

Each day, adult learners and volunteer tutors meet thanks to the numerous volunteer literacy programs throughout the state. This issue highlights some stories of the achievements of adult learners as well as the dedication of volunteer tutors. I commend all of these adult learners for taking the journey toward educating themselves and the volunteer tutors who give their time to aid learners in their journey.

This past November, literacy programs, libraries and schools statewide hosted events for Family Reading Night centered on the theme "Camp out with a good book!" Fun and creative programs were held by these organizations to encourage and inspire families to read and learn together. Highlighted in this issue is an organization on Chicago's north side that brought diverse groups of families together for a fun night of reading and activities. I want to thank everyone for making Family Reading Night 2015 a huge success.

Jesse White

Jesse White
Secretary of State & State Librarian



Recognizing adult learner and tutor achievements

Every year, the Secretary of State and State Library Literacy Office highlight the special achievements and outstanding stories of adult learners and tutors who participate in literacy grant programs throughout the state. The following are a few stories of these individuals.

ADULT LEARNERS

Javata Hopes, Waukegan — When Javata was at one of the lowest points in her life, she met Rachel — Waukegan Public Library's Family Literacy coordinator. After talking about family literacy and how it could help her to create a better future for her family, Javata and her 2-year-old son joined the Families Learning Together Program.

Javata grew up in a rough environment and had a learning disability as a child. She was repeatedly told that she was slow because she couldn't learn like the other children. Javata continued to struggle through school eventually dropping out of high school. After leaving school, she worked odd jobs but struggled financially to take care of her family.

Upon joining Families Learning Together, Javata became part of a group of mothers who wanted to learn. She worked hard to prepare herself to take on a greater role teaching her child and improving her own reading and math skills. Through her participation, her self-confidence has improved and sparked a fire to continue growing and learning. Javata has consistently improved her reading score and has jumped two full-grade levels since joining the literacy program nearly 1 1/2 years ago.

"The staff saw something in me, they embraced me, and now I can actually look at myself in the mirror," says Javata. "I want my GED but even more than that, I want to get an education and learn things."

In addition to the changes she sees in herself, she also sees changes in her son. Her son has grown from a toddler who wasn't even trying to walk, to a preschooler who is excited to investigate the classroom and try new things. Her son has also begun speaking in short sentences and actively participating in circle time.

Julia Pantoja, Chicago — Julia's story is very typical of recent immigrants. Twelve years ago, Julia and her family came to the U.S. from Mexico and struggled to assimilate to a new country. Realizing the importance of education and completing only the third grade in Mexico, she entered the Tolton Center's Family Literacy Program to learn English. In just a few months, Julia had already improved her English proficiency by two levels. According to Tolton Center staff members, Julia has adopted their philosophy: Parents are the first and most important teacher for their children.

Julia's exuberance for learning brings energy to the classroom. At the beginning of the year, she took on the responsibility of organizing classroom break time helping to perpetuate the family atmosphere in the classroom. When fellow students are having difficulty, Julia readily translates the concepts into Spanish to help the instructor. When not attending ESL classes, Julia is a member of the parent leadership team for her youngest child's Head Start program. She often brings information to share with classmates about the Head Start program and community activities that will benefit her peers.

Julia is a goal setter not only for herself but also for her family. Upon enrolling in the literacy program, she was asked about her goals and dreams. She wanted to get her GED and to see all of her children graduate



LEFT: Javata Hopes and her son at the Waukegan Public Library. RIGHT: Julia Pantoja participates in a Family Literacy activity at the Tolton Center.



LEFT: Anisette Akogan works on a literacy lesson at Spoon River College. RIGHT: Areli Varela-Coleman tutors adult learners at the Tolton Center.



Marlene Delaney (front left) leads an RTL book club discussion.



David Behymer tutors an adult learner.

from college so they could lead a better and more productive life. Julia is well on her way to achieving her personal goal, and her oldest son is now a freshman at Harold Washington College.

Anisette Akogan, Rushville — When Anisette began in the literacy program at Spoon River College 11 months ago, her English skills were very limited. She had been a nurse in her home country of The Democratic Republic of the Congo. Realizing that her nursing degree was not valid in the U.S., she enrolled in ESL classes to take the first steps toward preparing herself for a nursing career in her new home.

Anisette works the second shift, 10 hours a day during the week and eight hours on Saturday, at a local meat processing plant. Though sometimes exhausted, she finds a way to motivate herself to get up every morning and attend class.

Over the summer, Anisette discovered the local library and began bringing home books to improve her reading level. Her thirst for knowledge is contagious, and she often inspires other students in the literacy program. She realizes that obtaining her nursing degree in the U.S. will not be an easy task, but she is determined to succeed. For her instructors and tutors, there is little doubt in their mind that she will achieve her dream. According to them, she already possesses the characteristics of a great nurse — knowledge of the field, a kind and caring personality, and a genuine desire to help others.

VOLUNTEER TUTORS

Areli Varela-Coleman, Chicago — Having read about the struggles placed on organizations and agencies due to the state budget impasse, Areli came to the Tolton Center this past September and offered to volunteer in whatever capacity would be most beneficial to the program. In the midst of a difficult year for the program, she has taken on a variety of responsibilities, all the while serving as a source of hope, joy and optimism.

Although Areli is currently searching for employment, she adjusts her own job search schedule to meet the needs of the program. She takes on any tasks thrown her way, from recruiting to learner intake; from tutoring to helping learners set goals. During this trying year, Areli has supported program staff to alleviate pressure for each instructor.

Areli embodies the Tolton Center's mission: offering students a program in which they will find a supportive and caring community. Each morning she greets students with a welcoming smile, ensuring that they begin their day feeling welcomed and encouraged. As instructors and staff have struggled to maintain the program's intensity due to decreased resources, Areli has been there to offer her support and jump in to meet needs.

The center is able to continue offering services at all of its sites because of incredible volunteers like Areli. Without her and the many other volunteers, the center would not have been able to continue to offer ESL and Family Literacy programs in both the Pilsen and Little Village neighborhoods. Areli's volunteer spirit ensures that the Tolton Center continues to be a place "where everyone teaches and everyone learns."

Marlene Delaney, Buffalo Grove — Marlene began as a Read to Learn (RTL) adult literacy volunteer program tutor with Township High School District 214 in spring 2010. Marlene states that the program has changed her life. For Marlene, the program is more than just a volunteer opportunity; it's a passion. When she talks about RTL, her excitement is evident.

Marlene is deeply invested in the success of her student, caring about her adult learner first as a person, then as a learner. According to the RTL site supervisor, you can see Marlene's true compassion, empathy and patience when she is working with her adult learner. Marlene is considered a "go-to-tutor," which is a tutor who can be counted on for any assistance. Along with tutoring, Marlene types her site's Literacy Connection newsletter each spring and says it gives her the opportunity to see inside the world of other students as well as her own.

Marlene is an avid reader, so when RTL discussed implementing a book club in an effort to enhance the literacy development of adult learners, Marlene volunteered without hesitation. The book club began in the spring of 2015 with Marlene responsible for developing the book discussion forum and group formation. She encourages adult learners to participate as a means of improving their conversation, critical thinking and comprehension skills. Her group discussions create a sense of belonging and camaraderie among learners of diverse cultures, while building confidence and language skills. She took the development of the book club one step further by developing a syllabus and binder for each collection to be utilized with future RTL book clubs. Marlene demonstrates her dedication to this effort by continuing to meet with her group during the summer and holiday breaks.

At the Read to Learn Fall 2015 Literacy Conference, Marlene presented an introductory workshop about starting a RTL book club. A few months later, she agreed to expand upon her initial workshop and present it again at the RTL Spring 2016 Tutor Training. Because of Marlene's outstanding presentation, enthusiasm and willingness to assist with newly formed book clubs, several tutors volunteered to facilitate book clubs at three other sites.

David Behymer, Rushville — David Behymer came to the Spoon River College Literacy program in Rushville after reading his church bulletin about a need for ESL tutors. He retired after many years of teaching art at an elementary school and was already volunteering his time with an ESL program at Western Illinois University in Macomb. There, he works with a conversation group, helping foreign students improve their English skills. For Spoon River College, he tutors six hours each week and spends countless hours outside of class with adult learners.

He takes a personal interest in each of the learners by becoming their greatest advocate in a new culture; a culture that is so very different from their own. He helps the learners acclimate to the culture, language and community while putting them at ease with his empathetic, kind and compassionate personality.

David goes above and beyond what is asked of him, looking for opportunities to help his learners. He has introduced them to the local library to improve their reading skills. He has been known to drive them to the local meat processing plant to fill out forms for employment. David has baked his adult learners' birthday cakes, helped them acquire cellphones, and driven them 30 miles to the Secretary of State's Driver Services facility to resolve driver's license issues. One learner had a problem getting his social security number, which was needed for employment. David patiently worked with the learner and the Social Security office to resolve the problem. He also helped a learner study for and pass a para-professional exam for employment at the local school district. David Behymer's dedication to his students is truly inspirational.

Family Reading Night at Howard Area Community Center

Literacy programs, public libraries and schools across the state took part in Family Reading Night activities in November, incorporating the theme "Camp out with a good book!" At Howard Area Community Center on the north side of Chicago, families were invited to an "indoor campout" complete with evergreens, mountains, a campfire including flames and logs, and a night sky filled with bright stars and a full moon. The room also included a tent, camping chairs and lanterns.

As families arrived, they gathered in the decorated room to sit and read together. The lights were dimmed to create a feeling of sitting around a campfire on a summer evening. Stories were shared in a variety of languages including English, Spanish and Arabic. The families also engaged in some traditional campfire songs.

The evening concluded with families participating in an art project, using firs and leaves to paint and decorate their artwork, followed by a potluck complete with s'mores for dessert.

"It is great to see such a diverse community come together for this wonderful event," said Secretary of State Jesse White. "I encourage families to participate in reading together on a daily basis."

Family Reading Night is celebrated annually on the third Thursday in November, and is a statewide effort to encourage families to spend an evening reading together.



ABOVE: Families gather around the campfire during Family Reading Night activities at Howard Area Community Center.



LEFT: A child explores a book at Howard Area Community Center's Family Reading Night.



Resources to help literacy programs seek alternative funding

In a time when state-grant funding is in question and often times limited, programs need to turn to other sources for assistance. Following are some helpful grant-funding resources.

Foundation Center (<http://foundationcenter.org/>) — Established in 1956, the Foundation Center is a source of information about philanthropy worldwide. Its online directory (paid subscription) offers extensive expertise on private philanthropy, both for grant seekers and grant makers. Also, the Foundation Center's website offers information on potential funders, proposal writing and online training. The Foundation Center coordinates the Funding Information Network, which is a network of libraries, community colleges, colleges, universities and community foundations. Network partners offer free in-house access to the Foundation Center subscription database as well as print materials and personal services to assist grant seekers.

Funding Information Network partners are located in areas where under-resourced and underserved communities are most in need of services. These partners offer grant-seeking and grant-writing classes taught by professional instructors. A number of the partners are libraries, with librarians who are experienced in grant writing and grant seeking teaching the classes. Usually, librarians have strong ties in their business communities and are well-versed in locating specialized grant funding resources. To locate a Funding Information Network partner in your area, visit <https://fconline.foundationcenter.org/>.

JustGive (<https://www.justgive.org>) — A nonprofit organization whose mission is to increase charitable giving by connecting people with the charities and causes they care most about. JustGive is dedicated to creating comprehensive tools and services to make charitable giving a part of everyday life. Nonprofit organizations can sign-up for free, with no monthly or annual fees. There is a processing fee, but with an option for donors to cover the cost.

TechSoup (<http://www.techsoup.org>) — Founded in 1987 as ComputerMentor, TechSoup is a nonprofit international network of nongovernmental organizations that provides technology and other resources to the volunteer sector. At TechSoup, people around the world find the information they need to make smart decisions about technology at their organizations. U.S. organizations often first get to know TechSoup's product donation program, which provides eligible organizations with discounted software, hardware, services and training. TechSoup's catalog includes more than 375 products from over 90 companies such as Microsoft, Adobe, Cisco, Intuit and Symantec. Useful technology resources are available on TechSoup's blog, webinars, forums, newsletter, articles and how-to's. Almost 300,000 organizations have received hardware and software donations from TechSoup's donor partners.

ON THE HORIZON

- **June 21-23** – CASAS Summer Institute, San Diego, CA, www.casas.org
- **June 23-28** – American Library Association Annual Conference, Orlando, FL, www.ala.org
- **July 9-11** - International Literacy Association Annual Conference, Boston, MA, www.reading.org
- **August 10** – Illinois Conference on Volunteer Administration, Chicago, IL, www.icova.info

More literacy event information is available at www.cyberdriveillinois.com/departments/library/literacy/home.html (click Calendar of Literacy Events).

WWW



<http://www.volunteerpower.com>

Volunteer Power's mission is to give you the skills, training and confidence in recruiting, motivating and managing the 21st century volunteer.

https://www.energizeinc.com/how_tos_volunteer_management/recruitment

Links to articles on how to find the right volunteers for your organization.

<http://www.idealists.org/>

Idealist is all about connecting idealists - people who want to do good - with opportunities for action and collaboration.

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