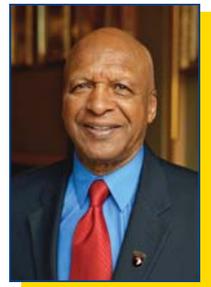


ILLINOIS ADULT VOLUNTEER LITERACY SUMMER 2017

Jesse White
Secretary of State
& State Librarian

Each day, citizens of our great state devote their time voluntarily in an effort to help adult learners become better educated. They teach them to read, write and speak English. These tutors come from a broad range of life experiences and provide a snapshot of just how diverse our society has become. In this edition you will read about two individuals experiences in volunteering. I applaud them, as well as the thousands of others, who work to make our society better educated.



The Targeting Autism Project at the Illinois State Library is working with librarians and literacy providers to better serve patrons and individuals impacted by Autism Spectrum Disorders. A new reader book club and family literacy story kits have been developed to address autism and are available for use by libraries and literacy programs anywhere in the state, free of charge.

In this issue you can also find information on the Illinois Adult Learning Hotline. This service provides helpful information for adults seeking literacy help, as well as anyone with an interest in finding a local literacy program to become a volunteer tutor.

The Illinois Library Association's iREAD Summer Reading Program is designed to encourage children and their parents to continue reading throughout the summer to help bridge the gap between school years. National research finds that students who participate in summer reading programs score higher on reading achievement tests at the beginning of the next school year than those who did not participate. Encourage all of your adult learners and their children to visit their local libraries to enroll in summer reading. Have a safe and enjoyable summer.

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Highlighting the diversity of volunteer tutors

Volunteer tutors have always been the driving force behind the Secretary of State Illinois State Library's Adult Volunteer Literacy Grant Program. Each year volunteers take the time to assist adult learners in learning to read, write and speak English. Last year, more than 3,200 tutors assisted 6,000 adult learners in their quest to become better educated. Volunteer tutors come from many different walks of life. Below are two examples:

Martin Sanchez, Poder Works, Chicago - Every volunteer has a reason for devoting their time to others. For 23-year-old Martin Sanchez, tutoring adult Spanish-speaking students in English is his way of giving back to the Latino community, his community. As

the first generation of his family born in the U.S., Martin grew up in a household where the main language spoken was Spanish. His parents are Mexican immigrants, who relocated to Chicago before his birth in search of a place to start a family where their children would have ample opportunities to succeed.

Growing up on the Southwest Side of Chicago, Martin lived and attended elementary school in the city until fourth grade, when he was briefly sent to live with his grandmother in Mexico. Upon returning to the U.S. a year later, Martin realized how grateful he was to call the U.S. his home and the privilege of living in a city filled with so many opportunities and a diverse community.



Martin Sanchez, far right standing, works with adult learners at Poder Works in Chicago.

Following Martin's graduation from Kelly High School, he began seeking opportunities to volunteer. His initial volunteer commitment was with the Latino Organization of the Southwest where he contributed to neighborhood cleanup efforts.

By chance, Martin came across a flyer for Poder, a non-profit organization that helps prepare Spanish-speaking adults to seize opportunities in Chicago through integrated English literacy, civic engagement, digital literacy and job training courses. Martin immediately enrolled as a student in Poder's intensive customer service training course, since he was actively looking

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for employment at that time. “The learning culture there was so supportive. The tutors were passionate about helping native Spanish speakers learn English and I knew right away that was what I ultimately wanted to do,” says Martin. He soon began volunteering at Poder two days a week tutoring adult learners one-on-one in English, which he describes a highly rewarding.

When asked about the difference he has made in his community as a result of his volunteer tutoring at Poder, Martin says, “It’s like the saying in Spanish, ‘Podemos ayudar aunque sea con ungrano de arena,’ which translates to ‘Anyone can make a difference no matter how small it may seem.’ It adds up.” He especially enjoys hearing about how his students have made substantial progress in their lives as a result of learning English. “One woman told me that she was able to obtain her driver’s license as a result of the classes she took at Poder. It’s amazing to think that I helped contribute to that.”

The Poder staff members consider Martin to be one of their most self-motivated English tutors at the agency. He genuinely cares about his students and constantly goes out of his way to make sure they understand the material. Poder’s volunteer coordinator, Griselda Piedra, says that Martin is the perfect role model for his students. “Just like them, he first came to Poder to grow both personally and professionally. It’s wonderful seeing Martin go from a timid, soft spoken person to providing tutoring support to over 45 students and even standing in as a substitute instructor when needed.”

At Poder, Martin has found a rewarding way to give back to his community, and because of the contribution he makes to the adult learners, the educational environment at Poder is vibrant and focused on individualized student support that empowers each student.

Bimala Tamang, Township High School District 214, Arlington Heights – Bimala arrived in the U.S. from India nearly 50 years ago bringing with her a love of volunteering and helping others. At the age of seven, she would travel with her mother to meet financially disadvantaged family members to encourage them to send their children to study for free at her mother’s special school. Her mother instilled in her students the importance of volunteering and education. She would often quote renowned scientist Albert Einstein, “It is the supreme art of the teacher to awaken joy in creative expression and knowledge.”

Bimala began as a volunteer tutor with Township High School District 214’s Read to Learn adult literacy program in 2009 and has donated over 450 hours of her time to the program. Her main focus is to help integrate adult learners into American culture and ease their fear and anxiety of being in a new country. She believes education empowers people to reach their highest potential and creates a better quality of life.

“Volunteers are not paid because we are worthless, but because we are priceless,” states Bimala. “My mother would be proud of my vocation to brighten the lives of adult learners and guide them to an understanding of a new language. Read to Learn has given me an excellent opportunity to continue my volunteer services.”



Bimala Tamang leads a book club discussion.

Bimala currently leads a book club of adult learners and enjoys encouraging them to be creative and imaginative as they read the book. As part of the book club, learners are given the opportunity to share and compare their own life experiences with the characters of the book. These exercises help them gain confidence in speaking and practicing their English in a safe environment.

“I have kept in contact with several learners who are graduates of the Read to Learn program who have improved their English to the point of being able to secure employment and become contributors to their community,” says Bimala. “We often laugh and reminisce about their time in the program and how they are so thankful that a program like this exists where people can get the help they need.”

Along with tutoring adults in learning English, she has also volunteered at Alexian Mental Health Centers; Life Span, which is an agency that provides free legal services and advocacy for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault; and Northwest Action Against Rape, where she served as an emergency counselor. She has also served as both a student trustee and student ambassador at Roosevelt University.

iREAD Summer Reading Program

The theme of the 2017 iREAD Summer Reading Program is “Reading by Design.” The theme is inspired by the creativity of authors, illustrators, builders, inventors, artists, architects and all individuals who make the world a more interesting livable, accessible and beautiful place. The program hopes to inspire readers of all ages to explore their own creativity and design new worlds for themselves and others.

Information on iREAD’s Summer Reading 2017 is accessible via the web at www.ireadprogram.org and includes valuable information and statistics on the benefits of summer reading and preventing the “summer slide.” Resources to help initiate your own summer reading program, suggested materials, posters along with marketing and advocacy information are also available. iREAD is a program of the Illinois Library Association.

Scholarship winners attend IACEA Conference

Seven Secretary of State Illinois State Library's Literacy Office scholarship recipients attended the Illinois Adult and Continuing Educators Association conference held in March in Naperville. The conference provided the winners the opportunity for professional development and to meet and network with literacy practitioners from around the state.

Some of the scholarship winners share what attending the conference meant to them:

Abraham Celio, Universidad Popular, Chicago – “A couple of sessions included ideas and key strategies to provide successful implementation of family and volunteer literacy programs. Keeping up-to-date with these developments is essential to the continued growth of Universidad Popular and its efforts to offer adult education and family literacy programs to low-income residents in the Southwest Side of Chicago.”

Kang Hee Hong, Regional Office of Education #33, Monmouth – “I teach in a rural area of the state and do not have the opportunity to connect with other literacy practitioners, so the conference allowed me to benefit from the community of teachers like myself. My students are already commenting on how much they enjoy the new games and activities that I brought back from this year's conference.”

Elizabeth Marsch, World Relief DuPage, Aurora – “As a relatively new member in the field of adult education and new to my volunteer coordinating role at World Relief, I gained a much broader understanding of the world of adult and continuing education, its various facets, unique challenges and history. I had the joy of meeting and learning from other educators and professionals who are devoted to serving and advocating for our students in spite of seemingly constant obstacles and hurdles.”

Sabrina Poulin, Aquinas Literacy Center, Chicago – “I found the conference to be an excellent opportunity to network with experienced colleagues, gain valuable insights from the workshops and find community in fellow literacy professionals.

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Scholarship winners pictured from left to right, Susan Wilson, C.E.F.S Economic Opportunity Corporation, Effingham; Kang Hee Hong, Regional Office of Education #33, Monmouth; Elizabeth Marsch, World Relief, Wheaton; Nancy Young, Lewis & Clark Community College, Godfrey; Abraham Celio, Universidad Popular, Chicago; Renuka Sharma, Indo-American Center, Chicago; and Sabrina Poulin, Aquinas Literacy Center, Chicago.

The Illinois Adult Learning Hotline – connecting students, tutors and programs

The Secretary of State Illinois State Library's Literacy Office, in cooperation with the Adult Learning Resource Center (ALRC), provides a centralized information and referral system that connects potential adult students and volunteer literacy tutors to local adult education and literacy programs throughout the state. One call to this number provides prospective learners or volunteers with contact information to reach the local literacy project nearest to their homes, workplace or other preferred location. The hotline also responds to callers' requests for general information on Illinois' adult education and literacy effort. Google the Illinois Adult Learning Hotline and a link to the hotline webpage will come up.

Referrals – The ALRC provides the referral service through both an 800 phone number, 1-800-321-9511 (TDD or voice), and an internet site at <http://www.thecenterweb.org/alrc/hotline.html>. Bilingual operators, who speak English, Spanish or Polish, answer the hotline during business hours, Mon.-Fri., 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. Once the operator has the caller's information, he or she is provided with up to three referral programs. The caller can then contact those programs about learning or volunteering opportunities.

Program Reports – At the beginning of each month, programs receive an Agency Monthly Report that lists callers (students and volunteers) who were referred to their program during the prior month. If an agency needs information about referrals before the end of a month, the agency can contact Yvonne Baginski at ybaginski@cntrmail.org or 224-366-8624 to provide a contact name and fax number. The ALRC will fax the program a list of referrals to date.

Promotional Flyers – to recruit both learners and volunteers a promotional flyer can be downloaded from the hotline's website at <http://www.thecenterweb.org/alrc/hotline.html>. The learner flyers promote English as a Second Language (ESL), adult literacy, high school equivalency test preparation and citizenship classes. The flyers are also available in English, Spanish and Polish. In addition, there are four different flyers targeted to volunteers. All flyers were developed for community distribution.

Contact Laura Sherwood, the hotline manager, at Lsherwood@cntrmail.org or 224-366-8622 for any hotline questions.



ALRC staff fielding calls on the Illinois Adult Learning Hotline.



State Library staff discusses autism at literacy conference

The Literacy Office of the Illinois State Library (ISL) included autism on the list of important topics addressed at this year's "On the Road to Literacy" Conference held at the University of Illinois, Chicago, in April. Mary Pelich, Autism trainer and consultant, Targeting Autism Project, ISL; Suzanne Schriar, associate director, Library Automation & Technology, ISL, and principle investigator, Targeting Autism Project; and Debra Vines, ISL Advisory Committee member and founder and executive director of The Answer, Inc. had the privilege of delivering presentations at the event. April, designated as Autism Awareness Month, contributed to the focus and timeliness of the content.

Mary and Suzanne shared their knowledge of the highly individualized and often hidden characteristics of autism. They provided many suggestions and examples of ways to overcome the learning obstacles and challenges faced by individuals with autism, including: physical and spatial accommodations; visual aids; format adaptations of reading materials; and practical advice for ensuring inclusive and welcoming interactions. Debra shared her personal story as the mother of an adult son with non-verbal autism and how her experience led her to start her own not-for-profit organization, The Answer, Inc., in 2007. The organization supports parents and caregivers by providing case management/referral services, resources, tutoring and recreational opportunities for individuals with autism and their families. Debra addressed the major issue of young adults on the spectrum who experience unique challenges in finding work or enrolling in appropriate education opportunities after leaving high school due to poor literacy skills. She also shared how The Answer, Inc., is addressing this need with its "Spectrum University Tutoring Program."

In addition to these workshops, Mary and Suzanne led a lunchtime discussion with literacy tutors on how the Literacy Office has added autism-related books to its adult new reader collections and story kits. They provided a demonstration of sensory activities added to the story kits to engage new readers on the autism spectrum. General information and instructions on borrowing the materials and working with new readers were also shared. To access information on the adult new reader book clubs available for use by literacy programs free of charge, please visit: http://www.cyberdriveillinois.com/departments/library/literacy/book_clubs.html.

**Targeting Autism is made possible by a grant from the U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services and the Secretary of State/Illinois State Library.*



Pictured are the new autism related Adult New Reader Book Club collection, *Rules*, and the two story kits, *My Brother Charlie* and *All My Stripes*.

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Scholarship winners — (Cont. from pg. 3)

The resources, information and experience I gained from the conference enabled me to effectively teach our new tutors about how adults learn."

Renuka Sharma, Indo-American Center, Chicago – "The Power of the Positive keynote address by Carrie Stack of the Say Yes Institute and her Building the Dream Team workshop was by far the most enthusiastic deliverance I have ever experienced. 'Replenishing the well' is something we all need to do daily and I plan to incorporate many of the things I learned during the conference into our literacy program."

Nancy Young, Lewis & Clark Community College, Godfrey – "Adult education is filled with fluidity and constant changes and demands within the field can seem overwhelming without continuing education. I can always count on this conference to supply progressive information and vibrant techniques which can be implemented immediately."

ON THE HORIZON

- **July 15-17** - International Literacy Association Annual Conference, Orlando, FL, www.literacyworldwide.org/conference
- **August 16** – Illinois Conference on Volunteer Administration, Chicago, IL, www.icova.info
- **September** – National Literacy Month
- **September 8** – International Literacy Day, www.literacyworldwide.org/about-us/news-events/international-literacy-day
- **September 19-20** - Illinois Center for Specialized Professional Support, Forum For Excellence, Bloomington-Normal, IL, icsps.illinoisstate.edu/forum-for-excellence
- **September 25-30** – National Adult Education and Family Literacy Week, national-coalition-literacy.org/adult-education-and-family-literacy-week/
- **September 27-30** – Pro-Literacy U.S. Conference on Adult Literacy, Minneapolis, MN, proliteracy.org/Professional-Development/ProLiteracy-Conference
- **October** – Domestic Violence Awareness Month
- **October 5-7** – Illinois Reading Council Conference, Bloomington-Normal, IL, www.illinoisreadingcouncil.org/conference.html
- **October 9-11** – Families Learning Conference, Tuscon, AZ, www.familieslearning.org

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