LITERACY
SERVICES of WISCONSIN

The Syl·la·bus

Winter 2024

Literacy Services of Wisconsin Newsletter

Our Journeys Together

By: Holly McCoy, Executive Director

As 2024 ends and we look forward to 2025 – our 60th anniversary year – I find myself reflecting on the incredible journey we've shared and the collective impact we've made together. The heart of our mission has always been to create programming that impacts literacy for generations to come. As we mark this milestone, I'm filled with gratitude and pride for the tens of thousands of adult students we've supported over the years. Through educational programming that empowers individuals to reach their goals, we've helped transform lives, and that is something we will continue to build upon in the years to come.

As I consider the growth of our organization and the countless families whose lives have been touched by our student-centered approach, I also think back to my own story. The journey that led me here wasn't easy, but it was one that gave me a deep understanding of the challenges and opportunities education provides. My parents' experiences shaped my path in many ways that still resonate with me today.

My dad completed his GED while in jail. His struggles with drug addiction had led to a period of incarceration and earning his GED gave him a chance to build a future outside the system – a job at a local factory. But with limited literacy came limited opportunities. My mom grew up on a farm and didn't have indoor plumbing until her senior

see **Journey** *continued on* **page 2**

New Headquarters Coming Soon!

Construction is well underway at our new HQ at 1737 North Palmer Street in the Brewer's Hill neighborhood. We look forward to welcoming everyone to the finished space in the coming months.

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Journey

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Director of Development & Volunteer Engagement Chad Knezel, Executive Director Holly McCoy, and Director of Marketing & IT Dustin Slane

year of high school. Despite this, she graduated at the top of her class and went on to work as a seamstress.

Their respective educational journeys, molded by the circumstances of their times and the barriers they faced, ultimately laid the foundation for my own life and understanding of what it means to strive for more. As a child, I was placed in gifted and talented programs. At home, however, I faced my own set of struggles because we had limited money, and my parents did not get along. When I drive by the trailer park that I grew up in, I am reminded of my roots and grateful for the opportunity to use my lived experience to lead an organization that, at its core, is about creating opportunities. My upbringing taught me a critical lesson: that access to education is transformative, but the conditions around that access can often create barriers to a better future.

This is the very essence of what our organization has sought to address over the past 60 years. We recognize that every learner's story is unique, and that generational change is possible when we actively work to remove the barriers that hinder educational success. As we enter this new chapter, I'm excited to continue building upon the legacy of making education more equitable and accessible for future generations by bridging gaps and creating connections between improved literacy, language acquisition, high school completion, job training, and so much more. For instance, you'll read about our onsite career navigators in this issue. They are a perfect example of how LSW is creating even more connections by meeting students where they are and moving them closer to their career aspirations.

As we celebrate our 60th anniversary, it's not just about looking back at how far we've come, but about imagining how far we can go. In the spring, we will open the very first comprehensive adult literacy hub in the state. You will all be invited to join us as we embark on the next phase of organizational growth and focus on what we do best – generating student success. The impact we have today will echo for decades to come, and I'm honored to be part of this journey alongside all of you.

The Syllabus is the biannual newsletter of the 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, Literacy Services of Wisconsin.

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Volunteer Photographer
Sara Risley

Founded in 1965, Literacy Services serves adult learners with quality education programs - Adult Education (AE), General Education Development (GED) test preparation, 5.09 High School Equivalency Diploma (HSED), English Language Learning (ELL), Workforce Training and Career Pathway Bridges, and integrated and personalized Functional Literacy instruction.

Literacy Services of Wisconsin is grateful for the broad support of our community, including more than 300 volunteers and financial support from 1000 individuals; 200 foundations, corporations and organizations; The United Way of Greater Milwaukee & Waukesha County; and the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act. We are grateful for our partnerships with Equus, Maximus, and Milwaukee Public Schools.

555 N. Plankinton Avenue
Milwaukee, WI 53203
(414) 344-5878

literacyservices.org
info@literacyservices.org

International Literacy Month

Last September, LSW hosted several book give-away events to celebrate International Literacy Month. Our street team handed out hardcovers and paperbacks at The Awkward Nerd Book Fair, Beat Street, Silver City Fest, and local public markets. Once again, Milwaukee's Biggest Free Library brought together the community to celebrate literacy and connection. We distributed hundreds of books to hundreds of families and transformed Kosciuszko Park into a garden of community resources and family-friendly activities.

The park came alive when LSW alumnus, Charles Grant, arrived with The Milwaukee Flyers. The youth tumbling team he coaches and mentors always puts on a high-flying and jaw-dropping show.

We are grateful to the volunteers, participants, and guests who made this event possible. A special thank you to our co-host, Barby The Book Fairy, for partnering with us to distribute reading materials and promote literacy in our neighborhoods.

We also extend our thanks to Komatsu, Brush Box, Betty Brinn Children's Museum, Boswell Book Company, La Revo Books, and United Way of Greater Milwaukee & Waukesha County for their generous support of this year's event.

Congratulations, Students!!!

Giselle - $1k Scholarship Awardee

Giselle moved to Wisconsin in 2005 from Peru. She has been a student at LSW's Waukesha Center since 2022. Since her enrollment, she has completed several classes, including our HSED (High School Equivalency Diploma) Pathway class, a book club and a movie club and now works one on one with a tutor to support her advanced English reading and writing goals. Giselle is a life-long learner. She speaks four languages (English, Spanish, Portuguese, and Japanese) and is currently teaching herself French. She holds her CNA certificate but recently discovered her true passion is in the world of Information Technology. She is currently in WCTC's IET (Integrated Education and Training) program for Information Technology and will complete the program May 18, 2025. Her final class in Spring 2025 will also give her credits toward her technical diploma or associate's degree that she will start in Fall 2025.

2024 Summer & Winter GED/HSED Graduates

Career Navigation Service:

Transforming Confidence

Joe has always struggled with confidence during job interviews, particularly as someone with a disability. The fear of rejection and uncertainty about disclosing his disability made the process overwhelming. However, after working with a career coach at Literacy Services of Wisconsin (LSW) for several months, things began to change.

Joe's story is one of many that demonstrate the impact of personalized career support. Through coaching sessions, he learned how to navigate job applications, develop effective resumes, and practice interview techniques. With his career coach, Joe prepared for various interview scenarios and built the confidence to advocate for himself.

Last week, Joe achieved a significant milestone—he landed an interview for a CNC Machine Operator position at a manufacturing company close to his home. Feeling empowered by his preparation, he openly discussed his disability during the interview, explaining the accommodations he needed to succeed. Joe highlighted his hands-on learning style, strong work ethic, and dedication to completing tasks.

Joe's progress is a testament to the power of preparation and support in transforming not only confidence but also career prospects. It also reflects the mission of LSW to expand economic mobility and equity through career navigation services.

Meet the Team Empowering Milwaukee's Adult Learners

Barbara Cerda
Career Navigator

Jon Gilgenbach
Career Navigator

Joe's journey is made possible by the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development Worker Connection Program and Wisconsin Literacy, which have placed two dedicated career navigators—Jon Gilgenbach and Barbara Cerda—at LSW. These navigators are passionate about helping adult learners achieve their career goals.

Jon Gilgenbach, with over 20 years of experience in adult education and advocacy, is committed to empowering learners to take their next step toward fulfilling careers. Barbara Cerda brings her expertise in resume creation, networking, and career exploration, paired with a "dream big" mentality to inspire others.

Using a skills-based career coaching framework, Jon and Barbara provide services such as:

- **Resume and cover letter creation and updating**
- **Interview preparation and practice**
- **Networking strategies and industry research**
- **Confidence and skill-building exercises**
- **Career and education exploration**
- **Personal branding and LinkedIn profile development**
- **Goal planning and job-seeking assistance**

These free services are available to all residents of Milwaukee and surrounding counties, as well as participants of Literacy Services of Wisconsin.

Joe's success story highlights the value of these services. By working with career navigators like Jon and Barbara, adult learners can overcome challenges, build confidence, and access opportunities that lead to lasting success.

Make an appointment with a career navigator today! Visit **https://literacyservices.org/career/**

Sponsored by: wisconsin literacy health · workforce · community

Thank You!

The following donors made gifts or pledged support between July 1, 2024 and November 30, 2024. Thank you for empowering adult students to read and write their way to a better future. We promise to put your gifts to good work! It is our commitment to recognize every donor based on the donor's wishes. If your name does not appear as you would expect, please contact Madison Olig via email at madison@literacyservices.org or by phone at (414) 344-5878.

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There are many ways to support our students' hard work!

Gifts of cash • One-time or recurring online gifts • In-kind gifts such as furniture, books, or office supplies (check out the wish list on our website for current needs) • Deferred income gifts, including charitable gift annuities and charitable remainder trusts • Bequests to Literacy Services as part of a will and last testament • Gifts of stock, mutual funds, and other securities (may be additional benefits for supporters over 70 ½ years old)

$5/month • Provides GED practice test vouchers for 15 students.

$40/month • Supports a student through an entire 16-week high school certification course.

Questions about giving or joining our Legacy of Literacy Society?
Call Madison Olig at (414) 344-5878 or email madison@literacyservices.org

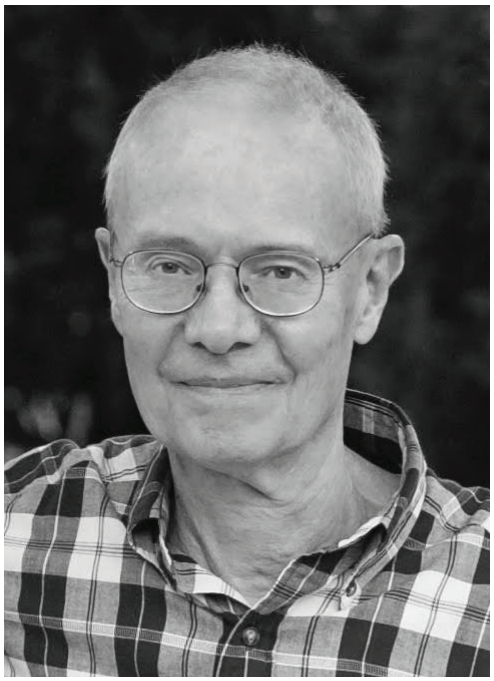
Generations of Literacy Support

Former LSW board member Jason Parry has been working closely with LSW leadership to help guide our capital campaign for our new headquarters. Jason served on the board from 2006 - 2011 and is now helping nonprofits realize their fundraising objectives through his company, Abundant Philanthropy. Recently, Jason had a chat with Tom Smith. Tom and his wife, Genie Smith, have been long-time donors to LSW; their recent support of our mission and campaign was inspired by Tom's father, Gordon, and his volunteer experience at Literacy Services.

Tell me about your dad's involvement with Literacy Services.
After my dad retired from his law profession, he had planned to spend much of his time traveling with my mother and their friends. However, those plans were put on hold when he was diagnosed with cancer and then needed to have his leg amputated due to complications associated with diabetes. Not being one to let "little things" get him down, he sought to find a rewarding way to keep occupied while recovering from his treatments and surgeries. He was a firm believer in education as a means to better outcomes for all and had been a financial supporter of Literacy Services for years, so he offered to serve as a volunteer tutor helping to teach adults to read.

What do you remember your dad sharing with you about LSW and why was volunteering important to him?
That he found the work personally rewarding and, in a way, it helped him overcome the challenges he was dealing with personally. He once told me he found the smiles and genuine gratitude he received for all the individuals he tutored to be, in a way, "healing" for him.

What inspired you and Genie to support this project?
Like both of our parents, Genie and I believe that providing educational and healthcare services to individuals in need is the best way we can help our community grow and thrive. For that reason, we are committed to supporting local organizations that help educate and offer access to healthcare services for those in need.



Volunteer Tutor, Gordon Smith

You have been a long-time supporter of this organization. What is it about LSW's work that is important to you?
Knowing how to read is the first step to education. Once an individual can read, they have the ability to learn anything they care to.

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555 N. Plankinton Avenue
Milwaukee, WI 53203-2901
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The Syl·la·bus

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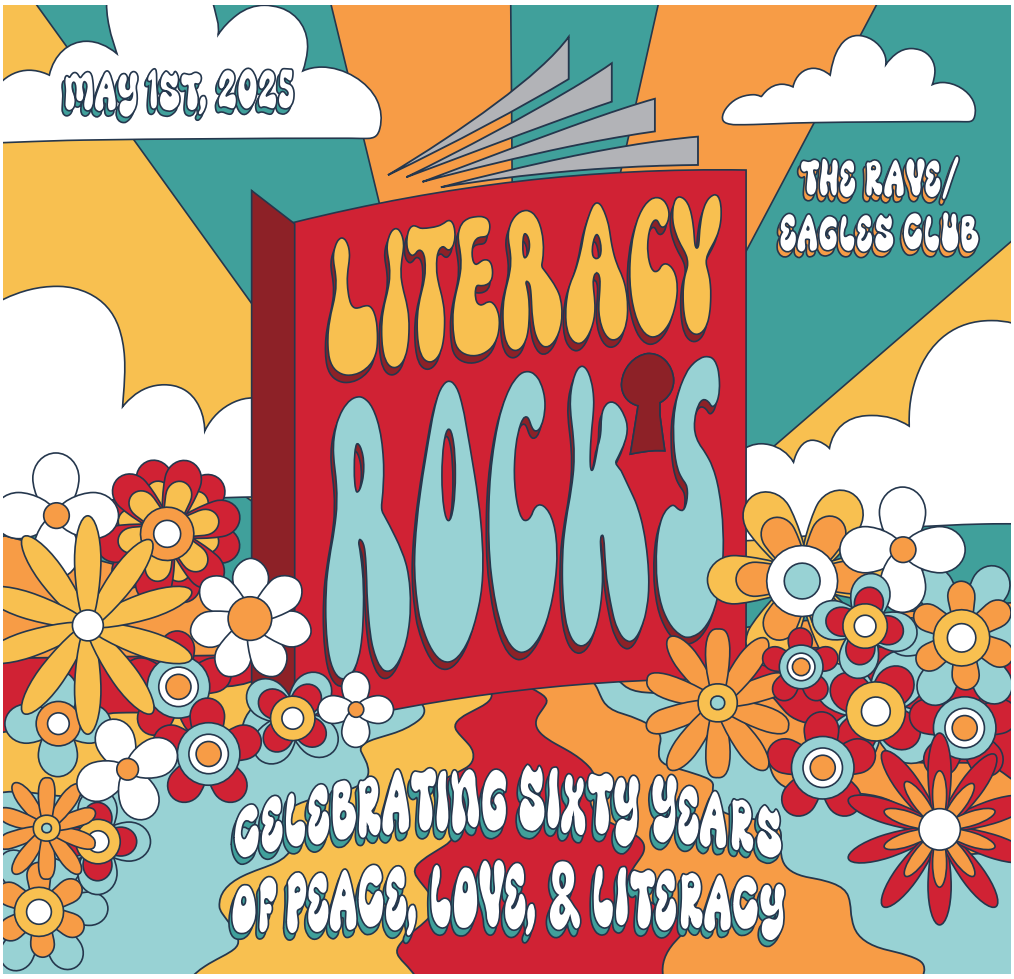

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