



Winter 2016

the SEED

Great Effort Leads to Great Success

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



Cristaly Martinez

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.

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Bonnie Entler, Executive Director

Executive Director's Message: Volunteers Make the Difference

Friends, caring volunteers are the secret to our success. Without them, Seeds would literally cease to exist: nearly 200 tutors work with 1,000 students each year, and 27% of our budget comes from donated services. In fact, last year volunteers gave an unbelievable 18,528.25 hours to Seeds, an investment worth \$373,638.28!

Again and again, students tell us that tutors make the difference. Last month we asked students to share what tutors meant to them. Here's what they said: "The tutors made me feel so comfortable. They made me come back every day." "They'll go out of their way to help you learn something." "You're changing our lives."

While tutors are the most visible of our volunteers, Seeds runs on the hard work of many others. Our partnerships with Court Community Service, Work Experience Placement, and Voc Works Modified Duty Off-Site supply volunteers who keep our classrooms clean, grade papers, file, research, enter data, attend community fairs, distribute information, prepare for events, and do much more.

Then there are our committees of professionals

who share years of experience. A CPA and financial professionals keep our books and help with the yearly audit. The owner of a marketing/PR firm wrote our marketing plan last year, and he and an active Community Relations Committee successfully expanded our web and social media reach. Our Program Committee connected us with researchers at the University of Akron to measure student self-esteem. And a group of successful sales professionals are strengthening our corporate giving strategy.

Please consider joining us as a volunteer. I guarantee an experience that will change your life as you help change the lives of our students. If your company offers volunteer experiences to their employees, we'd love to be introduced. Contact Alexandria Marshall, our Volunteer Coordinator, for more information: alexandria@seedsofliteracy.org or 216.661.7950 x15.

And to all our current volunteers, our heartfelt thanks.

Sincerely,

Bonnie Entler

Volunteer Spotlight: Multi-Talented Tutors

By Laura Weichel

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.



Gene and Carol Dodaro

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.

Through The Grapevine

■ Warm All Over

Climate-Tech, a family-owned heating and cooling company in North Ridgeville, has been a strong supporter of Seeds students since 2010.

Company president John Dubecky firmly believes in the importance of adult literacy, and **proposed an innovative way to increase their corporate support and raise awareness of literacy issues in Cleveland.** For every residential furnace sold this year, Climate-Tech will donate \$20 to Seeds on



John Dubecky

behalf of the customer who purchased the furnace. We are so honored and touched by this program – thanks, Climate-Tech!

■ Driven By Books

Seeds student reading is powered by book donations! **Barnes & Noble Books – Eaton Collection** chose Seeds as its holiday book drive partner. Their staff did an extraordinary job from Black Friday through December and collected 1,800 books and over \$300 for our students! For the third consecutive year, **Middleburg Heights Community United Church of Christ** collected hundreds of gently



used children's books for our students to share with the children in their lives. And **New Horizons Computer Learning Centers and Case Medical Students and Staff** each held book drives in honor of our students! Thanks to these partners, **student reading is flourishing!**

■ Thanks to the Brunch

Our 15th Annual Sowing Seeds of Hope benefit brunch, held in October, was enjoyed by **265 guests and raised \$46,000 for student instruction.** Our thanks to event sponsors: Nordson Corporation, Community West Foundation, Bill and Joyce Litzler, Bob and Renita Morris, Voss Industries, BeneschLaw, City Bank Investments and Antiques, George and Patricia Miller, Ice Miller Legal Counsel, Shur Tech Brands, William and Jennifer Rosenberg, RPM International, Climate-Tech, Concord Benefits Planning Agency, Paul and Debbie DeSiero, Hyland Software, Michael and Penelope Shemo, Sherwin-Williams, Mark Yanochko, Philip and Alice Alexander, Roslyn Chao, Robert and Jonell Frost, Tim and Gina Smith, Tyler Spey, and Karen Van Linge.

■ Register for More

Many of our students have needs that we cannot meet. In the interest of **helping the whole student, Seeds has strengthened its partnerships** with LD Edge, Cleveland Foodbank, Catholic Charities, May Dugan Center, and CEOGC. We now survey students at registration to see if they are interested in services that range from learning disability testing and Head Start to food assistance and workforce development. If a student is interested, our Registration Coordinator meets with the student and connects them to that specific agency. We've had great participation, and hope these connections help our students beyond the classroom.

■ Our Social Standing

Remember to **follow Seeds on Facebook, Twitter, and our blog** for updates and breaking news on adult education, the GED and S



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.



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Our Mission

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

Designer: Andrea Vagas

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.