

Dorset East Schools report



One of the most successful and popular of our Dorset East projects is volunteering in schools, which appeals to a lot of people as they like the idea of 'working' with children. We usually advertise it as listening to children reading, although it can be for whatever the school feels it has a need.

When a new helper is recruited and references completed, we visit the helper to talk through RSVP aims and give background information. Then at this point, the ideal school (usually the nearest one to the volunteer) is decided upon.

The school is then contacted to ask if they have a need for voluntary help. Sometimes this part of the operation takes a while and whilst the best means of contact is e-mail, this is not always freely available. Schools being such busy places what occasionally happens is that letters go astray and phone calls do not always reach the required destination.

When contact is made, the volunteer and school decide on the best day/time to come in. We usually stress our helpers do the minimum initially as this is a once a week commitment, so it is better to do less and then build up if it suits, rather than over commit.

The group is growing, having started with four people with numbers now up to twenty-five going into schools and another four or so presently awaiting references and placement.

Our schools' volunteering covers the whole of BH post code area.

The oldest school helper was 92 this July and most of are over 50. Older members are somewhat regarded as being surrogate grandparents to the children and as in the case of our 92 year old a great grandparent.

Unfortunately, it is a sad fact nowadays that families are becoming more fragmented and many children do not know their grandparents.

In one school in Bournemouth, they have children of around 24 different nationalities attending.

Bournemouth being in the middle of the hotel trade, those parents who come from abroad to work in it probably speak no English in the home, making it very difficult for a child to learn their lessons as well as English.

It is always stressed that in no way do we take the place of a teacher but offer one to one guidance to those children who are struggling and for whom the teacher does not have time to tutor singly.

School volunteering can be a most enjoyable role as the relationship between helper and child can be very rewarding to both sides.