

Summer 2026

- 2 A Passion for Educational Equity
- 3 Helping Others Move Forward
- 4 First Person: D'Arcy
- 4 From Learner to Teacher

The SPARK

CELEBRATING SUCCESSES SPARKED BY YOU!



Math student James beams with pride after mastering a lesson using manipulatives, which help students conceptualize number systems and place value.

OUR MISSION IN ACTION

The people behind our mission—and the stories that inspire it.

Every success at Literacy Pittsburgh begins with people. From dedicated instructors and volunteers to determined learners and generous donors, each person plays a vital role in creating better lives through learning.

In this issue, you'll meet some of the remarkable individuals behind our work. Their experiences offer a glimpse into the passion, perseverance, and purpose that define our community. Their stories and so many others remind us that learning changes lives—and that it happens because people like them, and like you, make Literacy Pittsburgh a place where everyone has the opportunity to learn and grow. •

Scan the QR code to read expanded profiles of the students, volunteers, and staff featured in this issue.



SPOTLIGHT ON SUCCESS: MICHAEL

From the GED exam to the bar exam, thanks to you!

Michael has lived in Pittsburgh's East Suburbs for nearly his entire life. Although he attended Woodland Hills from kindergarten to 12th grade, Michael began to have difficulty focusing on schoolwork in his junior and senior years of high school. At the end of his senior year, he was a few credits short of graduating, and while there was a program to help him finish, he wasn't interested because all his friends were already moving on.

Around 2005, Michael's cousin, Colleen, who worked for what was

then Greater Pittsburgh Literacy Council, encouraged Michael to get his education on track. Michael enrolled in GED preparation classes and earned his high school equivalency shortly afterward.

"I don't think [a GED] necessarily tells you what you know or you don't know, but it at least gives you the key to unlock whatever it is that you want to unlock," Michael explains.

After spending some time in Florida, Michael decided to enroll in nursing school when he returned to Pittsburgh.



He completed a 16-month fast-track medical training program. He then secured a job at UPMC Shadyside as a medical-surgical nurse and later joined the IV team.

Beginning in 2019, Michael attended

Continued on page 2 >>

MICHAEL

Continued from page 1

classes to earn his bachelor's degree, completing it in December 2021. Once he secured this milestone, Michael decided to take an exciting new turn in his journey.

"I decided, why don't I try law school? So I took the LSAT and did well enough on it to get into Duquesne. So I started at Duquesne Law in August of 2022, and I graduated from there in May 2026. It was a long journey, but worthwhile."

A fellowship with the Allegheny County Bar Association Foundation led to a part-time internship, and upon graduating and passing the bar exam, to a job with Allegheny County. As an assistant county solicitor, he defends the county's interests in civil lawsuits.

Michael adds, "I've learned, don't ever close your eyes on an opportunity because you never know. You never know what could present itself tomorrow." •

A LIFELONG LEARNER: MEET DEB

As a retired attorney and former adjunct professor, Deb has always been passionate about teaching and tutoring. "It's one of the most rewarding things I can think of," she says.

Deb began tutoring at Literacy Pittsburgh before the pandemic and has tutored three students, one of whom earned his GED credential. In spring 2026, she also taught a writing class for English language learners. Some of her favorite memories from the class came from an assignment in which students wrote about something they liked or disliked about their home country.

She recalled that one student from Korea wrote about appreciating the diversity and freedom of expression in the United States, compared to the pressure to conform in her home country.

Another student wrote about climate change regulations in China, such as recycling.

"I asked her, 'Does it ever bother you that the government is pressuring you?' She replied, 'No, I think it's good,'" Deb recalls. "I thought that was very interesting."

For Deb, tutoring has expanded her perspectives while allowing her to make a meaningful impact. Her favorite part of tutoring is getting to interact with people from different cultures and walks of life. "It really takes me outside of myself and my little bubble," she says. Her advice to anyone considering becoming a tutor is simple: "Definitely do it. It's incredibly rewarding." •



A PASSION FOR EDUCATIONAL EQUITY: MEET ELIJAH



As our front desk enrollment coordinator, Elijah Bayuk greets every visitor to our Downtown Teaching Center.

"I do my best to be a friendly, helpful, and smiling face as the first person that many folks see from Literacy Pittsburgh," Elijah says.

He especially enjoys watching students progress along their journey. Elijah registers new students for orientation, greets

them on their first day of class—and again every morning as they move through our program.

"I think one of the great strengths of Literacy Pittsburgh is continuity; we have different offerings that help the same people at different points in their educational journey, and I love getting to watch that unfold in real time," Elijah explains.

A lifelong passion for educational equity led Elijah to Literacy Pittsburgh. Growing up, both of his parents were public school teachers in South Florida, and he attended public education himself. He got an up close look at the system's many merits and at the places where people might slip

through the cracks. Elijah knew after graduating Emory University that he wanted to go into non-profit work.

"Literacy Pittsburgh is an organization that is completely true to its mission statement: better lives through learning," Elijah says. "In my role, I have watched peoples' lives genuinely improve as a result of learning with us; they've found new and better-paying jobs, new skills, new areas of passion, and personal fulfillment. I watch it happen every day." •

HELPING OTHERS MOVE FORWARD: MEET KEVIN

A longtime tutor, Kevin Brand wanted to continue doing work he found rewarding after retiring and moving to Pittsburgh. In 2021, a search for volunteer opportunities led him to Literacy Pittsburgh, where he quickly discovered both purpose and connection.

In 2023, Kevin attended our annual GED graduation ceremony, an experience that would become a turning point in his journey with us.

“I was especially moved by the open mic segment,” he shares. “Hearing students and their families talk about what this achievement meant to them really stayed with me.”

Shortly afterward, he met with CEO Carey Harris to learn how he could contribute at a greater level, eventually joining the Board of Directors.

While Kevin supports Literacy Pittsburgh through board service and philanthropy, tutoring remains at the heart of his experience. As a math tutor, he brings both patience and enthusiasm to his students and is quick to challenge the idea that



Board member and tutor Kevin Brand organized a session this spring with AARP to help students complete their income taxes.

math has to be intimidating. “Math can be fun—yes, really,” he says.

For Kevin, the most meaningful moments are often the simplest. “When a student suddenly says, ‘I understand this now!’ that’s everything.” •

A NEW PATH IN A NEW COUNTRY: MEET KHIN KHIN

Originally from Myanmar, Khin Khin and her family fled to the United States in 2021 following a military coup. As journalists, she and her husband were in danger of arrest.

Khin Khin started with Literacy Pittsburgh in 2022, taking English, GED, digital skills, and career classes with a goal of working in the healthcare field as a diagnostic medical sonographer. “Having a clear goal motivates me to keep moving forward until I achieve it. I am excited to see how far I can

grow in a new country with a new career path.”

Following her lessons at Literacy Pittsburgh, Khin Khin graduated from Freedom House’s medical training program and accepted a position as a Nursing Assistant at UPMC Mercy.

She is deeply grateful to Literacy Pittsburgh. “It is a life-changing opportunity for an immigrant like me. They gave me the guidance, education, and confidence I needed to continue my career journey and succeed in the U.S.” •



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FIRST PERSON: MEET D'ARCY

A dear friend about my age had gotten her GED at Literacy Pittsburgh and had good things to say about the services. I needed to get a job, and, without a GED, my options were limited to manual labor or minimum wage.

I am here to get my GED, and hopefully I can take some classes to get certified with Google or learn Excel. I will be going on to higher learning—my goal is at least an associate degree in languages to become an interpreter. I grew up

in NYC, the West Bronx, and one of the great things about growing up in NYC is the many different cultures and languages, which I seem to have a gift for. Most Americans don't realize how very difficult the English language is to speak.

Within the first two months, I passed three of the four GED subjects: Science, Social Studies, and RLA (English). I could not have known that Science and Social Studies are things I have always been "into." I



joke with people that if I had been able to have a "normal" education, I would have been a nerd. I now come for just Math.

I feel more confident and somehow math has become exciting rather

than frustrating.

The people here are judgment-free and so supportive. My math teacher, Mary McNamee, she has been a literal Godsend, not just for me, but for all of us. •

FROM LEARNER TO TEACHER: MEET ALEV



"Literacy Pittsburgh is meaningful to me because I have experienced the organization from multiple perspectives—as a student, a staff member, and now an instructor."

Alev Kerenciler, a native of Turkey, teaches a variety of

digital literacy and workforce development courses, including Microsoft Office, Google Workspace, and bookkeeping. She has also earned certifications in Microsoft Excel and Intuit Bookkeeping and continues to expand her knowledge, learning about artificial

intelligence and emerging technologies.

"Every day I have the chance to help students overcome challenges, celebrate their achievements, and move closer to the future they want. Being part of that journey is something I value very much." •

LITERACY PITTSBURGH

OUR MISSION

Better lives through learning.

OUR VISION

A more inclusive and productive community driven by access to education.

OUR VALUES

- We believe that all people deserve the opportunity to learn in a place where their strengths are celebrated.
- We respect all people and their ability to shape their own lives.
- We have a duty to earn the trust of everyone we work with.
- Our collective well-being depends on welcoming diverse cultures and perspectives.
- As a leader, we embrace the responsibility to innovate, model best practices, and grow.



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A copy of the official registration and financial information for Literacy Pittsburgh may be obtained from the PA Department of State by calling toll free, within PA, 1-800-732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement.

