

Giving back is the best gift of all

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Joan meets with Julia, a Virtual Literacy student, and her family at RSVP's office. (Courtesy of RSVP)

The last two months of the year hold celebrations that bring people together, exchanging stories, memories, gifts and more.

Some volunteers experience those feelings year-round as they develop relationships with those they serve. Volunteering is a gift to both parties, changing the lives of everyone involved.

The pandemic caused a disruption in education that still lingers with students falling behind grade level. Math and literacy skills took a hit in most areas of Pennsylvania, especially in school districts with lower-income populations.

RSVP Volunteers recognized the urgent need for students to work one-on-one with reading tutors while learning from home; the organization adapted its literacy programs to a virtual format alongside its in-person opportunities.

Many of RSVP's volunteers are retired seniors who want to help their community. Some reflect on their time reading with grandchildren, while others want to share their love for reading. They all understand how important it is for children to develop reading comprehension skills that will help them as they grow older.

Joan, a Virtual Literacy volunteer, found RSVP Volunteers in 2021 after retiring from her career in education. She met one of her students, Julia, that year and has continued to read with her as she went through third and fourth grade. As Julia approaches fifth grade, Joan recognizes her progress over the years.

"She has grown in terms of her vocabulary development and reading confidence," Joan said.

The success of Joan and Julia's meetings has impacted Julia's family, as her two younger siblings enrolled in RSVP's Virtual Literacy program. The three meet with their volunteer reading

tutors weekly for individualized help. Their mother, Stacey, is grateful for the program and the growth she has seen in her children.

Julia's growth has made an impact on Joan's life as well.

"I feel like my small part is making a difference," Joan said.

Joan finds it rewarding to work with students even after retirement from the comfort of her own home and sessions that fit her schedule.

Join RSVP's mission

RSVP Volunteers provides free programs to vulnerable populations throughout Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, and Philadelphia counties. Volunteers can read with children in the classroom to assist a teacher or virtually with Zoom and e-book software.

RSVP offers other programs for individuals interested in volunteering: math tutoring, digital skills training, Medicare counseling, nonprofit consulting, assisting partner nonprofits and more. Visit <http://www.rsvpmc.org> or call 610-834-1040, ext. 123, to learn more about volunteer opportunities.

Though the programs are free to the community, operating each requires funding to ensure all volunteers are cleared, trained, and given the tools to access the program. Gifts made to RSVP Volunteers help the organization empower volunteers to make a positive impact in your community. If you would like to donate to RSVP Volunteers, visit <http://www.rsvpmc.org/donate> or call 610-834-1040.