

## MENTORING

### Metropolitan Family Service's Experience Corps: *Retirees offer knowledge, nurturing to students*

At North Portland's James John Elementary School, being sent to the hall is anything but punitive. That's because a special cadre of volunteers are waiting for students outside the classroom door: "Aunt C", "Miss Gladys" and "Grandma June," the three senior citizens comprising the school's Experience Corps team who promote literacy through individually tutoring students.

Experience Corps operates in seven elementary schools throughout Portland and provides training and stipends to older adults who work 12-15 hours per week in the same building, with the same students throughout the school year. The volunteers spend about a half hour with each child focusing on reading and literacy support, but also math and science if needed, and work closely with teachers reinforcing daily lesson plans.

While the volunteers help students decode words, quiz them on syntax and gently prod them on pronunciation, it's obvious their time together goes beyond mere academics.

For 76-year-old "Miss Gladys" Lee, it's about relationships. She's been working with some students for several years and enjoys how they seek her out in the hall for encouraging words – even those no longer in the program.

"We're one more person to make the kids feel special, one more person to share a story with, one more person for them to talk with," she says.

After a career of teaching college, 71-year-old "Aunt C," or Claudine Paris, was a bit apprehensive about teaching children, but has enjoyed her first year of Experience Corps.

"I needed a purpose – I needed to make a commitment," she says. "This has been very meaningful and I wouldn't change a thing."

Eighty-two-year-old "Grandma June" Terry feels the same. She works the halls like a pro and knows most of the kids in the school by name.

"I like people and I like working with children. It's wonderful to see where they start and where they end up – they know we care and want to help them.

"This helps keep me young. I just can't see sitting at home."

*Excerpted from the Portland Children's Investment Fund 2007-2008 Progress Report*

*To read the full report, follow this link:*

[http://www.childreninvestmentfund.org/reports/CHIF\\_WEB.pdf](http://www.childreninvestmentfund.org/reports/CHIF_WEB.pdf)