

Success through SCALE

By Ezi Adesi - Adult Basic Education Director, ezi@litnetwork.org
Shawn Steen - Community Outreach Director, shawn@litnetwork.org

Derrick Wallace came to Literacy Network in fall of 2009, looking for help with his reading skills. He has worked with several volunteer tutors, each helping him with sight-reading, phonics, and spelling. Currently, Derrick is working in our Skills in Computers and Literacy for Employment (SCALE) program, honing his reading and basic computer skills through weekly sessions at the Goodman South Madison Library with his tutor, Katie Kazan.

“The best part about my experience with the SCALE Program so far has been working with my student Derrick. He is a terrific person, funny and very generous,” says Katie. “The most positive aspect of working with [him] has been spending time with him in class. I hope to see this program grow. I believe there is plenty of need and it’s rewarding for tutors and learners.”

We placed Derrick in this program hoping that the computer skills aspect would be a strong impetus to his learning. “What I like

most about SCALE is learning computers,” Derrick said. “[It] has improved my patience to learn and I am reading much better. It feels good being in a classroom. It makes me feel that I am not the only one who wants to learn the computer and how to read better.”

Consistency is crucial to the learning process. Weekly tutoring sessions benefit adults in this program. Their successes keep them coming back for more, building not only their skills but their confidence and pride. Instead of learning being a burden, it blossoms into a treasure. For example, during a recent creative writing segment in class, students were asked to write about their most prized possession. When asked what he was going to write about, Derrick did not hesitate.

“I’d have to say my tutor is my most prized possession.”



Katie Kazan and Derrick Wallace working together. “I’d have to say my tutor is my most prized possession,” said Derrick.

OFFICE HOURS

Monday - Thursday: 8:30 am - 8:00 pm
Friday: 8:30 am - 1:00 pm

Literacy Network teaches reading, writing and speaking skills to Dane County adults and families so they can achieve financial independence, good health, and greater involvement in community life.

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Gwen Gillon: A Friend to Man

By Ezi Adesi - Adult Basic Education Director, ezi@litnetwork.org

Gwen Gillon signed up to tutor with Literacy Network's Adult Basic Education Program a week after retiring from a 39-year career as a professional educator with the Madison Metropolitan School District.

"I had often driven past Literacy Network," Gwen says, "and I would say within me, 'you should stop in and see if you can volunteer and help with literacy!'"

While most new tutors at Literacy Network take on just one adult student, Gwen came in enthusiastic and energized, taking on two very hard working and committed students.

"Both students bring a great deal of background knowledge. They stay focused on the entire two hours of interactive instruction and application. It seems that the students at

Literacy Network are very determined to achieve their goals and have a good understanding that hard work pays off in the long run. I am really enjoying my experience as a tutor with Literacy Network so far."

It has been beyond a pleasure having Gwen as an adult basic education tutor with us. Her sessions with her students have been engaging, interactive and practical. It is amazing to see and hear Gwen in action with her students at Literacy Network. I look forward to many stories of student success, complements of Gwen Gillon. She is a gift to the community, the world of education, and society.

"The best way to describe Literacy Network and what it provide its clients," Gwen tell us, "is by a poem entitled A House by the Side of the Road."

The House by the Side of the Road

By Sam Walter Foss (1858-1911)

There are hermit
souls that live withdrawn
In the peace of their self-content;
There are souls, like stars, that dwell apart,
In a fellowless firmament;
There are pioneer souls that blaze their paths
Where highways never ran;-
But let me live by the side of the road
And be a friend to man.

Let me live in a house
by the side of the road,
Where the race of men go by-
The men who are good and the men who are bad,
As good and as bad as I.
I would not sit in the scorner's seat,
Or hurl the cynic's ban;-
Let me live in a house by the side of the road
And be a friend to man.

I see from my house
by the side of the road,
By the side of the highway of life,
The men who press with the ardor of hope,

The men who are faint with the strife.
But I turn not away from their smiles nor their tears-
Both parts of an infinite plan;-
Let me live in my house by the side of the road
And be a friend to man.

I know there are brook-gladdened
meadows ahead
And mountains of wearisome height;
That the road passes on through the long afternoon
And stretches away to the night.
But still I rejoice when the travelers rejoice,
And weep with the strangers that moan,
Nor live in my house by the side of the road
Like a man who dwells alone.

Let me live in my
house by the side of the road
Where the race of men go by-
They are good, they are bad, they are weak, they are strong,
Wise, foolish- so am I.
Then why should I sit in the scorner's seat
Or hurl the cynic's ban?-
Let me live in my house by the side of the road
And be a friend to man.

Cold Weather, Warm Hearts

By Sandy Drew, Julia Garrett, Sue Rosa, Willa Schmidt, and Leslie Wilson (ESL Tutors), and Jennifer Peterson (Director of English Language Tutoring)

On a frosty morning in mid-January, five intrepid volunteer ESL tutors met at Literacy Network's Tutor Meet-up for a cozy conversation about the joys and challenges of tutoring. First-time tutors and certified ESL teachers alike found common ground in discussing their experiences with their adult learners, who hailed from countries as diverse as Mexico, Morocco, and Honduras.

"I am really eager to learn how to tutor," says Sue Rosa, who was matched with her first learner in November. She attended the Tutor Meet-up in the hopes of garnering support and advice from more experienced tutors.

Julia Garrett, a graduate student at UW-Madison, agrees, "Other people always have ideas and resources that I don't know about." The group found they shared similar challenges in their work: for example, many students lack the time, energy, or opportunity to practice much outside of their weekly 2-hour tutoring sessions; they often work multiple jobs with long, inflexible hours, sometimes while caring for a family. Similarly, students' busy lives sometimes lead to difficulties in scheduling weekly lessons. As the group reflected on these common problems, they agreed that it helped to be cognizant of the limitations the learner faces, and simply do the best they could to help the learner during the two hours they had together.

"I really enjoyed hearing each story [today]," says Julia. "Where [the students] come from, how determined they are. It's helpful to see what others face. It's easy to think, 'What am I not doing right?' It's helpful to hear from other people that they have challenges, too."

What keeps tutors going despite these obstacles? Sandy Drew, a long-time Literacy Network tutor who has been with her current learner for two years, voices what everyone in the room seems to feel. "What I picked up from today was the positive energy that everybody has had with their learner."

The tutors agree that volunteer tutors do a great deal more than teach the language; they are a tremendous source of support to their learners and their learners' families. Students are often overwhelmingly grateful to have someone in their corner who can serve as a social and linguistic guide in an unfamiliar culture.

But the tutor-learner relationship is not only a service to the learner. It also brings joy to the tutor. As the dregs of our tea grew cold and the meeting drew to a close, we found a sense of camaraderie in this common feeling of fulfillment.

"I don't want to get mushy here, because I can do that," laughs Willa Schmidt, who has been tutoring her learner for about a year, "but at Thanksgiving, when we were talking about gratitude, I told my learner, 'I'm so thankful that I met you. You've opened up a whole new world for me.'"



Five intrepid volunteer ESL tutors met at Literacy Network's Tutor Meet-up for a cozy conversation about the joys and challenges of tutoring.



Student inspires teacher with persistence in learning

By Gregg Williard - ESL Instructor, gregg@litnetwork.org

Raina Dominguez, 37, grew up on a hardscrabble strawberry farm in Michoacán, Mexico. She quit school in the 6th grade and she never studied English. “I was frustrated. I felt I was not intelligent and I saw no future in school.”

Her grandfather raised Raina and tried to keep her in school by telling her she would be stuck working all day if she didn’t go. She surprised him by choosing the farm, working day and night for the next 11 years. She tended cows and grew strawberries, tomatoes and corn. “I think I only left because my grandfather died, and my older brother was so lazy and wouldn’t do his share of the work,” she said.

A cousin in Madison offered to help her relocate here. When she told her mother and brother she was moving, they didn’t believe she could or would do it. Her greatest concern was starvation, so she came loaded down with emergency ingredients for a proper Mexican diet. That was 14 years ago, and over that time she’s been working at a cleaning company. There she met her husband, and they have two children, Ernesto 10, and Felipe 6.

Having a job and family leaves little time, but Raina is dedicated to learning English. Thanks to donors



“I just try to live in the moment and use what’s in front of me to get better,” said Raina Dominguez, who has made major improvements in her skills.

who have made flexible classes possible, Raina has taken the classes she can fit around family and work. She also studies with her personal tutor, Mary. More recently, she’s begun computer classes. As her classroom teacher I’ve seen Raina progress from no English to solid Level 3 skills in speaking, reading and writing, studying English with

the same stubborn persistence she probably brought to life on her farm.

“I don’t think about future plans. I just try to live in the moment and use what’s in front of me to get better,” she said. Raina has taught me a lot about being in the moment, persistence, working against the odds and making hard choices. Thank you, Raina.

Strong Community Literacy Program Set to Expand

By Jennifer Peterson - Director of English Language Tutoring, jennifer@litnetwork.org

Summer '14 saw another semester of success for our Community Literacy tutoring program! Community Literacy currently has seven sections, each led by an intern who writes individualized lessons for each of the eight student-tutor pairs in the group. Every week, pairs work together for two hours toward the student's goals, whether they hope to communicate better with a supervisor, practice for a job interview, call a child's teacher, or improve their writing skills.

Last semester, 82% of learners felt they used more English because of their work with their tutors. 100% said they were comfortable with their volunteer tutors—a testament to the caring support our volunteers bring to the tutoring relationship. One student writes: "What I like about my tutor is the way she splein when I don't understand." Another comments, "I like so much all, because he is so patient. And I learn more vocaualary, and speak more English."

As for tutors, 100% of them said they would recommend the volunteer position to a friend—what an endorsement! "I really enjoyed the CL environment. It's nice to meet individually in a group setting. As always, it is beautiful to watch a student's confidence grow," says



82% of learners felt they used more English because of their work with their tutors

one tutor. Another writes, "I see the progress that my learner has made over all the semesters we have been together, and it is immensely satisfying. Her work ethic and desire to constantly improve her English makes me a better tutor. And, we consider each other friends—such

a gift!"

Because of the special opportunity this program offers—one-on-one instruction in a supportive group environment—Literacy Network staff have decided to prioritize its expansion for the Spring '15 semester. We're happy to announce that we'll be opening a Saturday morning session here at Literacy Network, and will be exploring the possibility of expanding into the East side with a ninth class!



Great weather for Run for Literacy

By Shawn Steen - Director of Outreach Services, shawn@litnetwork.org

More than 600 participants and 100 volunteers turned out on a beautiful, brisk fall morning for our 23rd annual Run for Literacy on October 19, and it was a great success! Bucky Badger kicked off the popular event with a kid's Fun Run down State Street, then stuck around for photos with the children as well as enthusiastic adults. At the finish line on Broom Street hundreds of participants gathered to congratulate each other, get free chair massages, and groove to DJ Miranda. We could not have asked for better weather or kinder supporters!

This annual event raises crucial funds to support more than 1,100 low-literate, local adults who come to Literacy Network every year with the hope that improved reading, writing, and English skills will lead to jobs (or better jobs), help them support their children's education, and



Enthusiastic Literacy Network team members Barbara Brunette-Smith, Carla Oppenheimer, Caitlin Mackesey, Fanny Anguiano, Jennifer Peterson and Roberto Garza celebrate after another successful event.

keep their families safe and healthy. By raising more than \$45,000, the Run for Literacy allows us to keep our classes and tutors free for those who need them most.

To learn more about Literacy Network programs, the adults who benefit from them, and ways you can further support their success, join us for LitNet101, an hour-long presentation on Tuesday, December 9 at 6:00pm. Please RSVP by calling (608) 244-3911.

Tutor Profile: Ruth Robarts

By Caitlin Mackesey - Literacy Network Program Intern

Meet Ruth Robarts, one of Literacy Network's army of tutors. Ruth started tutoring in April of 2010, and since then, she's worked with six students. Ruth says her favorite part of tutoring is helping students with workplace literacy. "I like to talk to them about their families, their current jobs and what jobs they want to have. These are almost always really productive kinds of conversations." Ruth helps her students prepare by doing mock

interviews, and accompanying them on the big day. They review key points together before the interview, and debrief after. Ruth has seen three students find a new job!

Ruth has made a big difference in the lives of her students, but she says that tutoring has changed her life, too. "It's given me a deeper sense of community here in Madison, and I've lived in Madison for a long time. I've lived here since the 70's. I taught high school here, I went to

law school here, I've done a variety of things. But this is one of the few things that extends your community beyond the people that you work with, that you live near, and so forth. This gives you a much deeper sense of the resources, the courage, the drive . . . [Our students] work harder than most of us ever work. It has made me aware of who I am and where I live, and how easy it is to really make a difference once in a while."

To reduce disparities, we must tackle low literacy

Reproduced from Cap Times editorial written by Jeff Burkhart, Literacy Network Executive Director

Recently, as Madison officials celebrated the city's status as "the most livable in America" from livability.com, it became more clear that we live in two Madisons. There is the highly educated Madison, where people enjoy excellent restaurants, music, recreational activities, and more. There is the Madison where opportunities are scarce: inadequate housing, few family-supporting jobs, and deep poverty.

A person struggling with poverty is very likely to have low literacy skills. The struggles are evident when a person tries to fill out a health care form or an employment application. It is evident when an elementary school student asks his or her parents for help with homework.

One in seven adults in Dane County struggles with low literacy. The disparity between the two Madisons, which was highlighted last year in the Race to Equity report, has existed for decades. In my 14 years in Madison, I have worked with hundreds of adults who have significant basic literacy issues. The problems have gotten more profound: At Literacy Network, we see an increase in the number of people who read at a first- or second-grade level. Some are high school graduates.

In most low-income neighborhoods around Madison, you can find adults who care about their families, and are interested in finding new opportunities. One afternoon this summer, I had the chance to meet three adults in south Madison who spend many afternoons at a community center. I asked them what they would like to be able to do better. All of them said they are interested in improving

their reading and writing skills so they can successfully complete a high school diploma or a GED and eventually get a degree that will help them earn family-supporting wages.

Adults with literacy challenges have children with literacy challenges. The single most significant predictor of children's literacy is their mother's literacy level, according to a report by the U.S. Department of Education. We need to invest in opportunity for the people who most need assistance if we are going to truly address the inequality that exists in our community and break the family cycle of illiteracy. Projects that improve basic skills such as reading, writing, computer skills and soft skills are necessary for adults to get out of poverty and support the education of their children. You can help. Hundreds of volunteers help adults improve their skills at Literacy Network. If you can commit two hours a week for six months, please contact us at 244-3911.

Our nation's workforce investment programs typically do not address basic skills deficits. Locally and nationally, workplace programs often invest in the easiest to serve because they are easiest to place in employment. To create a more equitable community, programs should serve those with the greatest needs. If basic skills deficits are not addressed, we will continue to see people falling behind. If we don't act, disparities will continue to grow. To truly have one Madison, we need to get behind efforts to build skills and help people out of poverty instead of simply continuing the status quo.

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DIRECTOR'S NOTES By Jeff Burkhart - Literacy Network Executive Director, jeff@litnetwork.org



In this season of Thanksgiving, I feel fortunate to have the opportunity to see lives change every day. I am fortunate to work with people who are improving lives, and to be surrounded by volunteers and staff helping adults thrive and support their families. As we improve programs and build connections,

I am pleased to say that many learners have greater confidence in their skills at work, are in a position to seek better jobs, can now connect with the education of their children and can better care for their family's health.

What a wonderful gift to be able to see the light in someone's eyes as they develop confidence, connections and understanding through literacy. One cloudy afternoon in October, Bertha stopped by my office and told me her story about arriving in Madison and being afraid to interact with people because she didn't

know how to speak English well. Her husband didn't want her to study English. But then she found Literacy Network. "Literacy Network helped me to start up and I never in my life had what I have here. I have best friends and people help me and I find my way. I am a changed person because I have the confidence and strength to pursue my dreams," she told me.

I thank you for helping make this impact possible. I am very fortunate to be surrounded by community volunteers who are dedicated to seeing the work of Literacy Network expand to meet growing needs. We continue to provide a high level of support to learners through collaborative efforts of staff, interns and volunteers. This support is backed up by hundreds of people who volunteer their time to help us with fundraising and events.

I am blessed beyond words to have the opportunity to work with such amazingly energized and generous staff and volunteers. I send a huge thanks to all who have helped Literacy Network's learners this year. It is because of you that we are able to efficiently provide a vital service to families in our community.

