

## My Friend Bill - Making Connections - Seventh Grader Benefits from 80 Years of Experience!

Bill Longley, who says there isn't much he hasn't seen in 80 years, spent much of his life studying wildlife conservation, ornithology, and biology. He has been a scientist all of his life and continues to learn even after retirement. The things Bill has been learning lately are not those completely science related. Bill had a chance to learn a little bit more about the life around him through the eyes of a seventh grader.



Bill has been a participant in the Job Connection, a referral service at the Lakes Area Youth Service Bureau (LAYSB), for three years now. He joined the program thinking it would be nice to work with youth and have a little help with his large fenced-in yard.

Bill has been paired with many youth in the three years he has participated in the LAYSB program and says that the youth and their backgrounds have always interested him. He enjoys learning about their likes and dislikes, their friends and what they do in their free time, and what they are learning at school. Bill shares a little of his own knowledge as well, talking with the youth about birds, plants in the yard, and other science questions that come up about conversation.

"I value their work in my yard," says Bill. "It's difficult to do some things alone and I like the teamwork. I have worked with youth in my past career and it has always been a pleasure to teach them new things and show them what I have discovered in my 80 years here."

One of the most recent connections Bill made was with a youth named Justin. Justin is in seventh grade and signed up for the Job Connection to make a little extra money for a trip to Florida. What Justin wasn't expecting was a new family friend.



"When I signed up for the program, I thought I would be helping grumpy, disabled people, but that is not who Bill was at all!" says an excited Justin. "He seemed really cool from the first day we met and I was excited to help in his yard!"

As the summer went on, Bill and Justin had many days together fixing stepping-stones, painting the fence, trimming brush and taking care of trees. Bill told Justin all about his days as a wildlife conservationist and studies he had done on birds and Justin told Bill what it's like to be in seventh grade and what he did in school.

"Bill talks to my mom and me a lot about his interesting life," shares Justin. "He taught me about gardening and the history of our city. He loves birds and can name any of the birds that come into his yard! He also has a great dog named Lita. As time went by, I began to notice how much our relationship was growing and how much I learned from Bill. I bet I could even have my own vegetable garden now."

Bill knows how important it is to help young people get through the rigors of growing, especially at an age where it seems like no one understands. Bill realizes that there are big changes happening in young

people's lives that can be hard. He feels that if he gives them respect, they will learn how to respect others, too.

"The youth are not only great company for me," confesses Bill, "they help with my work and make me feel good again, too. I try to be a model for them, but they are what keeps me young at heart."

The biggest thing Justin learned is that a teenager can be a friend to a senior citizen. Justin hopes his relationship with Bill stays strong for a long time. And even though Bill was unable to make it to Thanksgiving Dinner at Justin's house last year, they remain friends through their unlikely connection and all the things they don't have in common.

Lakes Area Youth Service Bureau  
Job Connection Program  
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