Graduating high school was my dream since I was a little girl,” says Cristaly Martinez, a 2016 Seeds of Literacy graduate. “I loved going to school and always tried to do my best, but we moved around a lot – Boston, Allentown, Cleveland, New Jersey – and sometimes it was hard to get to school.”

Cristaly missed a lot of high school and didn’t have enough credits to pass the tenth grade. She was embarrassed to repeat when all her friends went on, so she decided to try homeschooling through a distance-learning online high school. Computer problems and a lack of academic and tech support led her to try other classroom programs, but each made her feel like just a number and she didn’t make much progress.

By then, Cristaly was working at a fast food restaurant. “I was working hard but wasn’t where I wanted to be. It was a good job for a teenager, but not a career.” She searched for other GED® programs online and found Seeds.

“Quitting wasn’t an option for me,” Cristaly laughs. “I kept trying to find the right place – and it was Seeds. Everyone here was so positive. Even when I didn’t pass the GED the first two times, the tutors and staff told me it was ok, that I would get it. They encouraged me and made me want to come back! And even when I was trying to get my driver’s license, people here were rooting for me.”

Tutors really make the difference for Seeds students. Like Cristaly, many students say that it’s the care and concern from tutors that keeps them coming to classes. A tutor’s interest and encouragement instills confidence in students, and strengthens their motivation to succeed. Even with 200 active tutors, Seeds has an ongoing need, and holds training sessions monthly.

“Seeds gave me more than I expected,” says Cristaly. Not only did she pass all four sections of the GED test and graduate, but Cristaly was a keynote speaker for an audience of 265 at Seeds’ fall brunch, and has appeared on Leon Bibb’s Kaleidoscope on WEWS as a spokesperson for adult education and Seeds.

Her future includes phlebotomy training to get a better job in order to pay for college. Then Cristaly plans on obtaining a degree in Finance and Accounting (“I love working with math and money, and am good at keeping a budget”) and an MBA. With the focus and determination she’s shown at Seeds, we know she’ll succeed.

To learn more about Seeds of Literacy, contact Jo Steigerwald, Development Officer, at 216.661.7950 or jo@seedsofliteracy.org.
Volunteering keeps us on our toes,” says Carol Dodaro, of the husband-and-wife tutoring duo of Gene and Carol Dodaro. Active community volunteers, the Dodaros were looking for a flexible volunteer commitment in 2010. They found Seeds of Literacy, started tutoring weekly, and enjoyed the chance to work with someone different each week.

Now retired, both Gene and Carol have a rich history of careers that allowed them to positively contribute to society. Carol practiced nursing and instructed nursing students for many years. Gene, a Financial Advisor, helped people manage their money and understand their investments. The Dodaros’ backgrounds help them break down concepts and make learning fun at Seeds.

In addition to their weekly tutoring, the couple is known for their innovative student workshops, which dive further into the Seeds curriculum. The Dodaros use their backgrounds, and their love of helping others, to develop new and exciting ways to explain topics to students. Each workshop focuses on a subject area, like basic math or grammar, reviews the basics, and then builds up to more advanced concepts. The challenge of developing different ways to approach subjects and appeal to differing learning styles keeps this volunteer work interesting for Gene and Carol.

While remaining involved in the Cleveland area with Seeds, the Dodaros also are actively committed to Native American causes. Carol’s profession inspired them to establish the Nurse Carol Scholarship at the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota.

This scholarship provides tuition for Lakota tribe members aspiring to become nurses. Gene’s love of financial advising inspired a financial management radio show, called the “The Gray Fox and The Boomer,” on WHK. In their free time when Carol and Gene are not traveling or volunteering, the couple enjoys cooking, crocheting and reading.
GED Testing Service Changes Passing Score

By Alexandria Marshall

At the end of January 2016, GED Testing Service changed the passing score for the GED® test from 150 to 145 (out of 200).

Studies by GED Testing Service found that high school graduates were generally under-performing GED graduates in college, meaning that the standards GED Testing Service set for passing their exam overshot the educational standards typically met by high school grads.

Five points may sound like a small drop, but the number of people who’ve tested — and will continue to test — in that range is significant.

Since January 2014, 55% of GED test sections failed by Seeds of Literacy students scored within the 145-149 range. Ohio will retroactively apply the 145 passing score, so because of the scoring change, 20 Seeds students will have passed sections of the GED.

This development reflects what many adult educators have been saying since the unveiling of the new test: the expectations were too high for the many people who need a GED credential to find employment to survive.

The new scoring system is now a better indicator of multiple skill levels: those who score at least 145 have the skills of high school graduates; those scoring at least 165 are considered college ready; and those who score at least 175 are college ready with a recommendation to receive college credits.

To learn more about this change, visit our Blog on our website, www.seedsofliteracy.org.
Volunteers: The Seeds of a Great Nonprofit

By Alexandria Marshall

I often say that volunteers are the backbone of our organization. I say this because volunteers are Seeds of Literacy’s strength. They are what holds us up, the reason we can do what we do.

But volunteers are also the heart of our organization.

By keeping kindness, caring, and compassion in their every action, volunteers reflect what Seeds is all about. When a volunteer tutor patiently repeats a lesson with a student, or a committee member trudges through the snow for a meeting, that’s testimony to their commitment to literacy, to an empowered Cleveland, to helping people.

A nonprofit organization is no more or less than the people who bring its mission to life. At Seeds, we’re lucky to have so many generous and dedicated individuals to work with on our mission.

Our volunteers have our endless gratitude and, honestly, awe.

There is a literacy crisis in our community, but we’re working hard to change one life at a time through improved literacy — right alongside our students, donors, and remarkable volunteers.

It’s good company to be in.

Visit seedsofliteracy.org/get-involved to learn more about volunteering with us.