

Literacy Links

Fall
2008

a newsletter for volunteer tutors

special editor, Kris Magaurn, *PCC Tutor Coordinator, Tigard Senior Center*

Oregon Literacy Closes its Doors

By Penny Russman, *Counselor, Volunteers of America InAct Program*

An article written by Katy Muldoon for the Oregonian on June 21, 2008 made this stunning announcement. The reporter went on to say that the non-profit agency “for 40 years enabled thousands of adults to find help with reading skills.” Reason cited for the closure was lack of financial viability.

Acting as an umbrella organization for the state’s numerous adult literacy projects, Oregon Literacy (or OLI as it was known) provided support and materials for tutors, as well as raised awareness for those who could not advocate for themselves. Peggy Murphy, one of

Oregon Literacy’s most outstanding volunteers and supporters, said that Oregon Literacy reached people even in the most remote corners of the state. She added, “at Oregon Literacy we used to say that literacy was more than enjoying a good book. Literacy impacts our lives every day, from reading directions on medicine bottles, to understanding a mortgage application, navigating a map, or following a bus schedule.”

At the time of its closing, Oregon Literacy was involved with several projects, and the future of some are still in doubt. The Literacy Line, established in 1987 see pg. 2

New Adult Literacy Coordinator at the Multnomah County Library

By Kris Magaurn, *Chair, Portland Literacy Council*

Melissa Madenski has been on the job for just a few weeks, but already she has met with many of the literacy groups in the Portland area and gained valuable information to help the library become a better resource and support for literacy programs involved in adult and family literacy. With a background in teaching (ESL, public school and college) and in grant coordination and resource work, Melissa brings much experience and expertise to her job as Adult Literacy Coordinator. In this new position for the Multnomah County Library, she feels her first priority is to determine what is happening in the literacy community and then to find ways that the library can assist these programs in reaching their goals. Currently, the library is offering Citizenship classes at two locations, Midland and Capital Hill. There are 5 more classes planned throughout the year. For more information, go to the Multnomah County Library home page (www.multcolib.org), click on “Services” and then on “Citizenship classes.” There are also several Talk Time groups meeting. For information, go to the library home page, click on “Classes and Events.”

Looking to the future, Melissa has a number of projects in mind. She hopes to have “tutor resource centers” in the

libraries, to increase the time available for student use of the literacy computer labs, to make the library website easier for learners to use and also have an Adult Literacy section on the website, and to make more GED materials available on the shelves. The North Portland Library is piloting a Learner Web project which should lead to more learners having access to their own learning plans via the library computers.



Melissa Madenski, new Adult Literacy Coordinator, Multnomah County Library

With all the resources the library has to offer, Melissa looks forward to helping people and programs find the resources that fit their needs and maintaining the “teamwork” efforts she sees in the Portland area.

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Learner Web Ready for Pilot Testing

By Emilia Gilroy-Sander

The Learner Web project is a free web- and telephone-based learning support tool for adults seeking to prepare for the GED, to improve their English language skills, or work toward other learning goals. The Learner Web (LW) is designed to support, not replace, existing educational resources and services in the community. According to a recent longitudinal study conducted by PSU, many adults participate in self-study activities, regardless of their literacy level and educational background. Also, many adults are unable to attend formal programs because of conflicts with work, transportation and/or childcare. The Learner Web aims to support these learners by offering a flexible and self-guided learning opportunity.

By creating a free online account, adult learners will be able to choose a learning goal from a list. For example, if a learner chooses the learning goal "Get My GED," they will be connected to relevant GED learning resources in the community and on the internet. At any step throughout the Learner Web, learners can call a toll-free number to connect them with a Helper. The Phone Helpers can provide assistance navigating the LW system or help with instructional material, such as how to multiply fractions.

One of the most important aspects of the Learner Web is that it is learner-centered. The learner has their own personalized account within the system that allows them to save their work and log back in at a later time to continue where they left off. The learner can also view resources based on their interests indicated in their profile. For example, a learner is preparing for the GED and also has an interest in sports. The learner could be matched with math resources involving sports statistics, or could be reading a story about the history of baseball.

The Learner Web is now approaching the second year of a three-year national pilot project. In fall 2008 three sites in Portland will begin pilot testing the Learner Web. The pilot sites include Multnomah County Library, Portland Impact, and Portland Community College. Tutors can support learners by familiarizing themselves with the Learner Web. Visit www.learnerweb.org to learn more about the project and to view a demo of the Learner Web.

Promoting literacy in our community.

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OLI continued from pg. 1

for the purpose of giving individuals a place to call for information about tutoring or tutor training handled about 1000 inquiries a year, and was expanded to become the statewide TutorHelpLine five years ago. The future of the Literacy Line is unknown. Presently, no organization has stepped up to absorb the service. **The Easy Voters' Guide**, a joint project among the League of Women Voters of Oregon Education Fund, Disability Rights Oregon, and Oregon Literacy, will continue to be published through the LWV, and will be ready for distribution at the end of September 2008 in both English and Spanish. Copies will be available at most libraries, all election offices, and online at www.VoteSource.org.

For more information call the State League of Women Voters Office in Salem, at 503-581-5722. The **OLI Help Center**, a library of literacy materials, has been given to the Portland Literacy Council. The Council plans to donate the materials to volunteer tutors at the annual Tutor Conference in March. The **OLI website** will be absorbed, in part, by PLC, including but not limited to the Tutor Orientation. PLC will also provide helpful links to literacy services in the Portland Metro area. Finally, PLC was given some historical memoirs and early slide shows of Dr. Frank Laubach, an educator who, as Ms Muldoon stated in her June 21 article, was dedicated to stamping out illiteracy. A talk he gave in Portland in 1966 provided the inspiration for four local area women, Phyllis Newland, Martha Entler, Nancy Smith and Pat Gerrard to establish what we have come to know as Oregon Literacy, Inc. in 1967. There *see pg. 3*

Super Tutor

By Peter Talbot

When you meet Arnold Vinnard, you may be tempted to look for a cape under his sport coat. Arnold truly qualifies as a “Super Tutor.”

In the early 80’s, Arnold had tutored at PCC as a classroom aide, and prior to that had done some classroom tutoring of Southeast Asian refugees in Seattle. After being retired for two years from the Bonneville Power Administration, Arnold looked around for a way to employ his excess time and energies. He discovered the Volunteer Literacy Tutor (VLT) program online and contacted Kay Talbot, the VLT Coordinator at PCC-Sylvania. Kay was impressed with his willingness to learn as much as he could about the tutoring process. Arnold not only completed the first available tutor training sessions, he also attended the Spring 2007 Tutor Conference at Reed College.

Arnold was placed as a Level 1 ESOL classroom aide during the Spring 2007 term, working with individuals who were struggling to keep up with the class. During the Summer term, Arnold continued to work as a classroom aide and also took on his first one-on-one tutoring assignment with Anthony, an immigrant from Viet Nam and U.S. citizen. Thus began a story of a remarkably motivated student teaming with an extraordinarily committed tutor to achieve “super” results.

Anthony had been laid off from his job and needed to upgrade his English skills in order to qualify for the re-training program in Auto Body Repair at PCC Rock Creek. In pre-testing for the ESOL program, Anthony scored at Level 2. In order to enter the Auto Body program, he would need to test at Level 4! In addition, Anthony was non-literate in his native language. Arnold knew he had a tall building to leap when he heard that Anthony would need to reach Level 4 in less than a year before his re-training subsidy ran out.

Typically, Arnold would meet with Anthony for two hours in the early morning, then while Anthony attended ESOL classes, Arnold worked as a classroom aide. After Anthony’s class, they would get together for another two hour session. Anthony credits Arnold’s tutoring with making it possible for him to pass Level 2 in Summer, Level 3 in Fall, and Level 4 in Winter. Those of us who are involved in tutoring know what a remarkable achievement this represents.



Tutor Arnold Vinnard with his student Anthony Phan

The average VLT tutor volunteers about 75 to 100 hours per year. Last year, Arnold volunteered 582 hours! A line from one of his e-mails to Kay tells you something about his level of commitment to Anthony’s goals: “He’d like more tutoring time than the two 4 hour sessions per week we have together, so we may ramp it up a bit in the next month or two.”

When asked “What does tutoring mean to you?” Arnold replied: “It feels good to be a part of an effective organization providing an essential community service. The faculty and staff are competent professionals that really care about the students and provide me with the extra advice and support I need to be an effective volunteer. At the end of the day I go home thinking I really enjoyed my time with my students and that my efforts were valuable and appreciated.”

OLI continued from pg. 2

were other collaborative projects, which we hope will continue to flourish. Kathleen Holloway, PCC Volunteer Tutor Coordinator and long time supporter of Oregon Literacy, had this to say: “OLI had become instrumental in a number of projects that have a great deal of potential for the literacy community in Oregon. Some of these are the **Learner Web**, **Chalk it Up for Literacy**, and development of a new training model for volunteer tutors in the state (LIFT). OLI collaborated with us and supported our program at PCC in so many ways. We were disheartened and shocked to learn that the organization had to fold. It is a great loss to our community.” However, the literacy community in this state is strong and dedicated to moving on. OLI is now the inspiration for us to support the students and tutors who look to our programs for guidance and validation. The Portland Literacy Council website (www.portlandliteracy.org) will soon be updated to include OLI website information that is relevant to the Portland area.

Announcements



Save the Date! Volunteer Tutor Conference

March 14, 2009 at Reed College

The Easy Voters' Guide

The League of Women Voters quick guide to the November 4, 2008 General Election. Available online at www.VoteSource.org and at most libraries.



2008 VLT Retreat Donors

A hearty "thank you" to the following donors for this year's door prizes, and to Peter Talbot for his tireless efforts in procuring them.

Backyard Bird Shop, 1440 NE Fremont

Cadillac Café, 1801 NE Broadway

Francis Restaurant, 2338 NE Alberta

Jamba Juice, 1307 NE 102nd Ave.

Marco's Café and Espresso Bar, 7910 SW 35th

Music Millennium, 3158 E. Burnside

Navarre, 10 NE 28th

Old Wives' Tales, 1300 E. Burnside

Starbucks, 1311 NW 23rd

Starbucks, 2803 E. Burnside

Starbucks, 3507 NE Fremont

Starbucks, 4437 SE 39th Avenue

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