

Literacy Links

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a newsletter for volunteer tutors

editor, Peggy L. Murphy, Portland Literacy Council

Londer Center Offers Hope to GED Seekers

By Carole Scholl and Peggy L. Murphy

The Portland metro area has many resources available for adults seeking a GED including community colleges, libraries, and nonprofit groups. Londer Learning Center, a Multnomah County program, serves an often-forgotten group in our community: young people on parole or probation.

Last October, members of the Portland Literacy Council Board assisted at and helped sponsor Londer Learning Center's first GED Low-Cost Testing Event. This event was open to any community member who wanted advice or an opportunity to take some of the GED tests at a reduced rate.

The Londer Learning Center is a GED, ESL, and basic skills program for adults, 18 and over, who are on probation or parole. The Center serves about 1,000 young adults each year - high school dropouts who have been referred to Londer by courts, judges, and probation officers. Many are in recovery programs and most are unemployed. Only 30 percent of the Londer students read at GED levels; 70 percent read at 8th grade levels and below.

Students at Londer are working to change their lives. Most had negative school experiences, and are surprised to find that learning can be a good, rewarding experience. Success in school often leads to success in other areas of their lives. It may become easier to find work, pursue college dreams, and help children with homework. Students learn strategies to approach reading and writing, as well as dealing with math anxiety. Perhaps most important, they learn they are not failures.

A second community GED event is expected this spring at the Londer Center, and they will again seek volunteers. Lest anyone think that getting through high school is easy or that the need to help people get GEDs is unimportant, please keep in mind that over 350,000 Oregonians 18 years and older lack a high school diploma (U.S. Census Bureau American FactFinder). Consider giving the Londer Center a few hours of your time.

Carole Scholl is the Manager of the Londer Learning Center.

The Tutor's Surprise

By Kris Magaurn

Literacy Links asked Kris Magaurn why she volunteered to help at the Londer Center Community GED Event, and what she got out of it. In her own words:

"I offered to help at the GED intake at the Londer Center in October, expecting to do intakes on the students, but I ended up in a tutoring session with a young man who made me realize once again why I love to work with adults.

"My 'student' had learned English by the time he was 10, but it was never spoken or read at home, so he didn't understand the nuances of the language that were being tested on the GED "practice" test I scored for him. He was not able to pass the practice test, but wanted to know every answer and work through every reason and rule. It seemed he needed much more schooling before he could come back and take the formal test. And yet, the following week he did return, and he did pass the test. What dedication and tenacity it takes to break through the language barrier and climb the ladder of success."

Kris Magaurn is the founder and chair of Portland Literacy Council; PCC Volunteer Literacy Tutor Coordinator at Tigard Senior Center; Volunteer Tutor Trainer; and coordinator of the Volunteer Tutor Conference.

Shawn Postera is a Well-traveled Tutor

By Peggy L. Murphy

Who would relocate to Portland, Oregon, because they like rain? Shawn Postera, a volunteer math tutor at Multnomah County's Londer Center assures me she loves our weather.

Shawn has over a decade of volunteer tutoring experience at the Franklin Learning Center in Minneapolis. Shawn's background includes stints as a librarian, community outreach in law enforcement, and volunteering at Multnomah County Library computer labs.

An avid mountain biker and dedicated bike commuter (remember she said she likes the rain), Shawn took first place in the Portland ShortTrack Mountain Bike Series Women's™ Singlespeed Category in 2010.

I asked Shawn why she was a volunteer math tutor. She describes herself as an average math student, but she fondly remembers her grandmother being her math tutor and adapting her teaching to Shawn's learning style. That's the connection between student and teacher that Shawn works to create with her students at Londer Center. She feels being trustworthy is crucial so students are willing to ask questions. She particularly enjoys teaching them how to find answers and developing critical thinking skills.

Shawn finds tutoring to be very powerful and it has followed her around the world. In 1999 in a Norwegian library, a Somali woman spoke to her in Norwegian. Shawn answered in English and told her about the programs at her learning center in Minneapolis. Shawn next saw the woman in 2004 in Minneapolis - her sisters lived in Minneapolis, and Shawn had tutored one of them. The woman asked Shawn to be her tutor, and Shawn helped her earn a GED.

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Shawn Postera continued

As any tutor can attest, tutoring develops enduring bonds. While still in Minneapolis, Shawn had placed an order in a coffee shop only to find herself short of cash. A voice behind her said, "I've got it." It turned out to be an Ethiopian student who was Shawn's first student in 1997, returning his gratitude for her help.

Peggy L. Murphy, editor of Literacy Links, is a volunteer literacy tutor, and while "certified" to tutor math feels more at home with words.

Go Ahead - Eat Your Homework!

By Peggy L. Murphy

As a third grader in Redmond, Oregon, I was expected to learn my times tables by the end of the year. A roll of five-flavor Lifesavers was my reward. I remember longing after those Lifesavers, sure I'd never earn them. Finally, in spring the prize was mine. That's the only tangible prize I remember earning in elementary school.

Imagine my interest when Shawn Postera told me she had a math exercise with "edible data" that she'd show me during our interview. I learned that a Fun-size package of M&Ms can demonstrate fractions, decimals, percentages, and bar and pie charts.

My math lesson created fractions for each color of M&M, determined percentages for a particular color, set up an Excel spreadsheet, and created charts to compare the contents of two fun-sized packages of M&Ms. I had no idea that so much learning could be found in such a small package.

Shawn likes the visuals of the "edible data" approach because they help adult students apply life experiences to learning, work and personal lives. One of her Londer Center students experienced useful insight after the "edible data" exercise. She packages chocolates and now knows how to calculate replacement supplies, demonstrating that when teaching adults, real-life applications have great meaning.

Opportunities

Free ESOL training workshop

How Do I Know What They Need? (needs assessment)

Saturday, January 22nd, 3 - 5 pm, Rockwood Library, 17917 SE Stark

Sponsored by Mt Hood Community College VLT

Presented by People-Places-Things. Space is limited to 20 participants.

To register, email info@pptpdx.com. Please include a little information about your teaching experience and who you're affiliated with.

Financial literacy

Multnomah County Library has a two-year grant to promote financial literacy among at-risk families and seniors. The program is designed to provide effective, unbiased information to get control of finances. Details at multcolib.org/ref/ or contact Multnomah County Library.

Upcoming Events

Volunteer Literacy Tutor Training - Tell a friend!
Jan. 22 & 29, 2011 at Clackamas Community College,
Harmony Campus OIT
Feb 19 & 26, 2011 at PCC Willow Creek Campus

Tutor Conference Online Registration - February 2011
See the PLC website in February

Annual Tutor Conference - March 19, 2011
Reed College - See you there!