

# RSVP of Dane County Computer Buddy Program

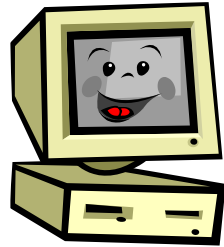


*...where volunteers make a difference*

- Margie Zutter, Executive Director, RSVP of Dane County, Inc.
- Diana Jost, Assistant Director



# What is the Computer Buddy Program?



Computer Buddy is an e-mail contact program between RSVP volunteers and elementary children in Dane County. The program fosters intergenerational connections by linking caring older adults to students through regular (usually weekly) electronic communication

# Computer Buddies Bridges the Generation Gap

The Computer Buddy Program has been a part of RSVP of Dane County's Intergenerational Program since 2002. This e-mail program fosters a meaningful relationship between young people and older adults, bridging the generation gap. Students and volunteers learn about each other's hobbies, interests and families as they communicate during the school year.

# What schools participate?



The program is open to all elementary schools in Dane County

We have found the program works the best in 3<sup>rd</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> grade classrooms.

Each senior buddy can have as many student buddies as they would like. We generally have three to four classrooms participate, so student buddies can outnumber senior buddies.

Most senior buddies prefer 2-3 student buddies during a school year.

# Compliance



1. Computer Buddy Partnership Agreement

2. Background Check

3. Supervision

4. Parent Consent

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# Computer Buddy Partnership Agreement

Along with our standard MOU with each School District we have the Computer Buddy Program in, each teacher has to sign our Computer Buddies Partnership agreement.

This agreement outlines the responsibilities of both RSVP and the teacher-classroom participating in the program.



*...where volunteers make a difference*

# RSVP Responsibilities

- **Recruit volunteers**
- **Contact new volunteers and provide them with the required volunteer application, disclosure, and consent for Background check.**
- **Perform necessary Background checks.**
  - Intergenerational volunteers complete NSOPW, State, City.**
  - FGP volunteers complete Truescreen and Fieldprint, (vendors that check NSOWP, State, city and fingerprints)**
  - All volunteers will be cleared prior to participation in the program.**
- **Communicate with the Elementary school when volunteers cleared to begin program.**
- **Orient and train new volunteers and students to the program.**
- **Email volunteers weekly to let them know when the student buddy has posted a blog. Make sure the volunteer answers the student.**
- **Review all outgoing and incoming blog messages.**
- **Assist with social gatherings for the seniors and students.**
- **Attend program-sponsored social events with Computer Buddies.**
- **Evaluate program and survey volunteers annually.**



# Background Check



**Each Computer Buddy volunteer is registered with RSVP of Dane County as either an Intergenerational volunteer or a Foster Grandparent volunteer.**

**Each volunteer is background checked prior to serving with any school.**

## **Intergenerational Volunteers: NSOPW and State and City**

*Some school districts, for example Madison, perform their own background checks. If they do not, RSVP does the checks prior to placement with the school.*

**Foster Grandparent Volunteers: All FGP volunteers are background checked by Truescreen and Fieldprint upon registering with RSVP**

# School/Teacher Responsibilities

- **Obtain parental consent and photo permission for students.**
- **Work with RSVP to match student to a senior volunteer.**
- **Assist with orientation and training of students.**
- **Establish regular area for students to use computers.**
- **Establish a regularly scheduled day of the week that students will send out e-mails to seniors.**
- **Contact RSVP with changing information on students or schedule.**
- **Coordinates end of the school year gathering with seniors and students (if applicable).**
- **Review all outgoing and incoming blog messages.**



# Parent Consent

- Teachers must get written consent from each student's parents to participate in the program.
- The consent form also asks for permission to take and use student's photo in media, such as newsletters or Facebook
- We check with the each school district we are working with. Some do not allow any pictures to be taken of students and used in media.

# Computer Buddy Program Child Enrollment Form



RSVP of Dane County and \_\_\_\_\_ elementary school are offering our class an enrichment program named “Computer Buddy” This program pairs students with senior volunteers and facilitates intergenerational interactions and supports the student’s mastery of literacy and technology through weekly or biweekly classroom blog exchanges. We’ve been invited to participate in this program and to use our class blog as a venue in which to communicate. Please complete the consent form below and return to school with your child.

- Student’s Name \_\_\_\_\_
- Please check all that apply:
  - ☐ Yes, I would like my child to participant in the Computer Buddy Program at school. I am allowing my child’s photo to be taken and displayed in media approved by your child’s teacher and RSVP of Dane County.
  - ☐ Yes, I would like my child to participate in the Computer Buddy Program at school. I do not want my child’s photo to be taken or used in any media coverage.
  - ☐ No thanks, I am not interested in my child participating in the Computer Buddy Program.
- \_\_\_\_\_
- Parent's (Guardian's) Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

# Volunteer Buddy Responsibilities



- Spending 15 to 30 minutes per week, usually the same day and time corresponding with your buddy. This can be flexible and may vary with the student's classroom schedule. Abide by the agreed upon frequency and timing of e-mail correspondence.
- Registration with RSVP of Dane County is required for all volunteer program participants. RSVP will complete the school district background check for all volunteers who will be part of the Computer Buddy Program.
- Keep your buddy's personal information confidential unless the student's safety is in question.
- At the end of the school year please attend the computer buddy party to meet your buddy in person or on Zoom.
- Let your computer buddy and the RSVP staff coordinator know if you will be away for an extended period of time or unavailable for messages.
- Please refrain from sending your buddy photos of yourself, do not use inappropriate language, and maintain a positive attitude.
- Please have an open mind that some student's move during the school year, some get sick regularly, and some may have lost their privilege to blog based on classroom behavior.
- Have a great time, this is a wonderful opportunity to be a part of a program that bridges the gap between generations!

# Supervision



- We run our Computer Buddy Program as a blog-email type program using a platform named “Kidblog/Fanschool”
- Kidblog/Fanschool is a very user friendly system, easy to learn, easy to access
- Kidblog/Fanschool provides tools to monitor all activity. The tools allow both the teacher and RSVP staff to monitor all blogs.
- The teacher reads all blogs before publishing for the senior buddies to read.
- Intergenerational/FGP Coordinator reads all blogs from the students and senior buddies before publishing for students to read.
- There is a fee for Kidblog/Fanschool, charged by the number of students and seniors blogging.
- For example, the fee is \$3.00 per person X number of participants  
i.e. \$3.00 X 300 participants = \$900.00 /year

# Buddy Matching Sheet

To help match the student buddy with someone with similar interests, we use a Buddy Matching Sheet.

Name : \_\_\_\_\_

Nickname \_\_\_\_\_

Briefly describe yourself: (eye color, hair color, tall.....)

Briefly tell about yourself (your likes, dislikes, what you like to do for fun)

Did you grow up in Madison? \_\_\_\_\_

Where did you go to elementary school? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have a pet? \_\_\_\_\_

Favorite food? \_\_\_\_\_

Favorite sport is? \_\_\_\_\_

Favorite subject in school is?

Favorite candy?

Do you play a musical instrument

Do you speak another language?



# In the beginning...



- The e-mails start as a friendly, "get-to-know-you" nature. During the course of the school year the “Buddies” become friends

*“Hi, I’m looking forward to being your computer buddy this school year. My favorite holiday is ----- . I love to-----, My favorite food is -----.*

*It is sooo cold out. I imagine you are having inside recess today.”*

*“All the food is delicious. What is favorite food? My favorite food is spaghetti! I love football! do you?”*



# Reward, Satisfaction, Enthusiasm

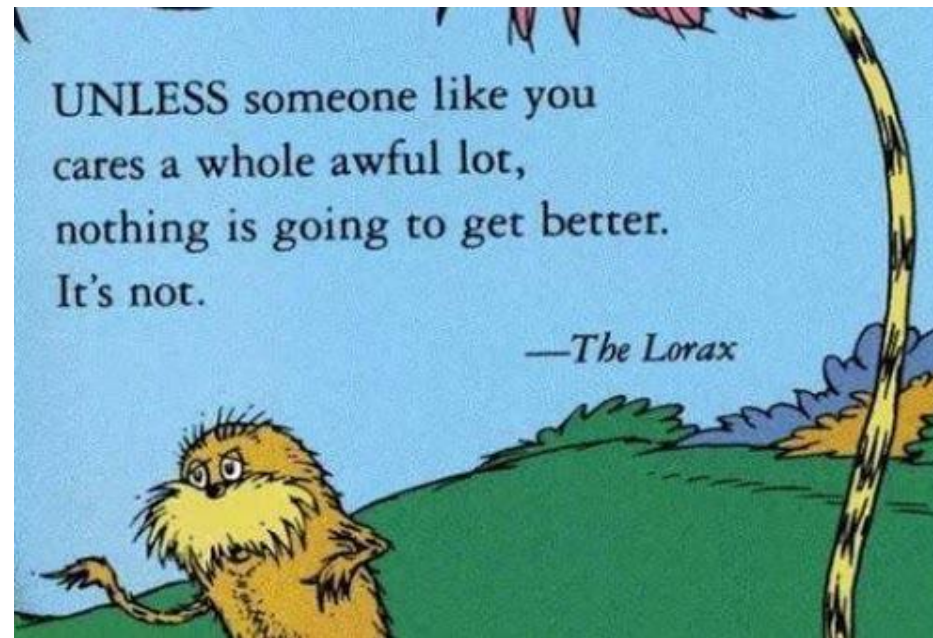
Volunteers say that their biggest reward for participating in the program is communicating with a student with boundless enthusiasm and fresh ideas

“It’s fun getting to know the children and to learn about what their school and home activities and interests are. I also think it’s interesting for them to learn about an older person, their lives and interests and accomplishments.”



# Wisdom, Understanding, Someone Cares

Students say that the best part of communicating with their volunteer is knowing that an adult takes interest in them and shares their wisdom and understanding.



UNLESS someone like you  
cares a whole awful lot,  
nothing is going to get better.  
It's not.

—*The Lorax*

# Improve Reading, Writing, Technology

- Teachers agree with the benefits that the volunteers and students share along with seeing students improve their reading and writing skills as well as technology skills.
- Teachers may choose whether they want the program to be a “Pen Pal” type program or if they want to use the program as part of literacy or technology curriculum. For example, one teacher had students blog each week about the book they were reading. Another teacher had students talk about art projects they were working on.

# And.....Finally the Buddies Meet

- The Buddies meet each other at an organized social event at the end of the school year.
- At the end of the last school year, we were still able to do the end of the year social event on ZOOM.



# Computer Buddy and COVID-19

- Computer Buddy is a wonderful program which has taken on a very special importance during this time.
- For Volunteers the program helps decrease the feeling of isolation, being all alone. They have someone to talk with to share what is going on in the world.
- For the Student, it is another person to talk with, to listen to and share ideas about this time in history
- Teachers state that it has been wonderful to see the communication, how the buddies check up on each other, see how each is coping.

***“What a wonderful part of the Intergenerational program to see older how older adults and students see this time in our history. How they each view the pandemic and how they each look at what is happening in our country and internationally***

## Quotes about the program at this time:

- One teacher stated: *“Lately the correspondence has been inquisitive, with students asking “have you ever been through anything like this before?” and heartfelt, as students ask their at-risk-aged buddies “are you doing OK?”*
- One Computer Buddy describes her experience with the program. *“In the beginning I was not sure about becoming a Computer Buddy” she explains. “What would I talk about? Well I should not have been concerned. Whether it was a 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> grader, all I had to do was follow their lead. It’s a very rewarding experience; the children are great!”*

# Questions



**If you would like more information on this program, please feel free to contact me by email or phone.**

**Diana Jost**

**[Djost@rsvpdane.org](mailto:Djost@rsvpdane.org)**

**608-441-1393**