



Janet Grace of Coventry

Thirty Years of Sundays

During the week, Janet Grace of Coventry goes to work as the Program Manager of the Captive Insurance Division of the CT Insurance Department.

But every Sunday – as she has done every single Sunday for the past 30 years! – Janet Grace goes to Manchester High School to supervise the students and teachers who are participating in the “Instructors of the Handicapped” swimming program.

Founded in 1956, this beloved program matches physically and mentally challenged adults and children with able-bodied teenagers for swimming lessons. With a background as a camp counselor and lifeguard, Janet became its Adviser in 1989, after reading in the paper that there was a vacancy.

“Adviser” sounds like such a simple word – suggesting, perhaps, some office-based paperwork or generalized oversight and coordination. In reality, being the “Adviser” to the IOH program means that Janet does everything – recruiting, scheduling, coordinating, encouraging, and supervising high school kids as they mentor their sometimes-nervous students, both children and adults, who are learning to swim for the first time.

Serving about 65 clients per year, the IOH program has helped about 4,000 people with disabilities learn to swim. Janet says the instruction gives the participants unique access to exercise that is tremendously beneficial – both physically and emotionally.

In fact, many students return week after week for that exercise – and the sense of community and friendship that they find at IOH. One man from Manchester has been participating since the program began!

“Through all of this, Janet hands out dozens of smiles, lots of high fives, many hugs, and comes back Sunday after Sunday, year after year, to do it all again!” her nominator wrote.

“It is just an amazing commitment to an amazing program.”