



## A BACKYARD OF THEIR OWN | ALUMNI CHECK-IN

*“My children can learn the address and we won’t ever have to move again. No sharing backyards, or driveways. This is our home,” said Ashley Wilson.*

She moved into the newly-renovated, two-story, three-bedroom home —her very first single-family home— in August 2022. “My favorite room in the house is the living room,” she said. “I love how cozy it is with the fireplace. It’s where me and my children can cuddle and watch movies.”

A year and a half ago, things were very different for Ashley and her three young children. They were living at Laura’s Home Women’s Crisis Center.

We first told you about Ashley when she graduated from Seeds with her GED in March 2021, while still living in the homeless shelter. She checked in recently: Her story is far from over.

### FINDING HOPE

At the time Ashley took her GED, she was juggling homelessness, unemployment, COVID, the loss of all of her belongings and furniture. But she admits the hardest part was the struggle within herself. “I was broken mentally and emotionally,” she said. But she couldn’t wallow — she had to consider her kids.

She didn’t want to tell Seeds her circumstances, but was glad she did. “To my surprise, everyone at Seeds was so understanding.” They got her set up and working on math in the Virtual Classroom.

“Every time I had an obstacle to face, Seeds was there to help me move it. The people at Seeds were never judgmental, never made me feel ashamed or embarrassed. They actually embraced my circumstances and helped me to improve my situation,” she said. “They make you feel like you’re a person, not just a number. They are always there to talk to.”

### THE EDGE OF SOMETHING GREAT

GED fresh in her hands, Ashley enrolled in nursing school. Just a short year later, she graduated as an LPN with a 3.8 GPA. Although she was poised to provide a better life for her family, she was still living at the shelter.

Everything changed when Laura’s Home selected Ashley and her family for the New Horizon’s program. New Horizon homes are purchased and then renovated by volunteers at organizations like Habitat for Humanity. A family is selected and must successfully complete preparations for home ownership with specialized casework and financial planning classes. After 24 months of employment and proven home care, the deed transfers to the family.

“I don’t know why they selected me,” Ashley said modestly. She first saw the home stripped to the studs, pre-renovation. “I couldn’t believe it when I saw the nice neighborhood and how big the house was. That was supposed to be the only time I saw it, so they could surprise me with the renovations.” Too excited to wait, Ashley confessed she snuck over several times and peeked into the windows to see the progress.

The completed, remodeled home has all of the charm of the original, with built-in bookshelves and drawers, arched doorways, and even a small balcony off the back. New drywall, hardwood floors, and updated appliances modernize it.

Ashley excitedly showed us a sunroom she will turn into a master bedroom – left unsaid is that by doing so, her children each have their own large bedrooms.

### A BRIGHT FUTURE

She is now looking for nursing roles compatible with her children’s school schedule. If there’s one thing Ashley’s shown the world, it’s that she doesn’t give up. We’re confident a great opportunity is right around the corner. With her GED, LPN, and new home, there’s nothing holding her back. ◀

▶ [Read more of Ashley’s story online at SEEDSOFLITERACY.ORG/BLOG.](https://SEEDSOFLITERACY.ORG/BLOG)

## PROGRAM IMPACT

FY 2021-2022



**506** employed students increased their skills and positioned themselves for advanced opportunities



**153** students and graduates made plans for postsecondary education and careers



**583** parents improved their ability to support their children's learning, impacting the lives of **1,311** children



**85** students became eligible to pursue postsecondary education and career training programs

## PROGRAM REACH

FY 021-2022



**64%** Cleveland residents

**87%** Ohio residents

**13%** (161) outside of Ohio



**10** international students



### Dear Friends,

Spring and summer felt extra energized this year. We held our first in-person graduation since 2019, coming right on the heels of a lively Dueling Pianos event at Music Box, both of which you can read about on the following pages. Before all the centerpieces were even put away, it was July 1. Fiscal year 2022-23 snuck up on us.

But it's more than just a new academic year for Seeds.

**It's the start of our 25th Anniversary!** For a quarter of a century, Seeds has empowered adults in our community to thrive.

When our founder Sister Kathleen retired and I joined Seeds as Executive Director, no one prepared me for how fast time would pass. The young, grass-roots organization I joined became an award-winning, globe-spanning, authority in adult literacy. *And it all happened in the blink of an eye.*

So this year, I'm reflecting on not only the successes of *last* year, but on 25 years of changed lives.

#### REFLECTION & CELEBRATION

We've chosen a very special Cultivator Impact Award Recipient for *Thrive!* — our dear friend and Seeds graduate Ms. Margo Hudson. Margo's never met a stranger. She charms everyone with her smile and story of perseverance, making it her personal mission to tell others that Seeds can change their lives, just as it changed hers.

Margo is such a huge part of our organization that all new students watch her story during orientation, and she tutors, too.

In addition to *Thrive!* (tickets on sale now!), we have fun activities in the works. We'll look back at the pop culture of 1997,

find out where our current staff members were that year, highlight moments in Seeds history, and share interviews with long-time stakeholders.

Other activities revolve around the number 25:

- special treats when the 25th of the month falls on a class day,
- a friendly competition between our locations - the first to recruit 25 new students and 25 new tutors.

#### DONOR CHALLENGE

Even more exciting, a long-time anonymous supporter has issued a challenge. They will **match, dollar for dollar, every NEW or INCREASED donation this year, up to \$25,000.** This is an incredible opportunity to double your donation and gift Seeds with \$50,000.

And that donor isn't the only supporter who wanted to do something in addition to his annual gift. Tutor and supporter Ray Hulme wanted to remove barriers. Through The Hulme Fund, he made a donation of bus passes and gift cards — popular incentives for students to reach attendance and reassessment goals.

It's remarkable what we've been through and how far we've come. To paraphrase the great Sir Elton John, we're still standing.

I am humbled by the willingness of individuals like these (and like all of you) to support this program year after year. As always, there are insufficient words to express my gratitude. ~ BE



BONNIE ENTLER,  
PRESIDENT & CEO



**JUNE 29, 2022** | For high school seniors, graduation is an important rite of passage. Unfortunately, our adult learners didn't have the same experience. They didn't graduate high school with their friends for a variety of reasons — life got in the way. But they returned to Seeds, *sometimes decades later*, demonstrating that **it is never too late** to finish school. Seeds was honored to give them the chance to put on caps and gowns, and celebrate their perseverance and success with family, friends, and tutors.

After two years of pandemic-driven virtual ceremonies, the event was held in-person, and live-streamed for all of the Virtual Classroom tutors and grads. Although not everyone could attend, the ceremony recognized the 84 individuals who completed their GED during the 2021-2022 fiscal year.



## 2022 Grads Address Their Classmates and Tutors



**CLASS OF 2022** Joe Fine



**CLASS OF 2022** Michelle Reid



**CLASS OF 2022** Chira Blakshear  
VIRTUAL STUDENT

"Our GED has opened doors, and the possibilities are endless. This DIPLOMA is the jump-off point for all kinds of things. It also gives US the opportunity to walk a little taller. I don't have to dodge the question of "When did you graduate?" We can say June 29, 2022!"

"Seeds has taught me that I must have faith in myself...I am proud to say that not only am I a graduate of 2022, but I am currently a nursing student who graduates in 2023. This is just the beginning. "

"I've been trying to get my GED since 2011 -- the year I was supposed to graduate high school. I've been through many trials and tribulations and moments where I gave up. But this program has helped my life in an amazing way. I made a promise to myself that I wouldn't give up!"

► Read their speeches, view more photos, watch the ceremony at [SEEDSOFLITERACY.ORG/GRADUATION2022](https://SEEDSOFLITERACY.ORG/GRADUATION2022)



In July, Seeds of Literacy entered our 25th Anniversary year. In the coming months, we'll celebrate with video interviews and social media campaigns to reflect on our journey. Join us online at [SEEDSOFLITERACY.ORG/25YEARS](http://SEEDSOFLITERACY.ORG/25YEARS) for our complete historical timeline and ways to help us celebrate this milestone.



**1997**

Sister Kathleen Kilbane (Congregation of St. Joseph) founded Seeds of Literacy to commemorate the Congregation's 125 years of service in Cleveland. The first year, there were **3 sites, 200 students, 5 grads, and 75 tutors.**

Sr. Kathleen retired and Bonnie Entler was named Executive Director. Seeds operated out of **10 sites, for 300 students and had 14 grads** that year.

**2003**



**2005**

Seeds obtained its own 501(c)3 nonprofit status and received national accreditation by ProLiteracy, making it the only nationally-accredited adult education program in Ohio. That year, there were **9 sites, 513 students, and 44 grads.**

**2012**



Long-time student Margo Hudson graduated after 11 years and 6 attempts. Her story became the inspiration for new students for the next decade.

*(Read more about Margo on the back cover)*

**2009**

Seeds centralized operations to the W. 25th site and expanded to 12-hour days to serve more students with better outcomes.



**2014**

Seeds East opened with a grant from the Ohio Department of Higher Education, the first new program to be funded in 15 years.

The new GED® changes took effect, based on National Common Core State Standards, increasing the cost by 300% and reducing testing locations.



Join us online at [SEEDSOFLITERACY.ORG/25YEARS](http://SEEDSOFLITERACY.ORG/25YEARS) for our complete historical timeline.

2018

The State announced two paper-pencil alternatives to the all-computerized GED. Seeds launched a public awareness campaign and quickly adopted the test alternatives.



East Site Coordinator Kara Krawiec won the first-ever ProLiteracy Hero Award after 3 rounds of international voting.



Seeds hosted a new signature event, *Thrive!* and announced the inaugural recipient of a new honor: Bill Litzler as the first Cultivator Impact Award-winner.

## VIRTUAL CLASSROOM

Seeds makes the difficult decision to reduce staff and close its doors as a global pandemic began. Just 2 weeks later, Seeds announced remote learning options by phone and video. Five months into the pandemic, the Virtual Classroom was formalized as a permanent program offering.

2020

94 adults graduated during a Virtual Graduation ceremony, including 20 students from the *Class of COVID* (those who enrolled, studied, and graduated entirely online.) The record-setting class was the largest since the change of the GED in 2014.



After being closed for 15 months Seeds reopened in limited capacity with extensive COVID protocols.

2021



It was the summer of awards for Seeds. At the **STATE** level, OACE awarded Dr. Carmine Stewart Administrator of the Year. Chris Richards received Teacher of the Year. **GLOBALLY**, ProLiteracy gave Seeds the Award for Program Innovation & Collaboration (with CWRU) and Graduate Desire Barb received the Award for Adult Learner Excellence. **NATIONALLY**, Seeds received the Best Practices Award from the Library of Congress. **LOCALLY**, Tutor Ed Round was named Most Treasured Volunteer by Community Solutions.



## \$25K FOR 25 YEARS

\$25,000

\$20,000

\$15,000

\$10,000

\$5,000

A generous, long-time supporter has made a pledge to contribute \$25,000 towards a fundraising challenge campaign. They will match, dollar for dollar, all new and increased contributions between now and the end of our anniversary year (June 30, 2023) if the community raises the other \$25,000.

This potential **\$50,000** will support Seeds of Literacy's general operating funds.

◀ as of 9/16/2022

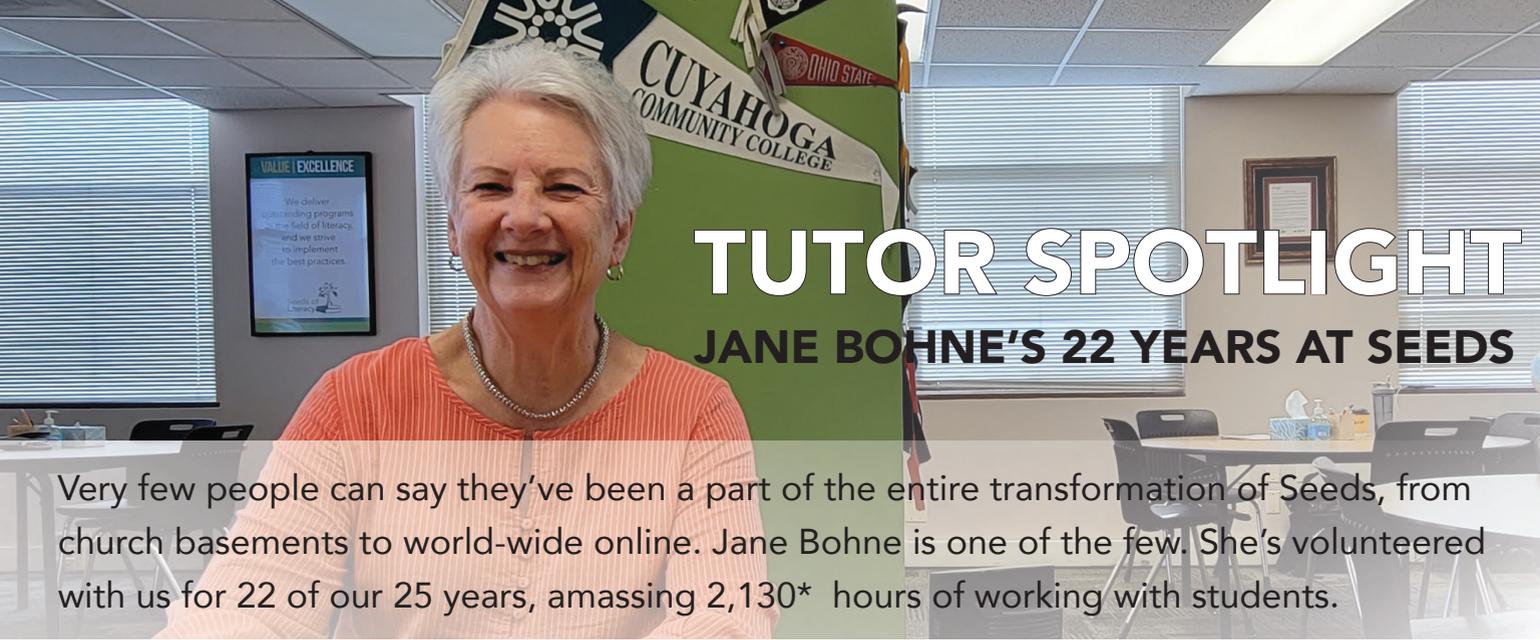
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## 15 Years of Service

Seeds West Site Coordinator Chris Richards was just 13 years old when Seeds was founded!



This August, he celebrated a very special milestone. Aside from President Bonnie Entler, Chris has the longest continuous tenure at Seeds. He joined the team right out of college and never looked back. He's seen just about everything, from the church basements to the centralized classrooms to the Virtual Classroom. ◀



# TUTOR SPOTLIGHT

## JANE BOHNE'S 22 YEARS AT SEEDS

Very few people can say they've been a part of the entire transformation of Seeds, from church basements to world-wide online. Jane Bohne is one of the few. She's volunteered with us for 22 of our 25 years, amassing 2,130\* hours of working with students.

After college, Jane was a programmer, walking around with a deck of punch cards, and data coming in on tape and discs that looked like a big drum. When she started a family, she left. "By the time I was back into the workforce, the computers had downsized from refrigerator-size things to desktops."

It was then that she found tutoring - first in her neighborhood, then a community college, and finally Seeds.

Growing up in a small town, attending the same Catholic school from 1st grade through 12th, Jane considers herself lucky. She liked school and often helped her friends with math. It wasn't until she began tutoring at Seeds as an adult that she had a startling revelation.

"Some of my classmates were left behind," she said, although she didn't realize it at the time. With large class sizes, teachers had to teach to the majority. **"If you weren't mainstream, you were probably left out,"** she said. She sees that in students at Seeds.

### DIFFERENT CHALLENGES

"What sets Seeds apart is that everyone who walks in here is truly an individual who wants to learn, needs to learn specific things, and will learn them at a different speed than everyone else," Jane said. "Some people who come in remember what they've learned, others never learned concepts, and some have forgotten and just need refreshers."

Jane recognizes the dedication it takes to even come to Seeds. "There are just SO

MANY obstacles they have to overcome. Their children have to be cared for. Many have to make sure their parents are also cared for. A lot are struggling to get or hold a job - more employers are requiring a high school credential. Sometimes they have to leave Seeds for awhile, but maybe you see them again in another year or two. Seeds always welcomes them back."

One of the things she likes most about tutoring is the diversity of the students and tutors. "There are many personalities and that's what makes it so interesting, how different we all are," she said. "It's enlightening to hear about their backgrounds and different view points, I enjoy it very much." Coming from a small town, she's learned a great deal about living in Cleveland, and bigger cities in general.

### LIGHT BULB MOMENTS

Jane admits she was nervous and probably acted like the nuns she grew up with when she first started tutoring 22 years ago - it's all she knew. But her style changed.

"I learned I had to watch the student's eyes to see if they were understanding what I was saying, and how to explain the concepts in a different way if they weren't getting it," she said. "You also have to really listen to what they say. You have to be patient."

"When a student is having trouble learning something, but they are willing to keep trying, they don't turn off and move on. Most keep trying because they want to get it. Seeing the light bulb go off when they understand is so rewarding. They're really thrilled!"

Jane described a woman she recently met who entered the program at a 2nd-grade reading level. After a progress check, the

woman tested at a 9th-grade reading level. "She was almost doing flips, she was so happy," Jane said. "We try to make them understand that they CAN DO IT."

### THE FUTURE

The biggest change in Seeds revolves around adapting technology. She remembers when the GED changed from paper to computer in 2014, creating another hurdle for our students. These days, more students are a little more tech savvy, but there are some that still find computers a major deterrent.

Technology imposed itself on Seeds again during the pandemic. "It's incredible how much the Virtual Classroom is thriving," Jane said.

"Tutoring in person, I can look in their eyes and get a better sense of what they are learning. Online is all business. There's less chit chat," she explained, admitting she actually likes a little chit chat. "But those online students are really amazing. I admire them so much because that's gotta be so hard. Some students work from phones, not a laptop or a tablet."

Jane hopes that Seeds can reach even more people in the future, bring them in, and "Convince them that the GED \*IS\* possible and that it will make such a big difference in their lives." The students are why Jane keeps coming back. "I want to see them succeed," she said. "I see what they have to overcome to be here."

And tutoring has made a huge impact on Jane's life as well. "It's encouraged me to continue to learn. If I hadn't done this, I'd be more complacent. I wouldn't have the perspective on what the world is really like for other people." ◀

\*as of 8/8/2022

## DUELING PIANOS FUNDRAISER

# HIT ALL THE RIGHT NOTES



On June 9, The Music Box Supper Club provided a much needed escape on the water for the Seeds of Literacy Family.

Two-hundred guests waited as two white pianos were placed center stage in anticipation of a lively event promoting literacy — an event that should have been held 2 years ago.

### STUDENTS SHARE THEIR STORIES

Before the music started, guests heard from two very grateful student speakers.

Ernestine said what a privilege it is, not only to attend Seeds, but to speak to the audience that day. "I never thought, in my wildest dreams, that I'd be standing up and talking about myself," she admitted. "I used to be so shy, but now I feel so free."

In the last year, she lost both her youngest daughter and oldest son. During the most unimaginably heartbreaking time in her life, Seeds gave her stability. "When I walk into the classroom, I feel so loved. It's like a family. I'm not just saying that...I feel that this classroom setting is more of a close-knit relationship for me."

Aliyia shared that she was surprised that studying for her GED was not as hard as she assumed. "A lot of other programs don't do this, but Seeds is a program where tutors sit down with you, one-to-one,

to help you with subjects that are more difficult than others. It helps me to understand what is being taught because they'll stay on the subject as long as it takes to know how to do it on your own."

### PERFORMERS TAKE THE STAGE

No song was out of the question, the T&Rich Dueling Piano Show said, as long as the request "came with some green." They played everything from Neil Diamond's Sweet Caroline to Outkast's Hey Ya. Nearly \$500 in tips and song requests went in their jar, and at the end of the event, the jar was generously donated to Seeds.

### CRITICAL FUNDS

Seeds of Literacy does not have any guaranteed annual funding or earned revenue, so fundraising events like Dueling Pianos help raise the money to cover operating costs each and every year.

More than \$86,000 was raised thanks to generous guests, silent auction winners, and incredible sponsors like Carnegie Management & Development Corporation and FirstEnergy Foundation. ◀

▶ [Read the full article and check out fun photos from the event: SEEDSOFLITERACY.ORG/DUELINGPIANOS2022](https://seeds literacy.org/duelingpianos2022)



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### 3 EASY WAYS to update your information: pick what works for you!

- ONLINE: [seeds literacy.org/contactupdates](https://seeds literacy.org/contactupdates)
- PHONE: 216.661.7950 for the receptionist to take your info
- SCAN THE QR CODE for the form



Long-time Seeds West student YVONNE DAWSON passed away in her sleep in July. She brightened the classroom with her sense of humor and her smile.



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**OUR MISSION**

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

**THRIVE!**

CELEBRATING  
**STUDENT SUCCESS**



& RECOGNIZING 2022  
**CULTIVATOR IMPACT AWARD-WINNER**

*Margo Hudson*

LITERACY CHAMPION • TUTOR • ADVOCATE  
MOTIVATIONAL SPEAKER • 2012 SEEDS ALUMNA

FRIDAY **NOV 4** NOON - 1:30PM  
**CROWNE PLAZA @ PLAYHOUSE SQUARE**  
FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION  
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