

Transcription of Podcast 316: Roberta Klein

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SPEAKERS

Bob Firing, Roberta Klein

Note: This transcription was computer-generated and may contain typographical errors.

Bob Firing 00:10

Good morning Shadow Hills. It's Bob Firing and I'm back. Happy New Year. I haven't had much to say lately, I know John has been carrying the ball on these podcasts. But I've got a good subject today, for all of you who made a New Year's resolution that you are going to help somebody in the new year. And this is something that won't even cost you any money and will pay unlimited rewards. I'd like to introduce Roberta Klein, who is the founder of a group called Read with Me. Roberta, welcome to the podcast.

Roberta Klein 00:48

Thank you, Bob. It's a pleasure to be on with you.

Bob Firing 00:51

Great. Well, why don't you just start at the beginning of what Read with Me is, what gave you the idea, and how it's been going?

Roberta Klein 01:03

Okay, well, my husband and I moved down here in 2003. And, we have always been interested in giving back to the community. And we asked what's the biggest problem facing the Coachella Valley. And, it very clearly evolved that education for people in the far east valley was an enormous challenge. This is an agricultural area, the far east valley, and most of the people who work in the fields are immigrants and do not speak English. They have children, the children go to school, but they don't have anyone at home to help them learn English.

Roberta Klein 01:46

So we met with the superintendent of schools of the school district that covers primarily the far east valley. And he said we need English speaking role models. And we thought, oh, well, alright, let us see if we can recruit people and I said, but this is far, this is 30 miles away from where the people who have the time to volunteer during the week, during the daytime, would be mostly retired and they live in like Rancho Mirage, Palm Desert, Indio, La Quinta, and it's a long way to some of these schools, would you provide a bus? So he said, yes. So we started out with one school and a we, up until 2019, have 14 schools that we provide volunteers for. And it's very simple. Someone who is fluent in English, who likes children, can register to volunteer one or two mornings a week at one of the schools. And we accept the registrations, do the background checks, now because of COVID do the vaccination verification. And, we'll find out what time of day and what day of the week you're available. And, we get you registered and assigned to a specific school, one that would be close to where you live. We do

have buses that go to seven of these schools. And the buses go from Sun City in Palm Desert and Sacred Heart in Palm Desert, and the Joslin Center in Palm Desert, and then also from St. Francis church in La Quinta, and from the Costco shopping center in La Quinta. And, we ask that you commit to go a minimum of eight times. And each time, it will take you time to get there if you drive, or take the bus, but that you're in the classroom, usually for two hours.

Roberta Klein 03:57

Now when COVID hit, that was awful, because the kids were not on campus. And of course, the volunteers couldn't be on campus. So we trained volunteers on how to tutor remotely using Zoom. And we are still doing that. However, we have right now, we have 300 registered volunteers, but we do need 60 more. And the Coachella Valley Unified School District, 10 schools, are sending home testing kits to all the kids because all the children have not yet been vaccinated. Many of them have, but not all. And we know that there are breakthroughs, even in the vaccinations. So the kid's families can test them at home. If they test positive, they stay home, they don't go to school. If they have symptoms, they stay home. So we're trying to get a handle on making it safer for the children, the teachers and the volunteers. The volunteers have to wear masks.

Roberta Klein 05:01

So when they're assigned to a specific school, then a specific classroom, they have one boss, it's the teacher of that classroom. And each teacher has his or her own style. Some of them like to have the volunteer, work with one child at a time. So in a two hour period, you would probably work with four different kids. Some of the teachers want you to work with two at a time. Some of them want you to work with three at a time, whatever the teacher wants. She or he provides, the materials that you're going to use with each child. And you usually have pretty much the same children. And the children are adorable, and they are so eager to learn. And they love the individual adult attention. And the teachers, of course, are very grateful for any help they can get, they're overwhelmed usually, and now with this situation, with COVID, they're even more overwhelmed. So they really need the help. And they're very grateful.

Roberta Klein 06:04

We have done an analysis of what difference does this program make in the child's learning. And, it's amazing. We test the kids, the school district provides us with the beginning scores and ending scores of children's reading progress. And for those kids who successfully complete the test, we found that on average, the kids who have a reading tutor progress 50.7% more than the children who do not have a tutor, a volunteer tutor. The ranges of improvement go from 30% per child to 125% more. So the average is over 50%. All the research is if a child is not reading, at grade level, by third grade, chances are they're going to drop out of high school, they dropped out of high school, they not only don't succeed, they get in trouble, they wind up in prison. We asked one of our pastors who was a chaplain in both state and federal prisons, about that. And he said Indeed, most, 70% of the people incarcerated learn to read in prison. So this is just hugely important. So since we've been doing this, when we first started in 2005, the graduation rate from high school was 50.1%. It is now 81%. So if you really would like to make a difference in the community, and enjoy what you're doing, and learn a lot more, come and join us. We need you.

Bob Firing 07:58

That's great. In addition to being substantial benefits for the teachers or for the student said, I'm sure there's good stories of positive feedback that the volunteers have gotten. Can you tell us any stories about that?

Roberta Klein 08:17

Oh, yeah, well, we have quotes that we put in our annual report like, this is the this is the happiest thing that I do all week, I can't wait to go back to do this again. And one of the teachers, rarely do we ever find in educational program for reading intervention that satisfies students, parents, volunteers and teachers. And, at the same time, is an effective and useful program. Read with Me is such a program. And another one, this has been the year of years of reading experience with these most resilient third graders. My teacher prepared them well for Zoom sessions, this is for last year. The students did express this missing their classmates, but they valued us as a small group exchange on Zoom. We're all anxious to return to the classroom. Riverside County Office of Education is honored to partner with Read with Me through a transportation grant to help connect adult volunteers with student and teachers. The Riverside County Office of Education is giving us \$97,000 to provide very comfortable mini-coaches to take the volunteers to the schools. Because they are, it's a long way it's a little drive.

Bob Firing 09:50

I was gonna ask about that. Cuz from here, people driving themselves is certainly an option, but I'm sure that you may make new friends and develop some camaraderie driving down there on the buses.

Roberta Klein 10:06

Exactly.

Bob Firing 10:06

And that that must be great.

Roberta Klein 10:10

It is and from there, from where Shadow Hills, you go to I-10. And then down 86 and also at Airport Boulevard. I say it would be 15 minutes to the John Kelly school. Right now they need 10 more volunteers, right this minute.

Bob Firing 10:26

So let's say we're successful, let's say that some people here raise their hands. Do they will they get a training session or what would be the next step?

Roberta Klein 10:37

Okay, so the next step would be, we would invite you to an information session to learn more if you'd like. And we're going to have one of those every Wednesday for the next three weeks, January 19 to 26, and February 2, at Sacred Heart in the St. Andrews room. But, you can also just call, and our phone number is 760-567-1830. And we can arrange an information and training session at our training center, which is in Palm Desert, on cook street. So nothing is really far for you there at Shadow Hills. Or, you can go online to our website, which is readwithmevolunteers.com. Now, the training session

would consist of, giving you an example, we have a video giving you examples of what you may be asked to do. Helping kids with frequently used words. The children read to us. And we help them with pronunciation and comprehension. We don't read to the children, the children read to us. It's a much more effective interactive technique, because they really learn. Does that help answer the question?

Bob Firing 12:02

Yeah, that's that that's very helpful. And well, I think, I'm trying to think of other questions. But, I think that what you said, if people are interested, that should do the trick. I was just going to point out that, as many volunteers as you need now. Desert Sands is not currently open to volunteers. And so, that's going to change at some point. And, I personally am going to be recruiting volunteers at Richard Oliphant, which is right over here by the Walmart. And so, this is a great way to meet some new people and help some kids who are in dire need. And I'd also like to ask, that many of you will belong to other senior-oriented organizations. And we'd appreciate it if you would tell them about the Read with Me program. And indeed, offer to let them listen into this podcast. Roberta needs a lot of help and she's going to need a lot more volunteers down the road when things eventually reopen.

Bob Firing 13:26

And, so thank you Roberta. Frankly, it's refreshing to hear from a nonprofit who doesn't really need money. What they really need is people helping with their time, and there are people here who have that. So, thank you for bringing this to our attention. And, for the audience, if you want to find out more Roberta gave you the contact information. We will enclose that with the link. And you can always, if you have questions, you can always get ahold of me here at podcast@scshca.com. So, until next time, thank you for your attention and bye bye.