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Seeds of Literacy
3104 W. 25th Street,
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Cleveland, Ohio 44109
seedsofliteracy.org



Our Mission
To provide personalized education that empowers adults to succeed in their communities.

HOW HAS *Adult Literacy* CHANGED DURING THE LAST 20 YEARS?

Since Seeds opened in 1997, big changes have happened in adult education. Unfortunately, they are not all good.



THE NEED IS GREAT.



Seeds has seen a **400% INCREASE** in annual enrollment.

67%
come with less than a 9th grade reading level.



93%
come with math levels below 9th grade.



the SEED

Fall 2017

"I came for a GED®. Seeds gave me back my self-respect."



"Coming to Seeds reminded me that all things are possible," shares Seeds of Literacy GED® graduate, James McKelton. "Here I was, 54, a grandfather, and I realized that I still hadn't finished high school."

James is bright. He was a studious high school freshman and promising athlete until he started experimenting with drugs and alcohol at 14. "School got in the way of partying," he confesses. He dropped out just one credit short of graduation.

Despite his lack of diploma, high entrance exam scores earned him a place in the Navy, but James was soon discharged when his drug addiction resurfaced.

James remembers the odd jobs that filled the next two decades: gas stations, car dealerships, janitor, and window washer. He bought a convenience store in Cleveland with a friend, operating for 12 years.

James worked hard, but when he got frustrated or bored, he'd return to old vices. "I would be working, get sidetracked, and then stuck in the same circle of people who were using." That took a toll on his health, his marriage, and

his work. By his early 50s, he had sold the store, was unable to work because of open-heart surgery, and still used drugs and alcohol to cope. It was then that his life took another turn: he became homeless.

In 2016, James entered Y Haven, a transitional housing, recovery services, and treatment program. In recovery, he realized that education was his key to breaking free: "I knew that another \$10-an-hour job would turn me back into the working poor. That is not what I wanted for my last years of work." A counselor referred James to Seeds.

"I had lost confidence in my ability to comprehend and retain because of my addiction," confesses James, softly. "But Seeds had the right amount of push, and [Site Coordinator] Sharon instilled confidence in me, telling me that I could accomplish this."

Fueled by his motivation, James took off like a rocket. During his first week at Seeds, he took and passed three of the four GED tests: Language Arts, Science, and Social Studies. Then he started preparing for Math.

"I was balancing my recovery, a job, and school. Sometimes I had to take a step back from Seeds to rebalance my life. But everyone was patient. They reminded me with emails and post cards to come back. They didn't scold me. I didn't have to come here in survival mode. I could let my armor down. Instead of protecting myself, I could absorb and learn."

Like James, many students come to Seeds as part of a larger life transition, like recovery from an addiction. "In recovery, you need to

find people who are doing things differently," explains James. "Seeds was a place to learn in a different way."

After months of diligently studying math with help from patient tutors, James passed his final GED test and was able to start a job as a Resident Assistant at Y Haven. During his treatment there, James volunteered to answer the phone at night and help staff with residents. Y Haven leadership noticed his potential and offered him a position on staff – contingent on obtaining his GED.

"This job will keep me connected with where I have been. I know what the men are going through, because I went through it, too." James is finding an apartment and is enrolled at Tri-C's Computer Numeric Control (CNC) Machining and Composite Manufacturing Program.

His plan after graduating from Tri-C is to work as a CNC Operator, save money, and return to college to become a licensed counselor. "I want to hold myself up as an example of what can be done if you're willing to roll up your sleeves and follow suggestions." James continues, "I want to get more knowledge and a better understanding of addiction and then share that with others."

Beyond his career, James is also reconnecting with his family. "I want to be a good role model for my grandchildren," he says, desiring to give back and inspire others in the same way Seeds of Literacy helped him to grow.

❖ JSteigerwald

To learn more, visit us online at www.seedsofliteracy.org.



Dear Friends,

As we celebrate our 20th year of empowering adults through education, it's tempting to sit back and take a well-earned breath. But like you, I know how much more still needs to be done. Our work hasn't ended, and in many ways, it's just beginning.

More people in need of literacy services walk through our doors each and

every day, and Seeds' small but mighty operation helps them achieve their goals. Sometimes we don't have a lot of room, and we don't always have a lot of resources, but at Seeds, *we have heart*. Each day, I'm in awe of what my staff and our tutors accomplish.

As I look ahead to our next 20 years, I know that to give our students the best in adult education, Seeds needs to grow. The technical term for that growth is "capacity building" but to put it simply, Seeds needs *more* – more staff, greater resources, and improved processes.

I'm delighted to announce that friends like you have made that capacity building possible. This fall, we've almost doubled our staff, adding new positions to accommodate more digital literacy instruction and curriculum changes, increasing our number of site coordinators, and adding a communications director

to the team. Our existing staff even shifted responsibilities as we laid the groundwork for an exciting future.

Our square footage continues to grow as well. In late September, we acquired the corner suite on the first floor of Seeds West and are in early planning discussions for how to use this incredible space.

Through all of these changes, we've maintained a singular focus on what matters the most: *educating our students*.

Seeds has come a long way from our early days in a church basement. It's been an incredible 20 years --- imagine what the next 20 will hold!

Sincerely,

Bonnie Entler, Executive Director



■ Pure Imagination

PURE IMAGINATION, our 17th Annual Sowing Seeds of Hope benefit brunch in September, was enjoyed by **185 guests and raised \$46,000 for student instruction**. This year's event included AVEJING (a Jazz trio from Tri-C), raffle, silent auction, and money cake created by staffer Claudia D'Attellis. Heartfelt thanks to our event sponsors: Community West Foundation, Benesch Law, Carnegie Management and Development Corp., Jones Day, William & Joyce Litzler, Bob & Renita Morris, RPM Corporation, Arconic, Inc., Concord Benefits Planning, Paul Etzler, Bob & Diane McFeeley, George & Patricia Miller, National Interstate Insurance Company, Nordson Corporation, Shur Tech Brands, The City Bank Investment Co./City Bank Antiques, and Mark Yanochko. ♦

■ GED® SUCCESSES

Congratulations are in order for the following:

Recently passed SECTIONS of the GED®:

Tabitha Angyal, Maurice Brown, Curtis Crute, Jeremiah Evans, Karen Florence, Charmaine Harper, Fatima Kaba, Michael King, Dionne Lobban, Kamwanya Luhata, Shako Luhata, Melissa Shepherd, Jazman Smith, Raynette Taylor, Tiara Thomas, Gloria Ward, Carrie White

Recently passed the ENTIRE GED®:

Lakisha Brown, LaShawn Clinton, Jessica Howard, James McKelton, Melissa Medina, Angelique Silva, Tharamattie Singh, Akiria Taylor, Dion Turley ♦

■ New Faces

The Seeds Family continues to grow! Please join us in welcoming **Site Coordinators** Billy Hallal and Todd Seabrook; **Digital Literacy Instructors** Sue Brown and Ty Evans; **Receptionist** Angel Gadson; **Student Engagement Coordinator** Latasha Crawford; and **Communications Director** Katie Kucera. Each new staffer brings unique talents that will better prepare Seeds for the next 20 years of service for adults in Cleveland. ♦

Dolores Kirn: Connecting Through Math



"People think you need to be a teacher or retired educator to tutor here, but you don't," Dolores Kirn says of the common misconception about volunteers at Seeds. Tutors just need to have patience, compassion, a desire to help, and at least a high school equivalent.

"I'm terrible at English," Dolores confesses. "I tutor math. I was always good at it, even at a time when it was unusual for a girl." Seeds volunteers tutor to their strengths, so if they aren't comfortable with high level math, they can leave that to Dolores and instead work with students on English, Science, or Social Studies.

Although many tutors aren't educators by trade, retired teachers are often drawn to the Seeds program. Dolores happens to be one of them. She taught students in the Mentor school district, at the Huntington Learning Center, and was a tutor at Brush High School – in math, of course.

It was pure happenstance that she ended up at Seeds of Literacy. "I was actually signed up to train with another program," she admits. Several miscommunications and cancellations prevented it from happening and she grew frustrated. It was then that she saw an ad for Seeds in her church bulletin.

"I prefer Seeds' one-to-one format to any other program out there. My students do, too," she said. "Some of them have tried classroom programs. If the class is working on fractions, but they're beyond fractions, they get frustrated because they aren't learning anything new. That doesn't happen at Seeds."

She's been with Seeds for more than seven years now – first at the West side, and then transferring to the East side when the Kinsman location opened.

Dolores knows that not every student comes to Seeds planning to take their GED. "I don't judge their goals," she says firmly. "I love to see the things students get excited about, when they draw connections between what they're learning and real life."

Recently, Dolores was working on percentages and the student had an epiphany. "When my grandkids tell me they got a 90% on classwork, I should be REALLY, REALLY proud of them. I didn't know that before," the student told her.

"I really enjoy connecting with people," Dolores explains. She knows that she and her students might never understand each other's worlds, but that they can come together with math.

The middle of the week is a busy time for Dolores. Tuesday mornings, she volunteers at the Cleveland Clinic before coming to Seeds in the afternoon. Wednesdays, she starts her day at Seeds and ends at the Cleveland Foodbank. Every other Saturday, she gives her time to a food and clothing bank run by various parishes in East Cleveland.

But volunteering at Seeds is different, Dolores explains. "I actually see the individual I'm helping. I develop a personal relationship with them. I get to know them as a person. They talk, I listen." ❖ **KKucera**

To share your time and talent, contact Volunteer Coordinator Sharon Farrer at SharonFarrer@seedsofliteracy.org.

NOW & THEN • Seeds' Leadership

When Sister Kathleen Kilbane, CSJ founded Seeds of Literacy in 1997, she planted the hope and purpose that would grow into Seeds' mission today: to provide personalized education that empowers adults to succeed in their communities. Sr. Kathleen founded Seeds as part of the Congregation of St. Joseph's celebration of its 125 years of service to the Diocese of Cleveland. After teaching at an elementary school for 22 years and working with the poor and disenfranchised for over 30 years, Sr. Kathleen knew the importance and necessity of having access to education. As she wrote the proposal for the start-up funds, Sr. Kathleen found that "the words just come when it's something I care about."

Taking its roots from a literacy program she started for the homeless, Sr. Kathleen intended for Seeds to be a place where adult students could receive individualized attention and one-on-one tutoring. While working with the homeless, she learned that the biggest issue was that "people were totally unable to receive individualized

education." Consequently, providing personalized education became the heart of Seeds' program.

In Seeds' first year, Sr. Kathleen, one other full time staff member, Sr. Agnes Schreiber, and 75 volunteer tutors served over 100 students at three locations. The one-to-one classroom model proved to be successful as five students graduated that first year and the numbers kept steadily rising over the next several years. In 2001, Sr. Kathleen wrote in her Director's Message, "As the age becomes more technological and companies downsize, we see fewer options for all people, especially the poor and undereducated. Our greatest challenge with the adult learner in many instances is to create in each individual a love for learning and their responsibility as parents to instill the same love for learning in their children." These words still ring true and remain a crucial component of Seeds' mission sixteen years after she wrote them.

Seeds flourished under Sr. Kathleen's direction. When she retired in



2003, it was serving more than 300 students at ten separate locations throughout the Cleveland area. Since then, Seeds has continued to thrive, serving nearly 1,000 students a year with 250 volunteers at two locations in 2016. As we celebrate Seeds' 20th anniversary, Sr. Kathleen reflects proudly on its progress over the years — "it has grown into such an amazing, wonderful example of how people can be served with love and compassion." A lot has changed since Sr. Kathleen opened Seeds' doors 20 years ago, but what remains is a deep devotion to empowering adults through education. ❖ **KKrawiec**