



# SENIORS **in SERVICE**

GEARED UP TO SERVE

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## A real-life superhero “Zooms in” to help children during the pandemic

AmeriCorps Seniors Foster Grandparent volunteer, Ernest Cross received a wonderful surprise when he joined a Seniors in Service Zoom meeting on August 30. The Juvenile Welfare Board of Pinellas County (JWB) honored him with the KidsFirst Cooperman-Bogue Award, and even surprised him at his home with a check for \$500. JWB’s KidsFirst Cooperman-Bogue Award honors outstanding individuals who have gone above and beyond to provide direct services to Pinellas County children and families, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to the monetary award, winners receive recognition during JWB Board Meetings and via JWB’s social media, website, press releases, and PSAs. During the 2020-21 school year “Grandpa” Cross provided intensive, high-quality, one-on-one tutoring and mentoring to 3 students, helping improve their academic achievement by offering wisdom and love. But it was the impact he made on one of these students that made Mr. Cross an obvious choice for this award.

When COVID-19 prevented volunteers from returning to classrooms, Mr. Cross learned to use Zoom to continue serving children who needed support more than ever. At-risk children who already faced adversity, were filled with fear and uncertainty. One student in particular illustrates how “Grandpa” Cross, like a superhero, literally (and virtually!) “Zoomed in” to make a difference.



*Foster Grandparent, Ernest Cross, poses with KidsFirst Award certificate, alongside his wife. Ernest was surprised with the award presentation at his home in August.*

Without a father figure in his life, this student had shut down. But Mr. Cross discovered how to crack the hard exterior of a child who no longer trusts. For this young man it was drawing superheroes. Instead of forcing or swaying away from what some would consider nothing of importance to talk about, “Grandpa” Cross just knew, this is what makes this child feel self-confident, what lessens his pain.

Mr. Cross was also able to utilize the Seniors in Service FGP training in Social Emotional Learning (SEL) with this young man, to help him navigate the fear and uncertainty, to better cope with his challenges, and to benefit academically. After weeks of one-word answers, the boy began to open up. The bond grew so deep that the young man requested extra tutoring and begged Mr. Cross to continue with him during the next school year. Mr. Cross immediately reached out to his school contact to make that happen. Even a global pandemic couldn’t stop “Grandpa” Cross from building trusting relationships with each individual student, such as using the language of art to bring out the superheroes in them all.

Our mission is to provide solutions to community challenges by engaging volunteers aged 55+.

Official registration and financial information may be obtained by calling the Division of Consumer Services at 1-800-435-7352. Ref #5C-02047 AHCA Reg #: 5776