

## 2006 SPOTLIGHT ON ACHIEVEMENT PROFILES

### **Valleria Anthony, Blue Gargoyle Community Services, Chicago**

Valleria faced one obstacle after another when she first arrived at Blue Gargoyle in 2002. First her daughter died, and then her mother suffered her second heart attack. Valleria herself had surgery and when she returned home from the hospital, her mother was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and soon died. Other people might have given up on their educational goals, but not Valleria. She became determined, attending GED preparation classes four days a week and working with a tutor on reading and math twice a week. She improved her reading skills enormously. Valleria loves to write, and she has learned to use the computer and emails her daughters. In fact, she has published her work in the Neighborhood Writing Alliances' *Journal of Ordinary Thought*. Valleria is on her way to achieving her goal of obtaining her GED certificate.

### **Michael Bassett, Lester and Rosalie Anixter Center, Chicago**

As a deaf man, Mike had to be resourceful in figuring out ways to communicate with others. Last year he began working full time doing remodeling, renovation and repairs in mobile home communities. Mike loves the job. He regularly uses his writing skills to make lists of things he needs to do, and writes emails to his tutor describing projects that he has completed. In class, Mike works with his tutor on construction-related words that he can apply to his job. Improving his English language skills helps him use his writing skills more effectively. Despite Mike's busy work schedule and other obligations, he never fails to attend on Wednesday nights at the Anixter Center in Chicago, taking a train more than an hour each way to meet with his tutor. He also serves in various leadership roles with Alcoholics Anonymous, working with other deaf people who are going through recovery. Mike's tutor, Sara Baum, is a Spotlight on Service winner this year.

### **Birgit Battle, Cahokia Area Even Start, Cahokia**

When Birgit arrived in the United States from Germany, she could not speak English very well and didn't know anyone. She came into the program at Cahokia Area Even Start with low-self esteem and a limited sense that she could accomplish anything for herself, or even influence her children. Birgit was nervous about attending GED classes but her desire to get her GED prevailed. She was timid when dealing with her children's schools and needed support to attend parent-teacher conferences. Now she is a regular at school events and communicates well with teachers. Her five children are doing well in school with her help. Birgit can read and write better and feels better about herself. Younger students in her GED classes see Birgit as a role model for her determination and perseverance. It wasn't easy for Birgit, but she is a shining example of what family literacy is all about.

**Karen Chapman, Lincoln Land Community College's TEAL Literacy Program, Springfield**

In 2004, Karen started in the TEAL Literacy Program. Through tenacity and determination she has improved her basic literacy skills and passed her GED test. She has also gone on to successfully complete a five-day class on autistic children. This class enabled Karen to get a Certificate of Completion from Sangamon Area Special Education district. She is now studying for the paraprofessional teaching test and is enrolled in college. Karen knew getting her GED would open doors of opportunity, but she did not realize how quickly those doors would open. The impact on her family has been especially notable. By demonstrating the value of education to her family she motivated five of her children, including daughter- and son-in-laws, to begin GED classes. She struggled with learning, transportation, money, family and landlord problems, but Karen persevered. She has come full circle. Now Karen volunteers in the GED class as a "sitter" so that "parents with children can come to class and work on their GED's too".

**David Cleveland, Albany Park Community Center, Chicago**

When David began at Albany Park Community Center, he had to learn to study. He had to learn how to make himself turn off the TV and find a quiet place to do coursework. His friends complained that he studied too much and never went out anymore. But it worked for him. Now David can read the newspaper, read directions and get around town without assistance. He can use the Internet to find information. David has a library card he uses frequently. He found out how much fun it is to go to the library. David was recently diagnosed with a serious illness. With his new skills, he can educate himself about his illness and make his own decisions. He is planning to take the GED in July and hopes to achieve his dream of going to college. Proud of his accomplishments, he says that learning to read is the best thing he ever did for himself.

**Theresa Cooks, Tolton Center, Chicago**

Learning to read has changed Theresa's life in many ways. When she first started at the Tolton Center, she was very tentative. Her attendance was spotty and she resented having to go to parenting classes although she had custody of two grandchildren. As she gained confidence, Theresa got excited about school. She has become a role model and a leader in parenting classes. Last fall, Theresa received custody of two more grandchildren, so that she was caring for four children under the age of three. In order to attend classes, she would put the three littlest ones in the stroller. The three-year-old would hold onto the stroller and walk with Theresa the six long blocks to school. Her determination has inspired both her son and her husband to enroll in the GED program. Theresa understands that education will be the way out of poverty for herself, her children and her grandchildren. Theresa has taken the GED and passed. Her education is her main focus. Theresa now has custody of five grandchildren, all under the age of three. She reads bedtime stories to them and is determined they will love reading.

### **Sim Duffie, De La Salle/Tolton Center, Chicago**

Sim came to Tolton unable to read at all, because some men earlier in Sim's life thought teaching him a life of crime was more important than teaching him to read. Sim first went to jail when he was twelve. The last time Sim was released from jail, he went to a halfway house where the counselor realized that Sim really wanted to change his life. So he referred Sim to Tolton. Tolton got Sim a job but he had to demonstrate that he was dependable and really wanted to work. Every day, he attends classes at Tolton and works a full shift. Sim has made major transitions in his life. He has moved from hopelessness to the belief that he can make a life for himself in the mainstream and break the pattern of his former life. In the short time he has been at Tolton, Sim has developed a curiosity about words, learned to read certain street signs, make sense of bus schedules and read some of the instructional signs at work. Although learning to read is a difficult process for him, he has the ability to focus on each success.

### **Kathy Hagen, The Literacy Connection, Elgin**

Kathy has overcome the painful memory of the teasing, jeering and spitting that she endured in high school because of her learning disability. Due to her inability to read and follow directions, Kathy also found it hard to find a job. She worked at a factory earning minimum wage for 12 years. But she wanted more, so Kathy decided to improve her life by learning how to read and write. Kathy started taking classes at The Literacy Connection. No longer is Kathy the insecure person who came seeking help. She is self-confident, dedicated and a serious student persistent in her desire to learn. When she read her first book, she said it felt so good to be able to read. Having experienced the joy of reading, Kathy will never be the same person she was before. She now has a new job because she can read instructions and follow directions. She is more confident in expressing herself in writing. Kathy is well on the road to success.

### **Sandra Handelsman, The Literacy Council, Rockford**

Sandy has taken control of every aspect of her financial obligations. After a divorce, she needed to learn to write checks, balance her checkbook and pay her bills on time. She has learned that and more. When living costs increased, she took on a second job to make ends meet. She even started a savings account. Despite her long work hours, she manages to prepare for and attend tutoring sessions twice a week at the Literacy Council. Sandy has transformed from a shy woman with little self-confidence to a person with a "can do" attitude. Her reading has improved so much that she is now able to read the *Little House on the Prairie* books, which she enjoys very much. In spite of all the challenges in her life, she repeatedly says, "I am blessed."

**Mary Ann Sanders, Literacy Volunteers of America/Project U.P.W.A.R.D., Peoria**

When Mary Ann lost her mother as a young child, she had to grow up fast and learn to support herself. To do that, she quit school and got a job. When she got married and had a son, she was so busy working and raising him that she put her education on the back burner. However, when she was laid off from her job, she had difficulty finding other work. Mary Ann realized the importance of education. She took the GED test but could only pass part of it. Then the test changed and she had to start over. She put her education on hold again and made sure her son stayed in school and got his education. Finally Mary Ann had the time to work on her own education. She was linked with a tutor at Project U.P.W.A.R.D. to help her with reading. She has made exceptionally rapid progress. Working two eight-hour shifts a day has not kept Mary Ann from attending class. Mary Ann plans to take the GED test again and then work toward a degree in the nursing field.

## **2006 SPOTLIGHT ON SERVICE PROFILES**

### **Sara Baum, Lester and Rosalie Anixter Center, Chicago**

Sara has worked one-on-one with two different students that are hearing impaired. Both students travel from distant Chicago suburbs to meet with her on a weekly basis. Sara enjoys being a literacy tutor because it is not just a “give” situation, but also a “give and take.” She learns as much from her student, Mike Bassett, as he does from her. Mike is a Spotlight on Achievement winner this year. Hearing-impaired learners like Mike use American Sign Language (ASL) to communicate. The differences between Mike’s first language (ASL) and English provide some unique and enjoyable challenges for their sessions. Because they must use ASL to communicate during their sessions, some of the techniques used to teach English had to be adjusted. For example, they can’t use tools like phonics that depend on the ability to speak or hear. Additionally, certain concepts do not exist in ASL or are expressed physically rather than through words. In working together to learn, Sara and Mike both get to experience the pride that comes with feeling that they have something to offer, as well as something to learn.

### **Bonnie Caulkins, Spoon River College, Canton**

When her children were raised and her husband retired, Bonnie needed to find something to get her out and among people on a regular basis. Because of her love for people and desire to help others, she decided to call Spoon River College to inquire about their volunteer program. She went through training and immediately started tutoring. Bonnie’s students know she cares about them. A student she is working with now has come a long way academically, gaining confidence in other aspects of her life as her reading improves. Her student has blossomed under Bonnie’s patient, caring hands. The smiles on her students’ faces, the gleam in their eyes and the joy in their heart when they learn something new gives Bonnie joy and pleasure.

### **Vicki Fagerstrom, District 214 Community Education, Des Plaines**

After Vicki was widowed, she was looking for something to get her out of the house on the weekends. So she began tutoring at the Palatine Library site for District 214. Vicki makes it a point to learn her students’ likes and dislikes. When Vicki discovers her student is interested in something, she brings in materials related to their interests. She also introduces her students to stores, sightseeing and restaurants. Vicki enjoys seeing progress in reading and loves it when a learner teaches her about a new culture. Her students open her eyes to the world in an informal and comfortable way. One of her most cherished moments is when her Japanese student and husband asked Vicki to be Godmother to their future child. They also let Vicki pick out the middle name for the child. She chose “Sam” after Uncle Sam. Vicki feels that her students have given her much more than she has given them.

### **Eva Hahn, Frontier Community College, Fairfield**

In 1987, Eva began volunteering as a literacy tutor at Frontier Community College. She also tutors neighborhood children, struggling teens, and other adults in the small town in which she lives. Eva wants to give others the joy and sense of accomplishment that comes from learning to read. Reading is one of the most important things she does every day. The hardest part of helping students succeed is overcoming that sense of failure they experienced throughout school. Eva believes if she can change that attitude, their chances of success will increase. One of the most rewarding and challenging experiences she has had is working with ESL students. They ask questions about the English language and expect a good answer. They want to know how to figure out the sound of a word and to know why it says that, and what rule they should use. Their curiosity helps them continue learning.

### **Florence Johnson, The Literacy Connection, Elgin**

For the past twelve years, Florence has been tutoring at The Literacy Connection. Even though she has health problems that she deals with everyday, she never complains and continues to teach English as a Second Language to several students. Teaching is a two-way street for Florence because she also learns about foods, customs and cultures of other countries from her students. One of her Chinese students was fired from her job because of her inability to speak English. With Florence's help she learned to speak English and to read music. That student now plays at social events and gives concerts. Florence was tutoring a 77-year-old grandmother in a Vietnamese family who was recently sworn in as an American citizen. Another student had a master's degree in philosophy from the University of Mexico but was working in a factory because of his lack of English. In the process of teaching him English, Florence also learned about philosophy. It gives Florence great pleasure to see her students achieve their goals, to learn to communicate, and to express their thoughts and feelings. Tutoring also keeps Florence young at heart, out of mischief and interested in life. She is honored to be a volunteer tutor with The Literacy Connection.

### **Lorraine Martens, Waubensee Community College, Aurora**

Lorraine always wanted to be a literacy volunteer. After she moved to Aurora eighteen years ago, she saw an advertisement in the newspaper and signed up for tutor training. After training, Lorraine was assigned to the ABE/GED classroom on Wednesday mornings. She has seen such determination and perseverance from students that value education. One young man worked the midnight shift and then came to class every week. He eventually graduated with the GED. Other students attend class, go to two jobs, raise their family and also complete their GED. Students respond well to Lorraine's friendliness and sense of humor. She can bring out the best in each student. She is constant in her volunteer assignments and supportive of the entire program. Char Rokop, the ABE/GED teacher Lorraine works with says that, "She makes the world a better place."

### **Barbara Mayers, Blue Gargoyle Community Services, Chicago**

Barbara retired from a partnership in a Chicago law firm and began her tutor training at Blue Gargoyle in the same month. Barbara says that before she began tutoring math, she was a math “phobe” and had not even thought about math in years. But it turns out that she is anything but a math phobe, and in fact has grown to love math. Barbara loves the “ah ha” moment when a student suddenly sees the meaning of something, or masters a skill that has been elusive and mysterious. Word travels. New students are so anxious to work with Barbara that they approach her as she enters the building. The biggest tutoring challenges for Barbara have involved working around the many problems that students face. We all know that ill health, joblessness or inadequate jobs and family difficulties can limit a learner’s time, energy, resilience and hope. At the same time, Barbara’s students’ persistence in the face of those difficulties inspire her to be more optimistic. Their struggles inspire her to think harder, learn more and become a better problem solver. Barbara says, “There’s a reason math is great. There’s so little else in life that has an answer.”

### **Robert Dale Redman, Lake Land College, Mattoon**

In 1987, Dale read about an opportunity to volunteer in the newspaper and joined Project PAL at Lake Land College as a volunteer tutor. Because he had recently retired, he was considering various ways to occupy his time. Dale loves to read and thought this would be an excellent way to help others learn to read. He has tutored students five days a week and every day has driven to a different community to tutor one-on-one. Dale worked with a student from Moultrie County Probation office that no one else would work with. This student passed his GED and was accepted to a technical school in Chicago. He has helped students get their driver’s license and even driven them to the test. Another student from Australia set a record for a high score on the GED. Dale says he is the biggest winner in this endeavor. First, he has remained best friends with his wife because he has a reason to get out of the house and not be underfoot. Also, he has a lot of fun working with his students and learning from them. Dale believes studying and preparing for his tutoring time with students has helped maintained his mental health. He is a great example of true dedication to helping others.

### **Don Riegenbach, McHenry County College, Crystal Lake**

Don has been volunteering for the English as a Second Language program for about ten years at McHenry County College. He gets to meet people from all over the world. Wearing a welcoming smile, Don immediately makes students feel comfortable when they arrive to learn English. He patiently reviews information as many times as necessary to help a student understand a concept. For some of the students it may take days of practice to pronounce a word properly. It is hard work but the students keep at it, and Dale says it is wonderful to see the look of accomplishment when students “get it right”. One of his students got a job as a supervisor at the company he worked at solely because he could speak both Spanish and English. Don is a role model for students who might find commuting to class difficult, or negotiating life’s speed bumps too complex. Being unable to drive or walk does not stop Don from helping students.

## **Bea Swartz, Carl Sandburg College Literacy Coalition, Galesburg**

Bea retired from a challenging and rewarding job that left her with the feeling, “Now what do I do?” She read a notice in the newspaper inviting interested adults to be trained as literacy tutor volunteers. Bea thought this might be something she would love to do. She responded and has been volunteering at Carl Sandburg College Literacy Coalition ever since. Bea learned about the thousands of adults who cannot read the newspaper, simple instructions on product labels, the Bible, read to their children or fill out a job application. Because Bea believes they are “prisoners” of this disability just as if it were a physical disorder, she is glad to help. Bea has worked with adult learners who are at the very beginning level, to those working towards passing their GED. She also volunteered during the summer at an area library for the Students Organized to Assist Readers (SOAR) program. This program provides training for junior high school students to read to young children or listen to budding readers at local libraries. Bea is a staunch advocate for the literacy program and helps in many different ways.

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