

2015 READ/San Diego: **Celebrating Success and Bright Futures**

In February 2015, the Library's adult literacy program, READ/San Diego, celebrated the monumental dedication and success of its 27rd class. The American Library Association named READ the nation's top literacy program and the U.S. Department of Education recognized it as a model program for providing life-changing training to low-literate students from a broad range of backgrounds and learning levels. The program serves the estimated 442,000 San Diego adults who cannot read and write well enough to meet every day needs. In addition to free literacy instruction, the Library helps participants pursue an education and encourages families to read together.

Recent graduates, tutors and program honorees include:

Antoinette Mosley Adult Learner of the Year Award Winners



Hinda Ahmed

“You need to reach...it’s hard, but if you want it, you reach.”

Hinda came to the US over ten years ago from Somalia. She had little schooling in her country, and found herself staying at home because she could not communicate well in English. Hinda found out about READ/San Diego from her sister-in-law. She enrolled in May 2011 and waited over a year for a tutor. She was matched with a tutor in December 2012. She’s been with her tutor Dorothy Kwiat ever since. Time (or lack of it) has been a huge barrier for her. She has four children ranging from two to nine years, and her time is spent taking care of her family. She manages, though, to make time for tutoring and homework, acknowledging, “I learn when I do.” Since working with her tutor, Hinda has been able to help her children with homework, read to them, attend school meetings, read books, read and pay bills, and vote. She appreciates that Dorothy “is nice and a good teacher.” She feels that her

spelling and writing have improved, but she still wants to further develop her skills. As for the future, Hinda is thinking about career goals. “Maybe a nurse,” she muses. “It’ll be hard, but I think it’s what I want.”

Kassim Alkarawi

“Every time I come here: I learn something new.”

Kassim walked into the Learner Orientation at READ feeling skeptical and withdrawn. When he started the program in 2012, he was unable to write the alphabet in order or recite the days of the week or the months of the year in sequence. He had attended school in Iraq for six years, but did not have one fond memory to share during his initial assessment. His old fears of the classroom along with his many humiliating school experiences followed him into his first tutoring session. Mr. Alkarawi moved to the United States when he was in his early 20s and learned to speak English; however, he was cynical about his ability to learn to read and write English. Consequently Kassim’s first lessons were important for developing trust and hope in his ability to learn. And learn he did! He has gone from not reading at all to picking out books to read. He has learned how to post an email, text on his iPhone, and fill out online applications, including medical forms. He applied for a library card by himself and started using the library’s public computers. He created an email account and became active in READ/San Diego’s computer lab. With the internet, he was able to find needed information. He was able to track down friends he hadn’t seen in a long time. In addition, he discovered he could find medical information and pose health-related questions through his clinic’s website. Kassim enjoys demonstrating his new found skill in alphabetizing. He’s a dedicated and motivated learner who enjoys his tutoring sessions, in part because, as he puts it, “every time I come here: I learn something new.” Kassim says, “I would like to help others like myself to learn more, be educated, and to continue learning.” Kassim would encourage anyone to go out and “learn—learn a lot of things; go to school, computer class, anything. Don’t just sit and watch TV.” Being pro-active is Kassim’s prescription to anyone who isn’t where they want to be.



Eric Bruner

“I know I have grown.”

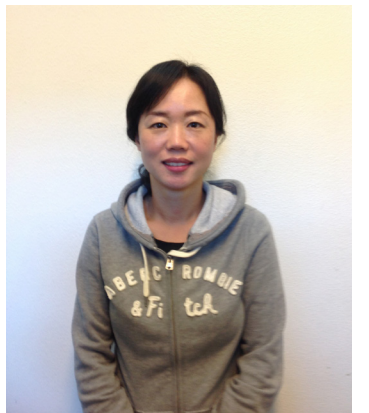
Education didn’t play a large role in Eric’s home life growing up, and he could see that had left him at a disadvantage. Since enrolling in READ/San Diego in 2000 and being matched with a tutor that has changed. Education has become a central focus of Eric’s life. He says his foremost goal has been to “learn to read and write better, to get to where I want to be.” Eric has found that he doesn’t have to do it alone. He’s developed a great rapport with his tutor, Fred, who Eric feels has positively impacted his life. Plus, he’s had the support of his family so anything was possible. One thousand thirty-eight tutoring hours with READ/San Diego have taken Eric far. Eric has been particularly

happy with the progress he’s made in writing. He’s writing letters, resumes, thank you notes after interviews, and incident reports at work. He has also worked with the police department’s “Compassion Project” helping people in the neighborhood fill out forms and paperwork. Eric says that Fred, his tutor, friend, and mentor has been invaluable to his success. He sees his progress as its own reward and as a stepping stone to his long term goals of becoming a lay pastor and buying his own home. As a father, Eric says he’s grateful that he’s now able to give his daughter an environment “filled with reading and learning.” He takes great pleasure in being able to read to her. His dream is for her to surpass him.

Mi Sun Cho

“Identify a specific goal or two and go for it!”

Mi Sun Cho came to the United States four year ago fro Korea. Initially, she attended English classes at the adult school, but wanted to focus on nursing, her career goal. She enrolled at READ after learning about the services provided from a friend. Mi Sun’s English skills were proficient for our program but not for her desired profession. She had practiced nursing for 16 years in South Korea, working in operating and anesthesiology departments, but that experience did not qualify her for nursing jobs in the United States. She had to pass the California nursing exam and demonstrate mastery of English. She admits it was not easy. Her success did not come without setbacks; She failed the state exam the first time she took it. She also attempted to volunteer at a local hospital and was turned away. Demonstrating English fluency and passing her exam were just two of her challenges. Her husband was deeply involved with his new job and she felt left to navigate a foreign culture, a different language, and a new school system for her fourth grade son. “I had so many questions, but did not know the answers,” she reflects, “and my self esteem was on the very bottom.” One year ago while also studying for the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), she succeeded in passing the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX). Because of her “steady effort,” Mi Sun received her California Nursing license in the fall of 2014. Today she advises new students, “not to wait. Identify a specific goal or two and go for it!”



Sharon Cooke

“I have goals and I will accomplish them.”

Sharon discovered READ/San Diego in 2011 while searching online for programs to help with reading and writing. Though she graduated from high school and received her diploma, she still wanted to improve her basic skills. Reading was never easy. Whenever she was called on to read aloud in class, she would find ways to get out of it by pretending to be sick or making up some excuse. She enrolled at READ to do something about it. “Since beginning this program, my life has drastically changed in so many ways,” Sharon affirms. “I am more confident and have taken on more responsibility at my job. Working with my tutor and learning more at each session has given me the confidence to try harder and take chances to achieve what I want.” Sharon now reads books and discusses the themes with friends. She is able to keep up with the readings at her church and understand what is being read. “I feel like I’m getting the full message now,” she reflected. During the last presidential election, she knew who and what she was voting for because she had read the ballot and understood the propositions. Sharon is grateful for the challenge and support from her tutor Nancy. She never saw herself as a public speaker, but he did. With his encouragement, she is now a speaker for the program at tutor and learner trainings. Sharon is proud to represent the program and tell her story. “This has been a very rewarding experience.”

Maria Ingrande

“Thank you very much for helping me.”

Maria was born in Palermo, Italy and moved to the United States 13 years ago. She had always wanted to further her education, but faced many challenges along the way. She tried community college, but the pacing didn't match her needs. She also realized that she wasn't as focused as she wanted to be. “My parents were ill and I couldn't concentrate,” she remembers. A librarian at her local library told her about READ/San Diego and she signed up in February 2013. She was soon matched with a tutor, and they have been working together ever since. Even the setback of returning to Italy for heart surgery has not prevented Maria from working toward her goals. Maria finds that reading and writing is easier for her now. She's more comfortable communicating with others, and her friends have noticed that improvement. She's able to read paperwork from doctors and lawyers, and she does a lot of research on the Internet. She recalls that before meeting Cathy, “I never read. Now I read stories, drama, books...everything!” Maria's goal is independence. “I want to have an apartment on my own and buy things with my own money,” she declares. Maria knows that there are opportunities in the United States that she cannot have in Italy. “If I were in Italy, there would be nothing for me to do,” she explains. “Here, I can work. I have a car, and I can do things I couldn't have done there.” Sometimes she feels discouraged, but she won't stop her tutoring sessions. “I don't want to give up,” she acknowledges. “Someone helps me and that has changed me for the better.”



Miran Son Lee

“Tutors are eager and ready to help you.”

Miran arrived in the U.S. from South Korea in 2001. She has spent five of those 14 years at READ/San Diego working diligently on her goals. Initially, she sought help to improve her English and analysis skills in reading. Her goals have expanded over time. Today she reads novels for pleasure, journals regularly, writes book reports and has even written two fantasy stories of her own. She has developed her vocabulary which has given her the confidence to talk with the teachers at her daughters' schools. She has helped her daughters select and apply to college. Miran studied, applied for and passed the test to become an American citizen just over a year ago. Another big hurdle Miran faced was to get a job and she has! She not only applied, interviewed, and was hired by a local market as a customer service representative; she currently answers phones and makes public service announcements over the store's loud speaker. Miran compliments READ/San Diego tutors for being eager and ready to help out, but her tutor-learner coordinator, Nancy Norcross says, “I think it is Miran who has been eager and ready to make the difference in her life.”

Jose Mendoza

“My progress never could have happened without this program and all those teachers that are helping people like me.”

Jose A. Mendoza has been a student with READ/San Diego for six years now which is as long as he was in school in his native country. Originally from El Salvador, Jose came to the US when he was 22 years old. He was desperate to find a job. He took employment wherever he could and was soon working seven days a week, 13-14 hour days, holding down three jobs. He needed to make ends meet yet lacked the skills to communicate. He says he felt sad, fearful and worried all the time. In 1992, Jose got his janitorial license and opened his own company along with his wife and one other employee, though he still had to work seven days a week, 13-14 hour days. Then in 2007, upon hearing a radio announcement about the READ/San Diego program, he decided to call for help. He was enrolled in the program, matched with a tutor, and was soon at work on his goals. Initially his goals were to fill out complicated forms, complete paperwork for his business, write effective notes and emails, as well as to read work manuals, voting materials, and the newspaper. He has accomplished these goals and has set many more. Today he is preparing for his Contractor's License. Why you may ask? Since the early 1990s Jose's company has grown to over 40 employees, has expanded and diversified its workload and is now serving more customers than ever before. Jose has also increased his family size to four sons and today one of his sons is the family company's CPA. Another goal Jose has accomplished is writing his memoirs, especially of his life in El Salvador. “My children don't believe what I have been through,” Jose says, “but our legacy should not be forgotten.” It comes as no surprise that Jose was committed to instilling the value of education while raising his sons. Jose says his life has changed tremendously. His reading level alone has jumped over four grade levels.



Wahida Qadiri

“My dream was to grab a book and read.”

Wahida was born in Afghanistan and didn't have the opportunity to go to school. When she came to the United States, she noticed that life seemed easier for those who had received a formal education. She wanted to learn to read and write in English so she could become more independent, but she felt embarrassed struggling in a classroom full of people. Wahida finally got what she needed when she learned about READ/San Diego from her sister-in-law, a student in the program. She enrolled and was matched with her first tutor a few months later. Wahida's reading and writing skills greatly improved. Only four months after first meeting with her tutor, Wahida passed her citizenship test! With her second and current tutor, Katherine, Wahida has continued to improve her reading, writing, and spelling. She's also learned computer basics and how to use a smart phone, which enables her to keep up with her kids and to communicate using text messages and email. Wahida's proud of the goals she's accomplished since coming to READ/San Diego in 2009. After taking a trip to the grocery store with her tutor, she now reads product labels and understands what they mean. She enjoys reading about food and nutrition. She also writes notes and letters to her family and friends. In addition to reading to her children, she participates in parent/teacher conferences, attends other school meetings, and helps her children with their homework. Despite her busy life as a mother.

Rebecca E. Lytle Tutor of the Year Award Winners

Katherine Albitz

“Learning is not a linear process. It goes in bumps and then all of a sudden she’ll make a big leap.”

After retiring from her job as a software developer and engineer at Hewlett Packard, Katherine wanted to get involved in something that she felt strongly about. She wanted to help adults who had been denied education or who hadn’t been able to get the education they wanted and needed. She searched online and found READ/San Diego. Katherine completed tutor training in September 2011, and was matched with her current student, Wahida, shortly thereafter. She initially felt apprehensive about teaching. Her only experience had been as a teacher’s assistant in grad school. She worried too whether she and her student would be compatible. Katherine’s fears were quickly allayed. “I lucked out and got the perfect student,” she says. “Wahida is absolutely perfect for me as a tutor.” Katherine says that tutoring has become an integral part of her life and that it’s been “very rewarding.” She and Wahida have worked hard on basic reading and writing skills. They’ve also worked on other life skills such as check writing, the use of smart phones and calculators, and basic computer skills. What inspires Katherine to continue tutoring and what’s the secret to her success as a tutor? Katherine is quick to credit her student. She says Wahida’s willingness and commitment to learning are responsible for both. “This is her accomplishment,” Katherine says. “I am very proud of her.”



Carl Balingit

“Learning to teach is very valuable.”

Carl Balingit heard about READ/San Diego through the San Diego Council on Literacy’s CEO, Jose Cruz. In fact, he credits Jose with being the inspiration for his willingness to commit to tutoring. Carl recognizes the value of reading and feels it’s important to have a “well informed society.” He attended tutor training in September 2013, was matched with his current student, Alex, and was excited to begin tutoring. Carl has been a dedicated tutor and he demonstrates this in part by meeting consistently with Alex and being punctual. He enjoys finding specific techniques and strategies that work best for Alex’s learning style. Carl says that seeing the positive impact tutoring has had in Alex’s life inspires him. When asked what he enjoys most about tutoring, Carl says he’s found interacting with Alex and getting to know him to be a wonderful experience. He’s proud of their level of commitment to each other and to the tutoring process. Alex describes Carl as being very patient, steadfast and he “does everything he can to help me

improve my reading skills.” Carl is glad that his love of reading motivated him to find such a rewarding experience.

Rancy Breece

“I am doing hearts work and the rewards are better than pay!”

Though the time was relatively short, Rancy never forgot his first experience tutoring an adult learner through READ in 1989. He returned to READ in 2012 to take on another student giving his passion for reading. He was paired with his student, Sharon, whom he considers, “the perfect student.” They meet regularly at the READ office or a local coffee shop. He is amazed at the progress she’s made over the past two years and her courage in taking on new challenges. Rancy was proud to see Sharon accept the role as guest speaker at READ’s learner and tutor trainings, a job she never dreamed of doing before. In addition to carving out time to tutor Sharon, Rancy taught three job readiness classes over the past year using his professional experience as a job developer and job coach. Students who attended his classes received customized training in writing resumes, searching for jobs online, interviewing, and career management. “Volunteering has impacted so many aspects of my life,” Rancy admits, “the rewards are better than pay.”



Lora Daines

“Someone out there is waiting for you!”

Lora is passionate about reading. As a child, she read Nancy Drew mysteries, books by Beverly Cleary — just about anything she could get her hands on. Reading is a part of her identity. So when she looked online for volunteer opportunities and found READ/San Diego, she knew she’d found a perfect fit. She felt excited that sharing her love of reading could open new doors — an entirely new world — for someone. Since completing tutor training in April 2012, Lora has worked with seven adult learners, both one-on-one and in small groups. She’s worked with two students for over a year now and is impressed by their progress. She feels inspired by their finding time in their busy lives to show up twice each week with smiles on their faces, hungry for knowledge. Lora says she continues to be delighted by the passion of tutors and students in the program. She remarks, “The commitment each group embraces really is a beautiful sight. I’m thankful everyday to be a part of such a program.” Lora continues, “Volunteering is truly life changing. Once you start helping others, and give your time to people and causes you

believe in, you realize on a greater level that the world is a very big place. I was looking for something to commit to that would help me move out of the comfort zone of my inner circle and routine, and to widen my horizon. READ allowed me this opportunity.” To anyone considering volunteering, Lora advises, “Just do it! Someone out there is waiting for you!”

Linda Gregg

“When my student feels good, I feel good.”

“I have worked with a man from Somalia, a woman from Vietnam, a young man from Guatemala, and now I’m with my current student from El Salvador. I have been so impressed with the dedication, the motivation, and the enthusiasm of each of my adult students, all of who left their native countries under very scary circumstances to come to the U.S.” says Linda Gregg, a retired first grade reading recovery teacher. “My knowledge of phonics, world events, homophones, and explaining American idioms has been a challenge as well as an enjoyment for me. Tutoring is one of the most rewarding volunteer jobs you can do!” she says. Linda also recalls reading to a group of little children years ago and realizing this was what she was meant to do. She had the same conviction when she started tutoring with READ/San Diego. “It’s the best training as a teacher I’ve ever had” she says and “the staff is very helpful and available.” Credit truly goes to tutors such as Linda, who are willing to ask for help, submit monthly reports, believe in their learners and stay committed to the literacy effort. Six years of volunteer tutoring has led her to recommend, “TRY IT. It is lots of fun and you and your learner become good friends.”



Dorothy Kwiat

“If you really want to make a difference in the world, just start with one person.”

After Dorothy’s retirement, she wanted to try different things. She spent time working with children in a variety of settings. After she learned about READ/San Diego though, she felt this was something she could do and enjoy doing. Tutoring for READ/San Diego has changed her life and has reinforced her perspective on people. “We all want the same things: education, a nice neighborhood, and to contribute to society, no matter our background,” Dorothy states. She is passionate about teaching and she is passionate about recruiting more tutors and students for the READ/San Diego program. “Volunteering has made her a happier person because I’m doing something for my life.

[Teaching an adult literacy skills] is something that’s totally me. It makes me

feel good about myself.” Just as importantly, tutoring made an impact on her learner’s life as well. “I’m not just changing Hinda’s life; I’m changing the entire family. She’s helping with homework. She’s getting books out of the library.” Dorothy says that her learner loves to learn and shared this exchange from their first meeting. “I told her, ‘I am determined to teach you if you are determined to learn.’ Hinda put her hand to her heart and said, ‘I am determined to learn.’” This was over two years ago and they have been working together ever since. Dorothy has praise for Hinda, noting that “she has good study habits, is enthusiastic and responsible...you can count on Hinda. She has so many questions and has the confidence to ask them. If I misspell a word, she’ll catch me. We read maps, balance checkbooks, math...people have to have a reason to learn. She’s a sponge. She wants to be a nurse.” Before, they were tutor and student. Now they are a team working together. “It’s like we’re old friends,” Dorothy says. “Now we want to accomplish something.” Dorothy doesn’t plan to stop tutoring anytime soon, vowing, “I intend to do this until my brain doesn’t work anymore.”

Catherine Pfister

“A little effort can help someone a lot.”

Catherine Pfister retired with the intention of traveling for awhile and then perhaps returning to work. However once she found READ/San Diego, she felt that her time was better spent in helping others meet their educational and literacy goals. Volunteering in the past with various organizations showed Catherine how important it is to read and write well. Her work with Amnesty International and other groups exposed her to problems in society and the lack of opportunities available to those who struggle with reading and writing. She comments, “People could be helped if someone took the time.” Having always been interested in adult literacy, Catherine dove right in. She’s worked with three learners since joining READ/San Diego in 2013. She attributes her success with three different students to understanding their different situations, and to being someone they feel they can talk with about their lives and what they hope to accomplish. This in turn has shaped her personal goals for tutoring. Reflecting on her 226 instructional hours and her learners’ accomplishments Catherine states, “I admire them a lot for their perseverance and dedication; I know they will be successful.”



Glenn Risolo

“The reward is that you feel you’re making a positive impact and that feels good.”

A frequent library user, Glenn grew up with a love of reading. He was drawn to tutoring out of his curiosity for learning and teaching. “Helping people stay excited about learning has always been a goal of mine,” he enthuses. “I’ve always loved learning and always helped friends. Tutoring has been a natural fit.” Over the past two years he and his student, Sandra, have worked on writing letters, sending email, learning new vocabulary, and word attack skills. “Brushing up on phonics was a challenge,” Glenn admits, “but I feel like I’m making a difference for her. I see how hard she is working and how committed she is to learning and doing her best. It inspires me.” Though he manages a busy branch library in the Clairemont area, Glenn makes time to meet with his Sandra twice a week after work. “It’s been a great fit. We’ve enjoyed working together,” Glenn reflects, “and tutoring helps me manage my time and stay organized.”

Elaine Rodman

“READ/San Diego has offered me a chance to make a difference in someone’s life and that is wonderful.”

Elaine Rodman discovered READ/San Diego in 2012 while researching volunteer opportunities at the Library. She was surprised to learn how many adults struggle with literacy. She loves words and the English language and felt maybe she could help. She says her experience teaching someone to read has added an amazing dimension to her life. “It’s opened my eyes to the plight of adults who cannot read — even at a primary level. I’ve done other volunteer work for many years but none has been as gratifying as watching my student have a more confident and enriched life.” Elaine notes that she never knew what dyslexia meant or how widespread it is. “Learning about this has caused me to delve into more research and challenged me to find new ways to communicate how to read,” she says. She’s enjoyed seeing her student’s weekly progress and increasing confidence. “I see her approach the computer and smart phone without the fear of not being able to read the screen. In this age of technology, how wonderful it is that e-mail will no longer be a threat to someone who has a learning disability.” Elaine is hopeful that her student will one day achieve her goal of writing her own memoir. Would she recommend volunteering with READ/San Diego? Absolutely! In fact, she hopes her schedule will allow her to take on an additional student this year. Elaine says, “READ/San Diego has offered me a chance to make a difference in someone’s life and that is a wonderful feeling.”



Denise Seyfarth

“Go in with an open mind and don’t be afraid. You’ll be happy you did!”

Retired and recently widowed, Denise decided it was time to volunteer and give back to society. Teaching reading was not a difficult volunteer choice for her. She knows there was a time in this country when it was against the law for African Americans to learn to read. She believes everyone should have this skill. Denise put her belief into practice by insuring that her own children as well as her grandchildren know how to read. Denise is an avid reader herself and she says you can always find her at the library. “I love reading,” she comments, “and I wanted to help open another person’s world and expand his or her opportunities.” Denise first found out about READ/San Diego through volunteermatch.com. She didn’t act on the idea however until she later picked up a flyer at her local library. “I was so afraid in the beginning,” reflects Denise. “Someone’s life is in your hands and you want to do your best for that person.” This conscientious attitude has made Denise a model tutor today. She’s been tutoring with READ/San Diego for over three years. She submits her monthly reports; keeps staff informed of her progress, and doesn’t hesitate to ask for help when needed. She was matched with her current learner in February 2012 and they have been making great strides ever since. Learning about another culture and helping her student reach her goals are two of Denise’s most outstanding accomplishments. “I pay more attention to world events and other cultures because of my relationship with my student today,” says Denise. Her advice to anyone considering volunteering is to “go in with an open mind and don’t be afraid. You’ll be happy you did!”

Frederick Stocker

“A great opportunity to get to know someone on a personal level.”

Fred grew up in a family that valued reading and education. He was taught the importance of reading for information, but also for the sheer pleasure of it. His father was a college professor and Fred always had good relationships with his teachers, so when he decided to look for volunteer opportunities, teaching was a natural fit. Coupled with his love of books and reading, Fred says READ/San Diego “just leapt out at me!” It was a good fit for Fred around since he also wanted to work with someone one-on-one. Fred completed tutor training in 2012 and was matched with his student, Eric, shortly thereafter. The team has been a success. Of his tutor Eric comments, “Fritz is challenging, encouraging and pushes me to the limit. He’s been just right for me and is doing a good job.” Fred is happy that he’s met someone who shares his love of learning. He says Eric is “ambitious in the finest sense. I’m fortunate.” Fred looks forward to his meetings with Eric. He reflects, “It’s powerful to see results rather than hoping for them.” Fred states that the most important thing he’s received from working with READ/San Diego is, “I got to know Eric Brunner.”



Mildred Massel Families for Literacy Award Winner



Masako Mori and Family

“I am so happy to now be able to read together and play together! This program taught me how.”

When Masako Mori moved to San Diego from Kobe, Japan in 2005, she relied on the English she’d learned in middle school in Japan. With practice, she was soon able to communicate well enough to be comfortable. When her son Alex was born, Masako had a new challenge — children’s books. “How am I to teach him to read?” she thought. Then, in 2012, she happened to visit the Serra Mesa Library while the Families for Literacy program was in session and decided to observe. The Families for Literacy coordinator spotted her, invited her in, and explained how the program could help her reach her goals. Masako knew she’d found the right program and she and her son Alex have been attending ever since. Alex enjoys joining the group in singing songs like, The ABC song, and playing games like Name Ball. He loves listening to the stories Ms. Stephanie reads to the kids and that he can take those very books home with him after each class. Masako and Alex especially enjoy making crafts such as a yummy felt pizza and a pizza oven made out of a shoe box. Masako consistently makes the effort to attend Family Days at City Heights and Malcolm X Libraries. At the annual Mother’s Day Tea Party, you’d spot her and Alex sharing a plate of mini sandwiches with a book in hand, talking about what’s happening to the characters of the story. Masako has become an outgoing advocate for the program too. She invites other families to attend FFL at Serra Mesa and helps them learn the ropes. Alex, who now attends preschool, has shown so much interest in reading that his teachers have noticed him reading everything around him, even signs and labels. If he doesn’t know a word, he wants someone to read it to him. Masako and Alex have made terrific progress and Masako’s confidence has grown. “Each time Masako steps through the door she has a bright smile and is ready to fill me in on all of Alex’s latest accomplishments,” says Stephanie. Masako says, “He loves reading! He’s learned so many new words; the ABC’s and sounds of the alphabet!”

Erika King Award Volunteer of the Year Award Winner

Angelica Marez

“Doing something that’s important with my time makes me proud!”

In 2011 Angelica, a mother of four, came to the library looking for a program that would help her teach her youngest sons — twins, Sammy and Danny — letter names, the sounds of the alphabet, and shape names and colors. Her friendly librarian steered her to READ/San Diego’s Families for Literacy and she’s been attending programs at the Malcolm X and City Heights libraries ever since. Angelica has always helped out during programs: setting up, cleaning up, and helping pass out supplies and snacks; but she wanted to do more. So when the FFL team put out a request for volunteers, Angelica was quick to answer the call. She’s helped out at the READ office making program reminder calls, sorting paperwork, and helping Ms. Stephanie with craft preparation — like cutting a whole lot of paper ice-cream cones and monster feet for Family Day! Angelica has also served at outreach booths during community gatherings like the YMCA Healthy Kids Day events. She’s known for her flexibility, team spirit, and can do attitude. Plus, she brings her bright personality to everything she does. Whether patiently helping children trace their tiny hands to make cute fish bookmarks or warmly engaging parents to tell them about her experience in the program and its benefits to her family, Angelica always shares a generous smile. She says that her time spent volunteering for READ/San Diego has given her new skills and increased confidence. She sees it as an opportunity to work at what she really enjoys doing: engaging with people, doing crafts, helping people, just having fun. She says, “You can learn a lot about yourself when you volunteer. Doing something that’s important with my time make me proud!”



Clifford Braden Office Volunteer of the Year Award

Jo Ann Olson

“Volunteering has given me a much bigger world view of society and the people who live in my city.”

Jo Ann left special education instruction in 2007, but she missed teaching and wanted to volunteer doing something she would enjoy. Since completing READ’s tutor training nearly four years ago, Jo Ann has tutored two adult learners one-to-one and has taught six small groups. Over the past year she has taught three financial literacy classes for READ students focused on budgeting, understanding credit, and predatory lending. “It was very empowering to be able to bring together a program from the ground up and to see it evolve and succeed,” Jo Ann remarks. In addition to making time for teaching, Jo Ann also spends two afternoons each week at the READ office assisting with special projects and front office tasks including greeting customers, making follow up calls, and many other assignments. Jo Ann admits, “I swore years ago I would never work in an office again; I hated the usual office politics. But at READ those dynamics don’t come into



play. The READ staff is committed to their mission. I am able to connect with all of them at a very real level. The office is truly a team.” Jo Ann has seen the program grow since she started and comments, “READ moved from its prior Malcolm X Library location to the new downtown library, which has allowed the program to grow and prosper by leaps and bounds. I feel very grateful that I have been able to be part of this important transition and evolution in the program.” When asked what she’d say to convince someone to become a volunteer, Jo Ann didn’t hesitate, “I would say that if they truly want to be happy, volunteering to help others read is one of the most fulfilling things one can do. By sharing that skill with others, you are opening a whole new world for them. All it takes is one volunteer helping one learner at a time. If we all did that, then there would no longer be any literacy problems in our country.”

Dale Lovell Literacy Advocate Award

Lourdes Garcia

“Our kids can do much more than be in gangs. I am the voice of those children to be sure that the goal of education is achieved in my community — that our kids can excel too. I have to be their voice.”

Lourdes began her advocacy career by first advocating for herself and her daughters. In 2006, she went to the library looking for a family reading program. She’s been attending Families for Literacy (FFL) ever since. Lourdes is passionate about literacy and education. She’s brought many families to the program over the years. And, when her daughters started school, she got involved in the school parents’ group. She inspired, and encouraged, other parents to get involved, too. A natural leader, when she spoke to parents about the FFL pilot program at Horton Elementary, they rushed to sign up. Lourdes co-taught the program with READ staff, sharing what she’d learned during her years in FFL. She feels the experience built her confidence as a teacher and parent leader.

“The parents trust me now. I learned that if I can help my child, I can help other children.” In 2013, she joined Platicando Con Mi Gente, a group of residents working to build leadership in the Latino community in Southeast San Diego. Lourdes is proud of her work with the group, especially planning and implementing events like the National Night Out @ Gompers Park and the Día de los Muertos celebration at the Jacobs Center. These events bring families together to revitalize their neighborhoods, reconnect with their culture, and support literacy in every language. Lourdes is also a member of, and serves on several action teams of, the Diamond Educational Excellence Partnership — a collaborative committed to improving educational outcomes for children in the Diamond Community. Her future aspirations? To see her girls grow and reach for the stars. And, “Maybe someday I’ll be a lawyer, or a teacher,” she muses. “I have the passion I had before, but then I didn’t have the confidence. Now, I know I can help people. I can help children. Our kids can do much more than be in gangs. I am the voice of those children to be sure that the goal of education is achieved in my community — that our kids can excel too. I have to be their voice.”



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