

2007 SPOTLIGHT ON ACHIEVEMENT WINNERS

Dorothy Bailey, Blue Gargoyle Adult Learning Program, Chicago

Dorothy, the oldest of eight children, was born in Mississippi. Following the third grade, she stopped going to school and began working in the cotton fields--until she decided there had to be something better. She moved to Chicago and went to work in a factory, where she still works 40 years later. Although she hadn't attended school beyond the third grade, Dorothy stressed the importance of a good education to her two children. When her children were grown, Dorothy began to pursue her own education by attending classes at Blue Gargoyle Adult Learning Program. Her determination is tested daily because she comes to school after working the night shift for eight to twelve hours. But Dorothy says that school is the greatest thing that ever happened to her. Now she can fill out work reports, read books to her grandchildren and great grandchildren, and she has even gotten a raise. Today she can read words that once she couldn't even pronounce.

Laura Beckham, Lawrence Education Center, Springfield

Before enrolling in Families and Library Fun at Lawrence Education Center in Springfield, Laura was afraid of her children's teachers. Now she helps her children with their homework. In fact, since she started reading to her kids and having them read to her, her son advanced three grade levels in reading in one year. His teacher told Laura to keep doing exactly what she has been doing. Laura has three children with multiple medical and developmental issues. She now feels more equipped to work with the doctors and school personnel concerning her children's needs. Because Laura lives outside the library district, she has to work hard to earn a library card. Now Laura goes to the library weekly, where she shares books, stories and craft activities with her kids. While working toward achieving her literacy goals, Laura and her family were adversely affected by a tornado that devastated portions of Springfield last year. The tragedy did not stop her. Laura not only achieved her own educational goals, but she encouraged and supported other parents to "stay the course". Eventually, Laura plans to take business classes at Lawrence.

Frances D'Agostin, The Literacy Council, Rockford

Fran was a wife, a mother and a businesswoman, and very few people knew she could not read. When her husband passed away, she knew she had to learn to read. Fran came to The Literacy Council at an age when many people would consider it time to "wind down". Not Fran--she is committed to improving her reading and writing. She can now read books to her great grandchildren, handle her own mail and pay bills. She is especially proud that she could write letters to her grandson while he was stationed in Iraq. Fran is an inspiration. Recently her 90th birthday was a celebration that lasted several days because she is so special and loved by so many. Fran is a wonderful role model for her children, grandchildren and great grandchildren.

Joan Doubler, Black Hawk College, Moline

Joan is a hard worker. She worked on the family farm and took care of her parents until they passed on. She then started work at a local hospital, where she worked for twenty years before retiring. Now Joan is working very hard with her tutor through Black Hawk College's LIFE Program to prepare for the GED test that she plans to take this summer. Getting her GED and participating in a high school graduation ceremony is a goal Joan has had all of her life. To help reach her goal, Joan's tutor contacted the high school where Joan would have graduated. They will let her participate in the ceremony with her GED. In spite of being embarrassed to try to obtain her GED, Joan never gave up her dream. Not too far in the future, she will walk across the stage at her local high school with her GED in hand.

Patricia Hale, The Tolton Center, Chicago

Today, Patricia is a stellar student. But two years ago, when she joined the Tolton Center and drug rehabilitation program, life was another story. As her reading level improved, her life began to turn around. She has been off drugs now for two years, attends church and has a job. She no longer receives public aid. Patricia purchased a car so she can get to work and her classes at Tolton Center. This summer she will regain custody of her 12-year-old son. She has managed to do all of this while battling a life long substance abuse addiction. The teachers mentored Patricia and helped her see the world from a different viewpoint. Patricia is an inspiration to her classmates through her outstanding example of dedication, her positive attitude and her leadership within the classroom. She is determined to improve her life and the lives of her family by attending class every day, completing assignments and participating in class activities. The future looks bright for Patricia.

David Hernandez, Township District 214 Community Education, Arlington Heights

David is the epitome of the student that benefits from the Read to Learn Program at Township District 214. He began working with a volunteer tutor in the fall of 2002. With much determination he strived for independence in his work, in his home life and in his heart. David works two jobs, so he is often exhausted when its time for schoolwork, but David continues to study with his tutor. His attendance and determination are admirable. He sets goals, doesn't ask anything from anyone but himself and continues to work diligently to meet his goals. David has received two job promotions because of his improvement in both reading and writing. Additionally, David and his wife were able to buy their first home last year. David continues to be a true success story.

Carole Ann Krost, Lake Land College, Mattoon

All her life, Carole struggled to learn to read. She felt like a blind person trying to get out of the dark and into the light. She was never taught how to work with her dyslexia until she started taking classes at Lake Land College. Despite all the obstacles she has encountered, she cheerfully works to improve her own life as well as the lives of others. About two years ago, Carole was hired by a home care agency. In March 2006, she was named Employee of the Month, in part because a client called the agency to praise her hard work and caring attitude. Recently, she took a second part-time job at her church. Her self-confidence increased as she became acquainted with church members and made new friends. She has also become an active volunteer for the food pantry at the church. Reading has opened doors for Carole that she never imagined.

Beth Saylor and her children: James, Kayle, Tyler and Dominick Saylor, DeWitt-Livingston McLean Regional Office of Education, Normal

Beth left school in the eighth grade and had her first child at 15. At 19 and with 2 young children, she joined the Even Start Program at DeWitt-Livingston-McLean Regional Office of Education. Soon she had two more children and, with 4 little children, she sometimes found it difficult to attend class. In addition, Beth has had to deal with medical issues for herself and her children. But as her skills and confidence grew, Beth was able to improve her family's access to health care. With determination and hard work she passed the GED test in 2006, proudly walking across the stage to the cheers of family and friends. Today she is a confident, competent mother and a role model for her children. She sets a priority on learning and reading in her home. She serves on the Head Start Parent Advisory Council and is a room mother at her children's school. Last year, Beth reached another goal by passing her driver's test. This fall, Beth was hired as a teacher's aid in the Even Start Pre-K. Her future plans are to enroll in the local community college. At the Illinois Adult and Continuing Educators Conference in March of this year, Beth received the student of the year award. She also just received a United Way Volunteer of the Year Award for her volunteer involvement with Heartland Head Start.

Bertha Steele, Blue Gargoyle Adult Learning Program, Chicago

Bertha's greatest obstacle was to overcome fear. She was very shy and afraid to go out because of her limited skills. Bertha was living in a group home and dependent on others, when she took a risk and joined Blue Gargoyle's Adult Learning Program. Sometimes Bertha would get frustrated and tell her teacher "I can't do it." She struggled, but she would always come back and say, "I'll try again, I want to try again." She shows us that you can succeed if you are willing to try and try again. With time, determination and a desire to become independent, Bertha has overcome these obstacles. Today, Bertha lives on her own and is financially independent. She can use public transportation to go shopping, to the movies, to plays and events hosted by Blue Gargoyle.

After improving her reading and life skills, Bertha sings in the church choir, reads her Bible and reads the church bulletin. Life for Bertha has improved immensely. She was willing to go the distance to reach her goals.

Claude A. Williams, Common Place Family Learning Center, Peoria

Claude has always had an undiagnosed learning disability, but he was still able to work a full-time job. He wanted to learn to read, so before he retired Claude stopped by Common Place to see if they could help him. He started working with a tutor, and his reading and math skills improved. Claude is able to balance his checkbook. Claude is quite a good cook, and now he can read and write recipes. He has used this ability to help raise money for Common Place. One of his goals was to cook a brunch for his family for Christmas. He worked on this task with his tutor and even tried out recipes on the Common Place staff. His Christmas Day brunch for 20 family members was a great success. Claude also volunteers at Common Place's food pantry. He visits on Fridays and helps with food distribution by transporting and stocking food. Claude is a hard working adult learner who has spent many hours trying to improve his reading and math skills and help other people any way he can.

2007 SPOTLIGHT ON SERVICE WINNERS

Sammie Davis, Southwestern Illinois College, Belleville

Sometimes young people who need help with reading or math are told by their probation officer or a judge that they need to attend GED classes. These are the people Sammie tutors at the St. Clair County Probation Office. It can be a challenge to convince these young adults that learning can be a new beginning, and that learning can give them a second chance. Sammie helps these young people understand that getting their GED will give them more options. He encourages them and reminds them that focusing on the present task will help them overcome the circumstances that brought them to probation. Sammie feels rewarded when he sees his students begin to understand the power of learning. A simple smile, or wanting to do more work, shows him that they are growing confident and beginning to overcome their fear of reading or math. Sammie's best reward is seeing students obtain their GED. He likes to prove to them that, with a little hard work, they can reach their goals.

Shirley D. Hall, Lake Land College, Mattoon

Shirley has been a teacher for the past 27 years and never tires of helping others to learn. After a full day at work, she tutors adults at an evening GED class as a Project PAL volunteer at Lake Land College. Shirley is one of the best recruiters for the literacy programs in her area. She follows up on students who have dropped out of school and encourages them to come back. She has even loaned money to a student so the student could take the GED test. She is a loyal friend to anyone, including students, teachers and other volunteers who need a helping hand.

It is satisfying for Shirley to see a student get a concept that he or she has been working on. She says she loves to see the “light bulb” go on. Shirley has several interesting memories. She had one student who became a great grandmother while attending class. That student was certain she could not pass the GED test because she said she was “too old and too dumb”. But with Shirley’s assurance that she could do it, the student kept working and finally passed the test. The student was looking forward to graduation, and having her family see her walk across the stage, but the Lord had other plans. Her graduation took place in heaven. The student’s husband received her diploma posthumously. There were tears in the eyes of her family and friends, because they all knew how hard she had worked.

Zeno Jacquat, Literacy Volunteers of Western Cook County, Oak Park

Twenty years ago, some ladies from Literacy Volunteers of Western Cook County made a presentation that caught Zeno’s attention. Twenty years before that he had emigrated from Switzerland and settled in Oak Park, so he knew what it was like to be an immigrant. So, after his retirement, Zeno took the tutor training class and began working with students. Seven years later he is still tutoring. Zeno’s rewards are his students’ successes. Some have become American citizens, some have received better paying jobs, and others have succeeded in securing a job. All of his students have become more comfortable with the English language and with American culture. Zeno also plays an active role in supporting Literacy Volunteers of Western Cook County events, promotes literacy to those outside the organization and is the only tutor member on the Program Service Committee (PSC). Last December, Zeno suffered a stroke, which was quite a shock to everyone. During this ordeal, he made certain his wife contacted the office so his two students would know that he would not be available for tutoring sessions. Zeno made a quick recovery and is now back tutoring his students, attending PSC meetings and working on events. Zeno is not only an excellent tutor, but a dedicated ambassador for literacy and Literacy Volunteers of Western Cook County.

Gwen McNamara, Township District 214 Community Education, Arlington Heights

Gwen has two essential principles that are important to her: being of service to others and always setting goals. The literacy program at Township District 214 allows her to fulfill both of these principles. She has faced some of life’s most devastating trials – the deaths of her daughter and husband. Despite these challenges, Gwen made it her life’s mission to help others. Gwen is always smiling and laughing because the hours she spends tutoring make her happy. She feels blessed when she sees the spark of understanding in her learner’s eyes, as they understand a new word or concept. Because she is always giving, Gwen feels young, full of hope and focused on a life of service. Gwen’s friendships with her students go beyond the classroom. They visit each other’s homes; go to dinners, movies and plays. Gwen gets as excited as the student when they tell her that they have become a citizen of the United States of America. They “light up” each other’s lives as they learn together.

Paul Mueller, Literacy Volunteers Fox Valley, St. Charles

Paul volunteers as a literacy tutor because he obtains a great deal of satisfaction from the task. He says there are few greater rewards than seeing the “light bulb” come on when a student finally grasps what you have been teaching. Besides the improvement of spoken language, reading and writing skills, a tutor gets to see the impact of learning on other parts of the student’s lives. Paul’s first student was a forty-six year old Somali man whose past included time spent in a refugee camp. In a span of about eight months, Paul tutored him for almost 40 hours, which resulted in a gain of one level in his oral skills and an increased understanding of American society. Another student Paul has been tutoring for about a year is now able to read children’s books to her three-year-old daughter. Reading together is something the mother and daughter will value for the rest of their lives. The student’s child will be more prepared to enter school because of Paul’s tutoring work. As students and tutors learn about each other’s cultures, there comes an invaluable understanding of both differences and similarities.

Donna Oleson, Waubensee Community College, Aurora

A retired schoolteacher, Donna is an inspiration as a volunteer tutor. She treasures her memories of tutoring her students. Once, when Donna was observing an ESL class, she noticed three Hispanic gentlemen who did not understand what the teacher was asking them to do. Sitting down with them, she briefly explained what the teacher was saying, helped them to understand, and she was hooked. She has been volunteering in ESL ever since. Donna has many stories of her students. For instance, one student from India came 30 minutes early to every class so they could converse in English. She explained questions to him that he had wondered about all week. Another student came to class crying. A clerk had said something rude to her and the student felt hurt and humiliated. Donna urged her to say to clerks, “Excuse me. I am learning your language, so could you please help me?” The student tried it the next week and came to class smiling because it worked. Her current student escaped from Sudan after being imprisoned by extremists. He and his family walked a week through lion infested grassland to reach Kenya. Before they could come to the United States, the events of 9/11 occurred, and their immigration to America was delayed for two years. Another student who was a lawyer in his native country has an inquisitive mind that helped Donna see the world through different eyes. Donna is honored to be an adult literacy volunteer tutor at Waubensee Community College.

R. David Pschirrer, Spoon River College, Canton

Being a literacy volunteer is one of the most rewarding and fulfilling times in Dave's life. Serving as a tutor at Illinois River Correctional Center (IRCC) through the literacy program at Spoon River College, he volunteers three days a week, three hours a day. The men at IRCC know he's there for them and that he will work with them all. It doesn't matter how poor their reading is. It doesn't matter if they know any English. It doesn't matter if they haven't been educated in their own country. Dave's goal is to help them improve their reading, writing, math or English skills. With Dave's encouragement, they feel a renewed sense of confidence. They want to learn to speak or write English or improve their reading and math. The inmates respect and admire him. The assistant warden at IRCC says Dave is an excellent example to the inmates because of his professional and respectful demeanor. Dave has been a wonderful asset to the literacy program and fills a much-needed position at IRCC. Dave is also learning from his students, as some of his Hispanic students are giving him a refresher course in Spanish.

A. Roseann Runyon, Regional Office of Education, Literacy Volunteers of America/Project U.P.W.A.R.D., Peoria

As a retired educator, it has been very fulfilling for Roseann to continue to use her teaching skills as a volunteer tutor for LVA/Project U.P.W.A.R.D. Roseann attended the very first tutor-training workshop that Project U.P.W.A.R.D. conducted 20 years ago. For five years she went weekly to the Hanna City Correctional Work Camp. There she tutored inmates and helped them learn the survival skills they would need upon their release. She is now tutoring adults at the local library in her small town. These adults do not have the resources or transportation to be able to attend adult education classes in nearby Peoria. Roseann also drives 50 miles each week to tutor a young man from Taiwan who has expressed interest in improving his English skills so he can seek employment as a translator in the United States. He delights in learning the fine differences between such words as cute, adorable and cuddly. He challenges Roseann to explain the "American" sounds we make for expressions like ouch, pow, clunk, whoopee, etc. Several times he brought along some Chinese friends to their class to encourage them to enroll in tutoring sessions so they can speak English together as a learning experience. Roseann feels fortunate to have found a satisfying means of being useful to society.

Marie Rutger, Illinois Eastern Community College, Fairfield

Marie has been tutoring at the Frontier College Program at Illinois Eastern Community College for 15 years. Some of Marie's students had been married for years and raised children without being able to read a word. It gives her pleasure to see that now they can read the Bible, newspapers, menus, and magazine articles. Recognizing that low-literacy skills affect adults significantly in their day-to-day living, Marie gives survival skills top priority in her teaching. She has assisted students in obtaining their driver's license, getting legal matters or health issues straightened out. Some of her students have gone on to obtain their GED. Marie encourages the English as a Second Language (ESL) students to participate in community activities with her, such as helping at nursing homes and attending home extension meetings. Marie has been a literal lifeline to many of her students. Two of her former students are now deceased, but not before they learned to read the newspaper, Bible and stories to the grandchildren. Marie feels rewarded to know that she had a part to play in making another person's life better.

Babette Simon, Oakton Community College, Skokie

At a time when most people might be taking a break, 86-year-old Babette is still out there conquering the world. She swims, takes classes and tutors both ESL and American-born students four days a week. Her energy and enthusiasm never stop. Three years ago, a year after her husband passed away, Babette came to Oakton's Volunteers in Teaching Adults program to inquire about classes for a Polish woman who needed to learn English. She was talked into becoming a volunteer tutor and, after training, began tutoring a group of six adults from Poland, South Vietnam, Iran, Mexico and India. Each student had different needs, but they interacted and learned a great deal from each other. Since then, Babette has tutored others on a one-to-one basis. One student had dropped out of school at age 10. At 22, he was back to learn the basics about reading. A dyslexic, he is beginning to read and was able to get a better paying job. Another student from Mexico went to school for five years but had to drop out to help support his family. At 16, he came to the United States and worked as a mechanic. It is a challenge for him to hear and understand the vowel sounds that are different between Spanish and English. But he is beginning to read the newspaper and do the paperwork required on his job. Babette enjoys seeing her students' confidence grow and knowing they can learn.

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