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seedsofliteracy.org



Our Mission

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

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The Spring 2019
SEED

She Found Her Voice in a Ballroom

November 2018: VALERIE TAYLOR approached the lectern slowly when it was her turn to address the crowd. She took a deep breath, and spoke — deliberately, with purpose and clarity. For a moment, she paused as emotion took over her. The audience hung on every word, and when she was done, they rose to their collective feet and applauded. She'd done it, and she knew she'd done well.

Less than a year earlier: Valerie couldn't have imagined speaking in front of a large crowd, in a ballroom, no less. A year ago, she was just mustering the courage to go back to school, decades after she left without a diploma.

"High school was a lot different in my day. I just wasn't getting the help I needed. I wasn't catching on as fast as the others. I was feeling left behind," she said. So she never finished.

"I'd been working in day cares for 18 years but the regulations changed and a GED became mandatory," she explained. "I was let go. Now I just take care of my grandkids and friends' kids."

The mother of 3, grandmother of 7, had actually been to Seeds once before, but left to take care of friend's child. Once that situation had improved, she returned. "It was my time now," she softly declared.

Although Valerie is quiet and shy, she'll give you a big smile in greeting, and if she trusts you, she'll try just about anything. That's how she ended up speaking to 100+ donors in the grand ballroom of the Union Club for Seeds' *Thrive!* luncheon in November.

"Sweet little [site coordinator] Kara smooth-talked me into speaking. I've never done anything like that before, but she promised to stay right by me," Valerie said. "She encouraged me and helped me with my speech. We practiced it over and over so I wouldn't be afraid."

But no amount of practice could have prepared Valerie for the view from the lectern, which was intimidating at first. "I looked around that big room, searching for faces I knew. But everyone was smiling at me, waiting to hear me speak."

"It was exciting," she admitted. "But when it was over, it was also huge relief. A great big weight lifted off me. When people started clapping, I knew I did a good job."

Valerie is *thriving* at Seeds. She's an original member of the Seeds East Book Club. "I looove Book Club," she said with a huge smile and slowly explained why. "It keeps us focused. It teaches us words we don't know. We can express ourselves without fear of being made fun of." Like all of the original members, Valerie joined to make

her teacher happy, but has since found that it makes HER happy, as well.



She's also a member of Student Leadership and this summer, she'll attend community fairs with Seeds' staff to share her story and encourage others to give Seeds a try.

Unlike most students, Valerie took the Math section of her GED first. "I saw everyone else really struggling, but I like Math so I did it first and got it out of the way." When the results came in, her class cheered for her.

Education has become a family affair for Valerie. When she saw her sons struggle with classes, she recognized it, and got them the help they needed to finish school. "I didn't give up on them. Dropping out wasn't an option," she said. Now, she and her grandchildren study together. "My granddaughter helps me. We're both working on expressions and quotations," she said.

"I love Seeds," she repeated. "It's like a big family. Everyone is kind. Everyone wants to see you succeed. When I miss class, I'm lost."

* KLK



A benefit supporting Seeds of Literacy

MAY THURSDAY 23 6PM - 9PM **MUSIC BOX SUPPER CLUB**
1148 Main Avenue
Cleveland, OH 44113



Crooner Michael Sonata brings the sights, sounds, and simple sophistication of Ol' Blue Eyes to the stage. He'll perform at this very special event, complete with dinner, and silent auction, in support of Seeds of Literacy. To purchase tickets, visit www.seedsofliteracy.org for details.



Dear Friends,

We've been expanding services, which means greater community awareness, an expanded tutor base, and more students served.

Last issue we told you about the **launch of four new clubs** at both locations — one for every day of the week. These learning clubs (Math, Writing, Computer, and Book Club) have provided a critical social component and positive reinforcement to what students learn one-to-one with their tutors.

The success of these clubs has been widely celebrated. Following **Kara's award** (see opposite page) she and Billy Hallal were invited to present the **outcomes of our club methodology for OAAACE** and she'll attend **ProLiteracy's National Conference this fall** to discuss clubs at Seeds.

The award garnered **media attention**, and Kara joined me on WKYC's *We the People*. When *Freshwater Cleveland* visited her classroom, the article was the most viewed page on their site for weeks. The coverage was so engaging that the tutor training following the article was our largest, with **more than 50 trainees** in attendance. The group was enthusiastic and ready to tackle Cleveland's adult literacy problem.

Our newest club initiative stems from our new **partnership with Goodwill Industries of Greater Cleveland** and provides formalized help with job searching, resumes, cover letters, applications, and interview preparation. A representative from Goodwill visits each site twice a month for the entire day, leading job clubs, and working with individuals on reaching employment goals. The response has been overwhelmingly positive, with students lining up for assistance.



And I'd be remiss not to mention our new **Beginning & Struggling Readers Program**, which ensures that we don't have to turn any adult away. More on that below.

We continue to stretch the limits of possibility for Seeds and our students with these programs, and **we couldn't have done it without your help** along the way.

Bonnie Entler

CURRICULUM CORNER: BEGINNING & STRUGGLING READERS

Seeds has expanded its curriculum to include instruction for beginning and struggling readers. The Beginning and Struggling Reader Program accomplishes two key objectives for Seeds:

- **Student Recruitment:** Potential students with low reading levels will no longer be turned away.
- **Student Improvement:** more targeted instruction on the foundation of all HSE testing (reading and comprehension) for current students.

Prior to September 2018, Seeds was like most adult education programs: unable to accept students who scored below a 3rd/4th grade reading level after taking the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE). Most materials for HSE preparation are written at a higher grade level, making the information inaccessible to lower-level readers.

"Seeds prides itself on being different," explained Dr. Stewart. "We hated telling adults that we couldn't help them, especially after they had the courage to come in and take the TABE. Now we don't have to. Everyone is welcome."

The Reader Program began as a pilot last fall. Of the newly admitted students since, 19% would have been turned away under the minimum threshold. "Those adult students are now receiving targeted reading intervention," Dr. Stewart explained.

The new initiative also allows Seeds to assess and identify comprehension and fluency challenges that exist with *current students* for whom reading is a critical component for test prep.

So far, more than three-dozen tutors and staff members participated in a two-hour long training to prepare for the Reader Program. They learned to identify everything from basic fluency and phonics to comprehension struggles. Most importantly, they learned techniques to provide targeted instruction based on individual student needs, a hallmark of the Seeds one-to-one program model.

The Reader Program has been embraced by staff like Digital Literacy Coordinator Billy Hallal who knew something was missing for some of his students, but wasn't quite sure what.

"It's easy to fall into approaching adult ed like a flow chart. If you finish this packet, then move on to the next, and the next, and so on," said Hallal. "But focusing on fluency puts the emphasis back on what's most important: student understanding and mastery of the material."

Student response to the program has also been overwhelmingly positive. Dr. Stewart explains that many adults grew up thinking they just weren't as smart as the other kids. "They're relieved when we can explain why they are struggling, and then share our plan for how to improve their reading!" she said. "

For Hallal, the Reader Program just makes sense. "If we as educators aren't ensuring that they understand what they've read, we are failing them. Conversely, if we take the time to ensure full comprehension, we empower students to succeed."



* KLK

ED ROUND FINDS THE FUN WHEN TUTORING

Ed Round, tall, with a deep voice, has an authoritative presence and is fiercely passionate about what he does.

These traits served him well in his legal career of more than 30 years, as an administrative law judge, and in the anti-trust division of the Justice Department.

Like many tutors, he saw an ad in a church bulletin after he retired. "I've always like teaching people stuff... maybe that would be fun!" he said at the time. The rest is history.



To SIGN UP for a TUTOR TRAINING, or to READ MORE about Ed, visit our website.

BONDING OVER BOOKS

Students trust him — Students like Erica (pictured), a young woman who graduated from high school, *despite having only a second-grade reading level*.

Like many adult educators and students, Ed has been frustrated with the lack of materials for adults like Erica learning how to read. Most materials are for children, with child-appropriate topics. Adults who are already self-conscious about their reading level feel even worse with these materials, he said. Ed is currently working with Program Director Carmine Stewart on the Beginning Reader Program (see opposite page).

He works with more advanced readers, too. He's an original member of the Seeds East Book Club, which he says is "more fun than you should be allowed to have!"

"Everyone reads aloud, becoming better and less self-conscious. They are more willing to share their ideas and are more confident about saying what they think when they otherwise might have been quiet."

LEARNING TO LEAD

In addition to Book Club, Ed is also a tutor mentor for the Student Leadership Group.

"This program is so great for our students because it gives them a sense of ownership over the Seeds program. Seeds isn't just a place, it's a place they are part of," he explained. With help from other volunteers, students learn important soft job skills such as brainstorming, planning, follow-through, and feedback. He's seen this increase their confidence and critical thinking skills.

"It doesn't matter if you're a heart surgeon or you're digging a ditch, every job is solving a problem. And that's what Student Leadership Group is teaching them — those problem-solving skills."

A FAMILIAR FACE FROM ORIENTATION TO GRADUATION

Ed sometimes speaks at new student orientation so that new students see a familiar face when they return to Seeds for their first class.

"Showing up for the first day of class is scary, particularly if you've been out of school for a long time," he explained. "It takes a lot of courage, and yet week after week, new students do it." And Ed is right there with them.

When Ed talks about Seeds, he uses the word "fun" with abundance. And it's not for lack of a better word — it's because he genuinely enjoys coming to Seeds.

"I have selfish reasons for being at Seeds... it's FUN for me. I'm here to have fun. But it's also really satisfying," he admitted. "Our students are hard workers who want to be here. They want to learn and they're fun to be around. We have a good time." * KLK

FROM THE COVER
STUDENTS THRIVE!



In November, Seeds launched a new signature event, *Thrive!*

The weekday luncheon congratulated both student success and stakeholder impact, while recognizing the first recipient of the Cultivator Impact Award: **William Litzler**.

The view from the lectern was intimidating, but student speakers **Aneka Monday** and **Valerie Taylor** (pictured), alumna **Charneil Daye**, and tutor **Margo Faulhaber**, all spoke passionately about the impact that Seeds has had on their lives.

The event culminated with a surprise video tribute, featuring Litzler's friends, family, and former students.

Thrive! raised \$67,000 to support student instruction at Seeds. *Photos and video are available online.* *

BIG HONORS!



A HERO RECOGNIZED

Not all superheroes wear capes.

Some wear fuzzy, literary-themed socks and form book clubs. **Kara Krawiec**, site coordinator (East), has been named the nation's first **ProLiteracy Hero**. She was nominated for her Book Club initiative. Reading scores for Club members increased 33%. She competed against hundreds of organizations, but ultimately, her smile and enthusiasm won over judges and the voting public. *Visit our website to watch the fun nomination video.* *

2ND PLACE, OANO EXCELLENCE

Seeds came in second-place for the Ohio Association of Nonprofit Organization's **Excellence Award** for our addition of an evening program at Seeds East in 2017-2018. The initiative provided more opportunities for potential students. An incredible 37% of new students at Seeds East enrolled during the new evening registration, and 25% of all attendance was during the new evening class. The evening time made the Seeds program more accessible to students. *