

VIRTUAL CLASSROOM EXPANDS REACH

Students from 20 different states (and counting) have registered at Seeds as the pandemic’s effects continue to shutter physical classroom doors. It’s not unusual to have 30 or more students attend Orientation any given week.

“The extended reach indicates a lack of other operational programs during this time,” said Dr. Carmine Stewart, VP of Programming. “Additionally, very few programs offer the flexibility and one-to-one attention that students receive from Seeds. This makes it attractive, even to adults operating in different time zones.”

SUCCESS OUT OF STATE

Michigan native Schanel works in the automotive industry in Detroit. She learned a skilled trade and makes good money, but when her lack of a diploma held her back from advancing, she knew she had to do something. What’s more, she knew she couldn’t do it alone.

“One of the local tutors I looked into wanted \$85 an hour!” she said. When Google led her to Seeds, she admits she was skeptical. “I really thought it was too good to be true. There’s no way it could be FREE!” Lucky for her, tutoring at Seeds is always at no cost to students.

From her home in Michigan, Schanel enrolled online and became a student in the Virtual Classroom in November 2020.

“When she came to us, she had a really ambitious goal to finish her GED by the middle of January,” Site Coordinator Melina Lindsey explained. “What impresses me so much about her is how unbelievably dedicated she is.”

Schanel completed her GED January 2, becoming **the first student to enroll, attend, and graduate from Seeds’ Virtual Classroom from out of state!** She beat her own deadline by several weeks. Shortly after, we celebrated another out-of-state grad, Juliza Almonte in Texas.

TUTORS FROM AFAR

Students aren’t the only ones finding Seeds online. Volunteers from as far as California have applied to tutor, looking for ways they can make a difference while remaining safe from COVID. The Virtual Classroom allows them to help others from the comfort of their homes, no matter where those homes are.

“We have a group of teachers from Virginia who now tutor with us in the evenings,” Melina said. “It’s great because they are all bilingual and can tutor our

Spanish-speaking students.”

NORTHEAST OHIO STILL STRUGGLES

Despite the expanded geography, the majority of students still arrive at Seeds from Northeast Ohio. Burned out from pandemic restrictions, they want to make the most of their time at home and reach their academic goals.

For many though, one thing still stands in the way. The Digital Divide is very real.

Even students who are able to get into the Virtual Classroom face an uphill battle. “We do everything we can to get them online,” Site Coordinator Todd Seabrook said. “But Standardized tests like the Test of Basic Adult Education (or TABE) and the GED aren’t compatible with many popular internet-enabled devices like cell phones, tablets, or low-cost Chromebooks.” For those students, the wait for education continues. *

Keep reading to learn more about the challenges AND SUCCESSES of the Virtual Classroom on the following pages.

Dear Friends,

A YEAR. We've been closed for more than a year as you read this. It's hard to believe, but in many ways, it *feels like a lifetime* since our classrooms were full of students and tutors, working together for a common goal.

My office is adjacent to the classroom. I no longer hear the excited voices when someone experiences a moment of understanding. I don't get to chat with tutors at the coffee station. I can't witness my staff high-fiving a student who passed their practice test with flying colors, or warmly welcome the return of a tutor who was out on medical leave.

It's these interactions, both large and small, that I miss the most. I know that I'm not alone in these feelings. When we are able to reopen, we must all

remember that time together is truly a gift that mustn't be taken for granted.

Despite the sad experience of closing of our physical sites, the Virtual Classroom continues to amaze me. Current students who were digitally averse are now embracing Zoom. Tutors who disliked email are using video whiteboards. Even members of my staff have embraced new technology, learning ways to work more efficiently and track their successes.

I always thought a Seeds expansion would be a little more localized, perhaps we'd move into another Cleveland neighborhood, maybe open a site on the far west side. Instead, the Virtual Classroom has taken us as far as the WEST COAST! This is beyond my wildest expectations. Students *from other states* are now Seeds of Literacy Graduates! Incredible.

The Virtual Classroom continues to grow, and I believe it will continue to do so long after our physical locations reopen. Adding 30+ new

students a week requires more manpower to accommodate onboarding and retention, so I'm taking a hard look at our budget and our ability to staff to full capacity again.

We hope to reopen with limited hours this summer. I want new members of the Seeds Family to be ready for the moment that we do!

As always, I write to you with gratitude in my heart and the appreciation on behalf of our students. Without your support, we would not be where we are today.

~ Many thanks, BE



BONNIE ENTLER,
PRESIDENT & CEO

BY THE NUMBERS IMPACT of EFFORTS SINCE JULY 1



650+ NEW STUDENTS
have registered for the
Virtual Classroom.



20+ STATES
represented by new
students & tutors.



4,312 CALLS
checking on
student well-being

71 GRADUATES

That's more than the
previous fiscal year,
when we were in-person!



274 SECTIONS
of the official
GED test passed



3,100 EMAILS
for student
retention

**Numbers approximate to reflect time between writing & publishing, as well as variations in availability of programs.*

VIRTUAL THRIVE! PROVIDED "THE INSPIRATIONAL MOMENTS I NEEDED TODAY!"



"One of the best virtual presentations I've attended during the pandemic!" one attendee proclaimed. (This is high

praise as the event was held after the pandemic had already been in full swing for nearly nine months!)

More than 80 people logged on to stream Seed's signature event, *Thrive!* What's more, all stayed tuned in for the *entire presentation*. What held their attention?

The event featured recorded interviews with graduate Teron, now-graduate Tachonna, students Eriselda and Deborah, as well as with tutor Ann Scanniello.

Although everyone was interviewed separately, their stories were compellingly interwoven by Seeds Site Coordinator (and videographer) Chris Richards.

The final product clearly illustrated a journey: the challenges that prevented these adults from completing high school, the clarity of the moment they decided to earn a GED, and their introduction to Seeds.

Despite arriving at Seeds at different times, from different directions, all agreed: Seeds of Literacy changed their lives and the tutors make all the difference. "When I said I can't do it, they told me I can. They pushed me. They believed in me," Tachonna shared. She graduated one month after the event! *

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Missed the event? The 30-minute *Thrive!* presentation is available online: WWW.SEEDSOFLITERACY.ORG/THRIVE2020

THE MEDIA'S FOCUS ON DIGITAL LEARNING

Cleveland news stations featured Seeds three times during the last few months as the media turned its attention to remote learning.

Classrooms across the country and throughout Northeast Ohio have been closed for more than a year now and online learning has become the norm for many. Although remote learning eliminates transportation barriers, it comes with its own challenges. Fortunately for Seeds, news stations have continued their coverage of the Digital Divide, and the impact on adult learners.

CHANNEL 5 & JADE JARVIS

In October, Channel 5's Jade Jarvis featured student Eddie Clark and tutor Ed Round. When the pandemic began, the remote learning program (primarily by phone) left something to be desired.

"What me and Ed were doing on the phone, I didn't really like that. I can't do math on the phone..." Eddie said. But everything changed when the Virtual Classroom using Zoom was established.

"It was good because it was like being back in school," he said. "...They have all helped me here, and I'm grateful, very grateful."

Jade returned in February when she heard the Virtual Classroom had become so popular that tutors were in short supply.

Interviewing tutors Lenny Horowitz and Bill Cook, she focused on how valuable the experience is for the volunteers.

"This is the first time I've ever looked forward to Monday mornings," Bill said.

CHANNEL 3 & BRANDON SIMMONS

Also in February, WKYC reporter Brandon Simmons interviewed student Paula Peale and Site Coordinator Chris Richards.

Despite ongoing computer issues, Paula is determined to get her GED. "I always thought it wasn't, but education IS important," Paula explains. "If I'm 100 years old, I'm gonna do it!" *



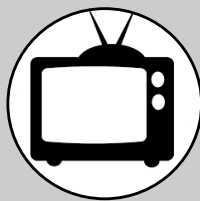
Student Eddie Clark prepares for his interview



Reporter Jade Jarvis introduces her segment from Seeds West



Student Paula Peale, Site Coordinator Chris Richards, and Reporter Brandon Simmons at the end of their Zoom interview



If you missed any of these broadcasts and would like to see them, they are available on the Seeds of Literacy website's blog.

[SEEDSOFLITERACY.ORG/BLOG](https://seeds literacy.org/blog)

ALUMNA PAYS IT FORWARD, SHARES STORY WITH CWRU MEDICAL STUDENTS

Each year, 200 first-year med students from Case Western Reserve University have learned the harsh realities of health literacy from Maria Rodriguez, a 2012 graduate of Seeds. But prior to Seeds, she only attended school until the 9th grade – managing to get by *without ever learning to read or write*.

She went to the doctor for a routine checkup and learned she was pregnant. Afraid to ask what that meant, or how she should take care of herself, she went home. Months later, she returned with stomach cramps, concerned about significant weight gain. This time, doctors told her she "had a baby inside of her." They gave her plenty of literature to help her, but she couldn't read any of it. She wasn't prepared for labor, breastfeeding, or taking care of a newborn infant — and she was too scared to ask anyone for help.

The now 62-year old wants to help others who might find themselves in a similar situation. For nearly a decade, Maria has shared the deeply personal story about her first pregnancy with perfect strangers from CWRU. And it's something she looks forward to doing annually.

Maria explains that even though she earned her GED, attended college, AND raised children and grandchildren, she is still intimidated by doctors. She feels that sharing her story with medical students is an important part of their education.

"I do this so they see something that's not in their textbooks. They see a person. They see the reality of people who can't always ask questions, or express themselves because of embarrassment," she said.

Her advice to them is simple. "Approach every single patient as though they are your mother or father. You'd be kind and gentle and take the time to explain it to them. You have to do the same with every patient." *



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OUR MISSION

To provide free personalized education that empowers adults to thrive in our community.

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TRIVIA TIME!

VIRTUAL GAME NIGHT

• • • • • **May 11, 2021** • **6:30**pm^{EST} • • • • •

Are you confident that you could conquer 8th grade polynomials again?

Find yourself boasting about your biology knowledge?

Ready to spot (and defend the need for) a missing Oxford Comma?

If so, we are looking for you!

Join us for Trivia Time: Game Night with Seeds for a fast-paced night of trivia and friendly competition on Zoom. (Don't worry, all questions are multiple choice!)

Our questions will include a mix of Cleveland literacy statistics (to learn why Seeds is important) and official GED questions (so you get a taste of what our students have to achieve).

You'll play against other virtual attendees for CASH PRIZES (**UP TO \$500!**) and bragging rights, while helping raise awareness about the importance of adult education.



FREE EVENT, ONLINE RSVP REQUIRED

www.seedsofliteracy.org/GameNight