten aged children, wanting to know what's going around the school because their youngster is sick.

PINWORMS

"I remember one woman calling up and giving me the symptoms and I asked her if she'd checked for pinworms," she laughed. "She'd never even heard of them so I

told her where to get the medication and what to do, that's what it turned out to be."

Bandaging cuts and bruises comes in her territory too although if it looks serious the vice principal is good at first aid.

"We use so much ice on bruises I sometimes think we need an ice machine," she said.

Often Kindergarten youngsters go home early, she said, and she has to hop in the car and look for them. They mix the recess bell with the noon bell or 3:30 bell and think their day is over so they go home instead of returning to class. It is not uncommon in the fall but becomes less frequent as the youngsters

get older and more used to school.

"They get tired and figure they've had enough so they go home," she chuckled.

She is also responsible for the milk and cookie money brought in for youngsters in kindergarten and those having lunch at school. Once when an attendance sheet went missing it appeared in the refrigerator with the milk so now the fridge is one of the first places she checks for missing lists.

Mrs. Harrison said she knows the names of almost every family in the school and by the end of Grade two she recognizes most students faces although she may not yet be able to remember the name that goes with the face.

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