



The Literacy Alliance

Literacy News

A quarterly publication of the Literacy Alliance

2009 Issue 4

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Family Literacy a Pathway to Success

In the adult classroom at East Wayne Street Center, four year old Sebastian brought the pocket calculator to show his mother how it worked. It was small even in his hands, and using his thumb Sebastian had to try the tiny button twice. Pushing the button opened the display cover which flipped back in slow motion. Sebastian chuckled with big dimples and raised the calculator so Sandra could see better. He watched her face for her reaction. Her eyes widened for Sebastian's benefit until the display cover stopped.

Sandra De Lira and her son participate in the family literacy program at East Wayne Street Center. They attend for three and a half hours daily, Monday through Thursday. The program provides adult instruction, early child education, Parent and Child Together (PACT) time, and parent support. All components work to increase literacy, strengthen families, and break the intergenerational cycle of illiteracy.

For Sandra, it is a chance to improve herself and strive for a better life. With Sebastian, she and her husband have four children, eleven year old Theresa, ten year old Elvira, and seven year old Enrique. Her children like Sandra being at school "because they see that if I can do it they can do it too."

When she first arrived in the United States, Sandra did not know how to drive a car and converse in English.



Sandra De Lira and her son Sebastian attend The Literacy Alliance's family literacy program at East Wayne Street Center. Her desire to improve herself and make a better life for her family keeps Sandra coming to the program.

"There's a big difference between Mexico and here," she said. In Mexico, one takes the bus to work, school, and the store. Here driving is necessary to accomplish such tasks. Sandra wanted to learn to drive and improve her English. She wanted to go back to school. Her sister was attending the family literacy program at Adams Elementary. Through that connection, she got East Wayne Street Center's number.

Sandra and Enrique began at East Wayne Street Center in 2006. She made progress improving her conversation skills and earning a driver's license. Language, though, continued to be her toughest subject. She was matched one-on-one with a Literacy Alliance tutor. "She taught me a lot about grammar and whatever I needed to improve," Sandra said. "And I had to put a lot of work into it."

As with so many Literacy Alliance students, Sandra must manage to do her studies while working and taking care of her family. She recognizes that reaching her goal of passing the GED® Tests will take a long time. To strengthen her language skills, she reads as much as she can, stories about explorers and mountain climbers. Her favorite subject is social studies, particularly history. She also practices at work, speaking to coworkers and customers.

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Family Literacy a Pathway, continued from page 1

In addition to the help she is getting with her studies, Sandra praised the PACT time at The Literacy Alliance's family literacy. "It's a very good idea," she said. "Often with work and other obligations, it's very difficult to find the time. Here you can play with your child and see others playing with their children." A few years ago, Enrique said, "Come on, Mom, make cookies with me." Together, they baked and decorated cookies then shared them with his brother and sisters at home.

With education and eventually a GED®, Sandra hopes to become more involved in her church, perhaps get into social work. "A lot of people in my church and in the community have helped me, and I would like to do the same." She also wants to make her mother proud as she and her children become the first generation to earn diplomas. She wants to continue to set a good example and help her children with their studies.



For nearly ten years, Mary Wise and Johra Mirza have worked together to strengthen Johra's English skills. Their one-on-one sessions incorporate materials from day to day living, such as newspapers, food and medicine labels, and recipes.

The Literacy Alliance's one-on-one program matches literacy tutors with adult students who can benefit from individualized instruction. The agency trains the tutors and makes the matches. Once a match is made, tutor and student arrange meeting time and place, usually an hour a week at a library branch.

Goals vary greatly from student to student. Some want to be able to read the Bible or share books with their children and grandchildren. Others want to improve their math skills for work. Some want to pass the driver's test. And many, like Johra, want to become more connected with their community.

One-on-One Student Passes the Citizenship Test

For most of ten years, Mary Wise and Johra Mirza have met one to two hours a week. They were neighbors who became a one-on-one tutoring match through The Literacy Alliance.

Mary's involvement with The Literacy Alliance goes back to 1993 when she worked one-on-one with adult students. She has also been a literacy tutor at FWCS's Our Lady of Good Hope learning center on Saturday mornings.

Thinking about Johra and knowing that her English was limited, Mary thought, "I'm helping with The Literacy Alliance and thought I might help out." She called Johra and the match began.



Sixty thousand Report Card Night fliers are bundled and ready. The Komets and Comcast sponsor Report Card Night, admitting thousands of "A" students to a hockey game for free. Comcast makes a donation based on the number of "A" students attending.

For its part, The Literacy Alliance works to inform every student in the area about this incentive to earn good grades. Literacy Alliance staff obtain permissions from school corporations. They count and bundle the fliers provided by the Komets for each school. The bundles are then arranged according to routes for delivery. In early January, The Literacy Alliance staff deliver the bundles to 131 schools in Allen County.

For awhile, they concentrated on English. English in context with life skills became the method. "I wanted to help with practical matters," said Mary. Study materials included newspapers and labels for foods and medicines. Lessons moved to simple math as they studied shopping and recipes.

Johra came to the United States from India twenty seven years ago. Her husband Sam came over first. He got an education before bringing his family. Their children have grown up and gone to college. Their daughter lives in Virginia and their son in Indianapolis.

Early on, Johra felt isolated. "It was really hard," she said. Working with Mary, she has made great progress. Watching TV news and reading the newspaper, she has a better understanding. "I feel more connected, more comfortable."

On November 6, Sam and Johra drove to Indianapolis so she could take the test for citizenship. A woman asked questions about dates in history, early presidents, and the branches of government. Johra passed the test.

Mary moved recently, and Johra misses her on grocery day. Going shopping with Sam just isn't the same. They still meet regularly, and this will continue as long as it works out for both.

Announcements

The Literacy Alliance continues to have intake sessions for its adult literacy programs. Morning and evening sessions are available. Each session lasts about two and a half hours. Adults interested in strengthening their basic skills or preparing for the GED® Tests must register for one of the sessions by calling The Literacy Alliance, 426-7323.

Volunteer opportunities are available at The Literacy Alliance. Tutor adults in reading, writing, math, and basic English. Help answer phones and track volunteer hours. Collect books and shelves for Habitat home libraries. To volunteer, register online at www.fwliteracyalliance.org or call Laura at 426-7323.

Where Are They Now?



Literacy News readers may remember Victoria Weinley, 2006 GED® graduate and the first recipient of The Literacy Alliance Scholarship.

Victoria prepared for the GED® Tests by attending The Literacy Alliance computer lab and enrolling at the Anchor Learning Center. She tested in November 2006 at Anthis and did well enough to earn a scholarship from Ivy Tech where she's currently enrolled.

Her plan was to become a pharmacist, but she soon

realized that goal was too unrealistic, requiring more time and schooling than anticipated. She said, "I took a long hard look at what I wanted to accomplish," which was advocating for free medications for those who can't afford them. She discussed it with her husband Larry and decided to "tone down a notch and work on it from the insurance and CMA (Certified Medical Assistant) side."

Victoria expects to finish with Ivy Tech in May 2011. She will have four degrees, associates in applied science and technical certificates in medical assisting, insurance coding and processing, and medical office management. She serves as president of the Medical Assitant Club and as a member of AAMA (American Academy of Medical Administrators) has gone to its national conference.

"The classes are getting harder," Victoria said. "Pathophysiology is really challenging, but it brings it together, makes you understand what meds go with what diseases." She's looking forward to the externships that're coming up. "I didn't think I'd ever get this far."

In addition to all of her obligations and activities, Victoria has approached The Literacy Alliance about volunteering. She would like to help people achieve their goals, as literacy tutor and cheerleader. Referring to The Literacy Alliance, she said, "You guys really hooked me up. I want to give back."

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GED® Graduation Event

Anthris Continuing Education and The Literacy Alliance will host the 2009 GED Graduation Reception and Commencement at the Scottish Rite Center on March 3, 2010.

Beginning at 5:30 p.m. in the Valencia Ballroom, attendees will enjoy light refreshments while congratulating the graduates, their friends, and family. At 6:45 p.m., all will go upstairs to the auditorium for the graduation ceremony.

For more information about the event or about sponsoring the reception, call Brian at The Literacy Alliance, 426-7323.



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Report Card Night Benefits The Literacy Alliance

The Fort Wayne Komets and Comcast are sponsoring Report Card Night again this year at the Memorial Coliseum. Students with an "A" or "A Equivalent" will be admitted FREE to the Turner Cup Champions' match against the Port Huron IceHawks at 8:00 p.m. on February 5, 2010. Eligible students should get their tickets early in advance at the Coliseum box office.

Comcast will be making a donation to The Literacy Alliance for every "A" student who attends the game.




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Single Father of Two Earns the GED®

John Decker
John Decker passed the GED, took a night class to improve reading skills at the New Haven Learning Center. He is a single father of two in the state of the GED. He does a job and work as a night shift in a retail store as the main part.

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Call Brian at The Literacy Alliance, 426-7323.

From the Director's Desk

As mentioned in recent newsletters, revenues for the current fiscal year are uncertain. The economic downturn makes it more difficult for many to give. Revenues from the state of Indiana are indefinite due to shortfalls at the state level and changes that will come in mid-2010 with the Department of Education's new vision for adult education. We're worried that there will not be sufficient funds.

In the middle of fiscal year 2009, Literacy Alliance board and staff discussed closing a learning center and eliminating a half time position. Though these moves would have cut costs, they would have hurt many unemployed Allen County adults who need to improve their skills.

We are here, as always, to help adult learners reach their academic goals. In this issue of *Literacy News*, you've read about a few of those adult learners. It's important to remember that Sandra, Johra, and Victoria aren't just individuals looking to get ahead. They're mothers and members of the community. Their work at The Literacy Alliance is their first step to aspirations that include being better parents and better citizens.

The Literacy Alliance will take risks this program year. With need increasing in this economy, we decided that we could not cut services. We hope to operate at current levels at least through this program year and are working through partnerships to expand to meet demands. With Fort Wayne Community School's division of adult and continuing education, we will broaden the intake process and open two new sites, a north side learning center and a volunteer-operated, computer-based small group site.

Many of you have responded generously to our most recent appeals for donations. We are grateful and heartened by your support. As you know, your contributions of time and treasure are vital to those served by The Literacy Alliance.



Judith Stabelli, Executive Director



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