

2014: Year in Review



By: *Ginger Duiven, Executive Director*

What an interesting year it was to join Literacy Services! The new GED tests arrived in January. Our 50th year was on the horizon. Our English as a Second Language program was without a director. We had a new Board President in Dave Hanson and a new Executive Director. So much change, so much energy.

Now that December is here and nearly a full year has passed it seems like a good time to give you all a "State of the Center" style report.

We started the year with a wonderful opportunity to update our GED program to reflect the new tests and the new computer-based testing environment. Goodbye, paper and pencil! Hello, keyboards and pixels! Thanks to a grant from the Greater Milwaukee Foundation, Literacy Services was able to purchase new laptop computers for our

students to use as they prepare for GED tests. They are hard at work building skills and speed so that when it's time to take that first timed test they will not have extra test anxiety or be slowed down by the computer and typing.

As the year has progressed, we, along with GED preparation program folks around the country, have been puzzled by the lack of adults in pursuit of this important credential. When I spoke recently with Beth Lewis, the State GED and HSED Administrator at the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, she shared current data showing that so far this year, just 853 adults have completed the GED in the whole state of Wisconsin. That is in comparison to an average year when 7,000 to 8,000 adults complete the GED. Wow! GED completions are down to just 11% of a normal year. The good news is that while the total numbers are down, the pass rate in Wisconsin is higher than the National average of 58%. In Wisconsin, 64% of adult test takers have passed. As you can imagine, this

huge drop has been felt in our classroom too. We have some great ideas now in development to get our own classroom buzzing again as well as classrooms across the city. Stay tuned!

Our Adult Basic Education (ABE) team created and piloted an accelerated Pre-GED curriculum this year, designed to help students shore up their skills so that they might more quickly transition into preparing for GED testing. This new approach has been met with great enthusiasm from the students and tutors alike. We are looking forward to fully implementing this program in the coming months.

The ESL (English as a Second Language) program got a new name in the spring. English Language Learning or ELL recognizes that some students already have learned many other languages but not English. The new staff team hit the ground running and brought structure, new

*See **Review** continued on page 5*



Learning to Fly

By: *David Peters, Director of GED*

Charles Grant, a Literacy Services of Wisconsin GED graduate, spoke with me recently about his work with The Milwaukee Flyers Tumbling Team and how his experience in our GED program has contributed to his success in that leadership role.

The Milwaukee Flyers

Charles is president of The Milwaukee Flyers, a nonprofit organization that guides youth in a positive direction through gymnastics and mentoring. At any given time, the organization works with 30-40 young people, providing

gymnastic instruction and mentoring classes. Current ages range from 7-22 years old. As a part of the mentoring, Charles maintains communication with each child's school to monitor their progress. A core group of approximately 15 perform at a wide variety of events in the Milwaukee area. Past events have included Summerfest, Bastille Days, Marquette women's basketball games, Milwaukee Wave games, The World's Biggest Fish-Fry in Port Washington, and a variety of other community events. They have also performed in approximately 15 Milwaukee Public Schools. Currently, they are in talks with the Milwaukee Bucks to begin performing at some home games this season.

Charles' experience growing up helps him

*See **Flyers** continued on page 3*



The Syllabus

Literacy Services of Wisconsin Newsletter

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Founded in 1965, Literacy Services serves adult learners with quality education programs - Adult Basic Education (ABE), General Education Development (GED) test preparation, English Language Learning (ELL) - and integrated and personalized Functional Literacy instruction.

Our mission is to educate, motivate and inspire engaged adults to achieve greater independence and transform their lives. We are grateful for the broad support of our community, including over 400 volunteers and financial support from 883 individuals, 186 foundations, corporations and organizations, The United Way of Greater Milwaukee and funds administered by Wisconsin Technical College System Adult Education and Family Literacy.

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Transformations

By: Bianca Ortiz, Adult Basic Education Program Coordinator

Two years before joining the staff of Literacy Services, in the spring of 2012, I became an ABE tutor because adult education has always been an influential part of my life. I witnessed the transformative power of education through my mother. She left high school to go to work and soon after began a family. After working countless low-wage jobs, she realized that her prospects were limited. She completed a GED program and then became a student at Concordia University, graduating with a degree in Paralegal Studies. As a family, my siblings and I frequently went with our mother to campus or a public library to study. We observed her determination and sacrifices to achieve her educational goals. As she became more confident in her skills, her influence was palpable; the value of education became a foundation upon which our family relied.

As I reflect on my upbringing I see the same transformation every day within the students we serve. Most of our students live full, demanding lives, but face innumerable obstacles that result from insufficient literacy. I feel it's crucial to create trust between myself and my students, to assure them that I care about their success; as the daughter of an adult student, I fully understand the sacrifices they make to better their own skills for themselves and their families. Often students are nervous when they begin studying at Literacy Services, but I've realized over time that students tend to ask more questions as they become more comfortable in our setting. At first the questions come slowly and with hesitation as if to gauge the level of trust; soon they expand to include requests for help with their children's homework assignments, understanding community news, or completing job applications. These requests have

become treasures of my lessons, and I'm always inspired by the students' eagerness to learn. I watch the world open for many students as they become more confident and empowered.

“I watch the world open for many students”

Though I know how powerful educational advancement can be, I did not expect such a life-altering experience at Literacy Services for both myself and the students with whom I work. I find great joy in teaching the building blocks of our language, and I know it does not end with one student. One evening when my student arrived for her lesson, I saw that, lacking childcare, she had brought along her grandson. He joined us in our warm-up reviewing letters and sounds before resigning himself to quietly sitting and coloring with some crayons. I felt immense pride knowing we were helping to brighten his future by helping his grandmother and family achieve greater literacy. I see this cycle continue every day within our community: as our students gain new skills, that positive influence is felt by all those around them, just like I was influenced by my mother. Now, as the ABE Program Coordinator, I cherish every moment I spend working with our community, and I'm constantly in awe of the good we achieve each day.

Literacy Services is always looking for more volunteer tutors. Do you know someone who might like to tutor? Perhaps you are interested in learning more about volunteering in one of our programs. Sign-up for one of our Volunteer Orientation dates listed on page 7.



Flyers

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connect to those with whom he works. “The youth I work with are fatherless, in trouble at school, in trouble in the community. I was once like them. That’s why I can relate to a lot of these kids, what they’re going through, what they’re up against.”, he says.

Who is The Flyers biggest supporter? According to Charles, it is The Milwaukee Police Department. Since The Flyers’ performance at a National Night Out event about three years ago, they regularly receive requests from MPD to perform at a variety of police-sponsored events. Officers have praised The Flyers’ use of gymnastics and mentoring to reach young people in need of the positive influence the Flyers organization provides.

LSW Experience

Charles knew that if he wanted to effectively lead the Milwaukee Flyers, he needed to build his knowledge and skills in college. In order to get there, he would first need to get his GED. He had tried other GED programs but didn’t feel the connection with the people and the program that he felt at Literacy Services. He describes Literacy Services as a “warm, loving environment” that feels like a “home away from home.” The support and encouragement he received from tutors and staff contributed to the development of his confidence. This would be a critical quality to have if he hoped to inspire its development in the young Flyers. “Being here made me stronger, made me set bigger goals and commit to achieving something better in life. I can definitely say this is where I built my confidence.” Upon completing his GED, Charles enrolled at Milwaukee Area Technical College to pursue a degree in business management. He begins his third semester in January 2015.



The Milwaukee Flyers Tumbling Team with Charles Grant (back row, right)

As Charles was guided and motivated by Literacy Services tutors and staff, he now guides and motivates youth in Milwaukee. He developed the discipline, patience and follow-through to persevere and attain the goal of GED completion. Now, fortified by his development of these qualities in himself through his experience at Literacy Services, he mentors youth, giving classes on these very traits. And so, the impact of lessons learned at Literacy Services continues to expand beyond the life of the student and into the community.

Charles has set a powerful example for his daughter, who has now seen her father graduate. He has also influenced his niece,

who won an award for a paper she wrote about how she holds him as her role model and inspiration. At any given time, 30-40 young people from Milwaukee’s inner city look to Charles as a role model, a mentor, even as a father figure. The example that Charles is for all these young people and, doubtless, for others was forged, in part, in Literacy Services’ GED program. As Charles puts it, “If I never would have come here, I wouldn’t be where I’m at right now. I wouldn’t be as confident as I am now. I wouldn’t be as vocal as I am now, as disciplined as I am now. The commitment, determination, and patience come from learning. Coming here was the start of who I am now.”

Intrigued? Check out The Milwaukee Flyers at: www.themilwaukeeeflyers.com.

Also, follow them on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.



Our Corner of the World

By: Nancy Ignacio, Director of English Language Learning

As the calendar year and my (almost) first year at Literacy Services draws to an end I have some updates and reflections to share with you.

Our new conversation groups are in full swing! Students can come Mondays at either 10:45 AM or 5 PM to join with other students to practice their conversation skills in a less structured environment, and to make friends and network with other students! The response to these gatherings has been strong, with an average of 5 students attending each session.

More and more, tutors are taking their students out of the classroom to take advantage of the great attractions around our fabulous downtown location. These outings include visiting the main post office, the Public Market, and the Milwaukee Art Museum and engaging with people along the way. The students are accompanied by and encouraged by their tutors to learn about how things work here in the United States, to converse spontaneously and to ask questions to build their knowledge and confidence in speaking English outside of the classroom.

Congratulations, tutors and students! Keep up the good work!

We made a commitment to improve our professional development opportunities for tutors with our new monthly in-service program. At these meetings we present some new ideas, materials and suggestions for instruction to sharpen tutors' skills and provide a forum for tutors to share their ideas with each other. We repeat each in-service the following month at a different time, allowing both morning and afternoon tutors an opportunity to attend. During the first part of these sessions, the ELL staff introduces new ideas and materials. The second part of these sessions is a forum for tutors to exchange information: what works for them, what doesn't work, what their frustrations, roadblocks, successes and breakthroughs have been. ELL students come to Literacy Services with such a wide variety of needs that giving tutors the opportunity to learn from each other is a very valuable resource. So far, these sessions have been extremely well attended: over 50 tutors have participated so far.

Tutor response has been very positive! During one of these forums, one tutor asked us, "How are we [the tutors] doing?" Perhaps it is time to say a few words about and to our ELL tutors. Your generosity of spirit and patience, your attentiveness to the needs of your students and your willingness to learn new methods to facilitate student learning never cease to fill us with admiration and respect. Our students are flourishing in the positive and supportive environment that you create for them. In fact, there has been a 20% increase in student achievement over the same period a year ago, thanks to your efforts! AND the student retention rate has improved as well! This tells us that our students are very happy and pleased with the support they are receiving from their tutors. You are doing a wonderful job, and we are so appreciative of the contributions you are making to better the lives of your students. Thank you so much!

We are looking forward to 2015 as we continue to build momentum, thanks to the inspiration and dedication the 160 ELL tutors and students bring to our work every day.





Review

Continued from Page 1

materials, a better-organized classroom, tutor trainings and in-service meetings. The team has developed a top-notch program. And from what I hear from the tutors and students, they recognize and appreciate this good work.

Another important but invisible project was replacing our aging and near-failing computer server. This led to completing an inventory of all computer equipment, software, licenses, and security systems and the creation of a three-year plan for replacing our aging equipment. We are now better positioned to keep Literacy Services running smoothly.

We said hello to several new staff and goodbye to a few familiar faces too. Thank you, Becky, Nancy, Maxime, and Amanda for joining our team! We miss seeing Mark and Billy every day but love it when they drop by and update us on the latest in their lives. We welcomed Josta, Robin, and Marilyn as new temporary team members placed with us through the Senior Community Service Employment Program and Department of Workforce Development Division of Vocational Rehabilitation program.

We started the year in a strong financial position thanks to Jan Constable, the board of directors, and a generous bequest from Naomi Strehlow which helped the agency weather the leadership transition. This year it's too early to tell where we will stand when the fiscal year closes on December 31. We experienced a lull in fundraising in the early part of the year but things have continued to build as the year has progressed. The R.A. Stevens Challenge Grant and the amazing response from our community to that challenge, along with the successful 50th Anniversary Year Kick-off Luncheon and annual book sale, brought much-needed fuel to the cause. We are still working to raise the funds needed to cover our operating expenses this year, but it will be a stretch! If you haven't already, please consider making a gift!



Caterpillar representatives present Ginger Duiven, Executive Director with a grant check to support Literacy Services. From left to right Karin Dahlke, Ginger Duiven, Krishna Battula and Aimee Iverson.

So how are our students doing? Students in the ABE and ELL programs made bigger advances in their education than during the same period a year ago. With our new capacity study completed, we now know just how many students our facility, operating hours, and staffing can manage while delivering quality one-on-one educational outcomes. The GED students, thanks to those new computers, are getting ready to take the new Reasoning through Language Arts test. They are polishing their writing skills in preparation for writing the "extended response."

We showed our ongoing appreciation to our incredible tutors and volunteers on Valentine's Day with a celebration luncheon. We are already planning the next Annual Volunteer Appreciation Event, scheduled for February 13, 2015. We again thanked our donors and volunteers in December with a lovely social evening at the 145-year-old Milwaukee fine home goods retailer and tea room, George Watts.

Joyce Mielke and Marie Weiss of the board of directors, with the help of Becky and Dustin, tackled the project of updating and completing our organizational history. This project led me to visit with executive directors, board members and donors from across the decades. With this background and history, we are planning a wonderful 50th Anniversary Celebration Dinner at the Milwaukee Hilton City Center Ballroom on September 17, 2015. I hope you will save the date and plan to join the party!

It has been so rewarding to get to know each member of our board of directors. This board is made up of a committed, engaged and active group of professionals from many industries and backgrounds. It's just the kind of group you would want governing Literacy Services. The board committees are active and effective including the new Human Resources Committee created this year. One of our long time leaders has reached the end of his third term which also means he has reached the term limit of three, three year terms. Thank you to Mark Short for his leadership during his term as Board President and for his long service and generosity. We will miss your wise insights and detailed eye on the financials.

Our partnerships with United Way, MATC, Caterpillar, Northwestern Mutual, and other corporate partners remain strong. We are exploring partnerships with several other organizations now in order to broaden our reach and impact. Look for more info on these in the new year.

It has been a great first year. Everywhere I look I see people unlocking their potential. Members of the staff are growing professionally and delivering outstanding results, and the new and long-serving tutors are continuing to hone their skills and techniques. The students continue to bring their motivation, hopes and dreams to 555 N. Plankinton, and the magic of our Each One, Teach One model turns the key. It is truly inspiring to be a part of such an amazing organization.

Thank You

We are grateful to everyone who contributes to support the important work of Literacy Services. In the space below we recognize all of the donors who made gifts of support between September 1 and November 30, 2014. It is our commitment to recognize every donor based on the donor's wishes. If your name does not appear below as you would expect, please contact Dustin Slane at 414-344-5878 so we can correct our records. Thank you on behalf of all the students who are motivated to improve their lives through education and learning at Literacy Services!

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In honor of Sharon Weissenburger
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to everyone who contributed to the success of our 50th Anniversary Kick-off Luncheon!

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Calendar Bookmarks

Accepting New Students! While our ABE program is close to full capacity, we do have openings for new students in our new GED program. Students can call 414-344-5878 to sign-up for our Initial Assessments Sessions. These sessions are the first step in our new enrollment process for ABE and GED students.

We also have openings in our ELL (formerly ESL) program. Assessment and enrollment appointments are available two times each week. Prospective students can call to schedule an appointment.

January

1st-2nd - Agency Closed Happy New Year!

5th - Classes Resume

14th - Volunteer Orientation 5:30-6:30pm

19th - Agency Closed Martin Luther King Jr. Day

29th - Volunteer Orientation Noon-1:00pm

February

11th - Volunteer Orientation 5:30-6:30pm

13th - Volunteer Appreciation Party

26th - Volunteer Orientation Noon-1:00pm

March

11th - Volunteer Orientation 5:30-6:30pm

26th - Volunteer Orientation Noon-1:00pm

September 17th, 2015

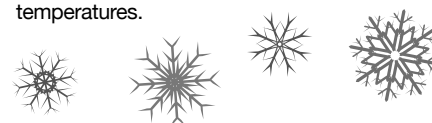
Save the date for a HUGE celebration to book-end our fiftieth year!

Visit literacyservices.org/events for more information about upcoming events and trainings.

Weather Closings

How do you know if Literacy Services is closed for inclement weather?

Follow local media announcements for weather related closings. Literacy Services will close for weather if the Milwaukee Public School system cancels classes for excessive snow or cold temperatures.





LITERACY SERVICES

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The Syllabus

Winter 2014

Literacy Services of Wisconsin Newsletter

In this issue:

- Year in Review
- Learning to Fly with GED graduate Charles Grant
- Program Perspectives
- And more!

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Season's Greetings & Happy New Year

from the staff and board of
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