Making a Difference

Powerful Words

How many volunteer opportunities let you read children’s books while helping kids realize their hidden potential? Randy Friedman found one in the Start Making a Reader Today program at a NW Natural lunch event, and it turned into a lifelong passion.

Friedman, the director of NW Natural’s gas supply department, was the first employee to volunteer when the utility started its relationship with SMART in 1994. Since that time, he has spent an hour per week during every school year helping children learn to read.

“An hour a week changes lives,” Friedman said.

SMART volunteers read aloud to students, encourage students to read to them and help children expand crucial language skills. Even more than that, the program also gives kids much-needed positive one-on-one time with an adult.

Other NW Natural employees have joined the SMART volunteer program thanks to Friedman’s enthusiasm and the Oregon company’s commitment to making a difference in the communities it serves. Nine NW Natural employees currently volunteer for the program.

But as much fun as he’s having reading children’s books, knowing he’s helping change young lives for the better is what brings Friedman back to the classroom year after year. “Now I’m seeing young adults who were SMART kids 20 years ago who are stepping up to say how important SMART was to them,” he said.