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## **Foster grandmother helps RFK children**

**By Erin Maroney**  
**ITEM STAFF**

**LANCASTER**— Maureen Sheehan has five children, 10 grandchildren, two great-grandchildren, and a classroom full of "foster" grandchildren.

Sheehan, 75, spends four hours a day, five days a week with children at the Robert F. Kennedy Children's Action Corps Robert F. Kennedy School in Lancaster.

Sheehan started working at RFK in July 1993. She said her sister referred her to the Foster Grandparent Program, which is federally funded by Community Teamworks, Inc., and located locally in Lowell.

For the past 12 years, Sheehan has worked one-on-one with students at RFK, a special education school for boys.

"I help the kids with math, reading, spelling and other academics. Sometime I play with them during free time, if I have the energy," Sheehan said.

Sheehan had helped many students by tutoring them in class, working as a mentor, helping with art projects and helping students follow along and take notes in class.

At times, she corrects and grades papers and helps the teacher run class.

"I help guide the kids who need the one-on-one attention. Working with them gives them continuity," Sheehan said. "Some of the children don't have families or grandparents and they know I will be there every morning."

Sheehan is not a teacher; she sits with children in class during lessons.

She did have previous experience in a classroom as a teacher's aide in Leominster before she came to RFK.

She then retired and worked full time during the school year as well as working for RFK's summer program.

Sheehan worked in the summer program for two years.

Last year was the first year she took the summer off.

"Maureen is a valued member of our team," said Val Paen, principal of the RFK School. "She never misses a day of school or hesitates to work with some of the most difficult students. She finds the positive in each student and makes them feel special."

Sheehan said she works with 10- and 11 year-olds at RFK.

"The children have so much emotional baggage that each day is a new challenge. Each new concept achieved is a giant leap in the lives of the boys," Sheehan said. "It gives me a feeling of gratification to be part of their learning experience."

Sheehan said she hopes to continue to be a foster grandparent.

"I really love the children. They give me a reason to get up she added.

"The kids really care about Maureen," Paen said. "It's a two- way relationship. The kids give back to her, which is really nice."

Sheehan took last summer off, however, because she needed time to take care of her husband, Charles, who needs extra care at home.

"It's a real commitment for her to be here," Paen said. "It's a great undertaking. She is a different, more nurturing type of adult role model. We are very fortunate to have her here."

She and her husband recently celebrated their 50th anniversary with a celebration thrown by their children.

Foster grandparents are persons, 60 years or older, who devote four hours, five days a week to work with children with special or exceptional needs. The volunteers work in schools, day care programs, and institutional settings.

Foster Grandparents offer emotional support to child victims of abuse and neglect, tutoring to children who lag behind in school. Foster Grandparents assist children in literacy, social, speech and other valuable developmental skills that augment the quality of life for children of all ages and backgrounds, according to the program's Web site.

Volunteers receive a stipend of \$106 every two weeks for a 20-hour work week. Other benefits include accident insurance, transportation, tax-free income, meals, paid vacation, holidays, and sick pay. The stipend that the volunteers receive is not considered wages and therefore does not affect social security, internal revenue or other benefits.

Anyone interested in the Foster Grandparent program can visit [www.comteam.org](http://www.comteam.org) or call Val Paen at (978) 365-2803.