

Summer 2025

- 2 Cultivating Language Skills and Resilience
- 2 10 Years of Tutoring
- 3 More Than One Path to Success
- 4 Opening Doors to Opportunity

The SPARK

CELEBRATING SUCCESSES SPARKED BY YOU!



Twice a year, Literacy Pittsburgh's full staff—currently 72 strong—gather for a retreat to reconnect with each other, gain new skills, and ensure alignment with agency priorities. In July, we met at Temple Sinai, with sessions that focused on clear communication, the status of organizational health and goals, new learning options for students, and finally, techniques for self-care in the midst of uncertainty.

SPOTLIGHT ON SUCCESS: TROY

**Embarking on
a life-changing
career thanks
to you!**

Troy, like many Americans, dreamed of creating a better life for his family. He sought a career that would provide financial security and offer potential for growth. Troy found this opportunity in the construction field. As a first step toward his dream, he enrolled in Introduction to the Construction Trades, a pre-apprenticeship program offered by Pittsburgh Gateways. It was there that he met Literacy Pittsburgh math teacher Tina Burns. Tina said, "Troy focused

on every math concept, working hard to master it. He listened to every guest speaker, union member, and concept, and he took the program very seriously." Troy's hard work paid off, and he was hired by Laborers' Union Local 1058. He won Apprentice of the Year for the region and gave a speech for the Department of Labor about how the trades changed his life.

Troy stated that he is working hard, enjoying the work, and would like to stress to anyone going into the trades that is



worth it. He comes home each evening tired, but he goes back out every day, proud to help rebuild Pittsburgh.

Troy's success is a great example of how collaboration and hard work changes lives. •

THE FACES OF LITERACY PITTSBURGH

Meet the community allowing us to fulfill our mission of better lives through learning.

People make an organization truly special and Literacy Pittsburgh is no exception. In this issue, we offer an opportunity to meet some of the people who are fulfilling our mission of better lives through learning.

Meet Emily, an English Language Learning instructor, Henry, a tutor in the Beaver area, Janel, a GED grad, and others. Each has their own story to tell and their own reasons why Literacy Pittsburgh is meaningful to them. We are grateful for the many ways they and you make Literacy Pittsburgh a great place to work and to learn. Thank you! •

BETTER LIVES THROUGH LEARNING

CULTIVATING LANGUAGE SKILLS AND RESILIENCE: MEET EMILY

Emily Harrer teaches English language learners at Literacy Pittsburgh. She acknowledges that language learning is a long and daunting process. Patience and support is essential. “I strive to help students feel like whole, valuable, and smart people—regardless of their English level or performance in class on any given day,” Emily said.

She especially loves lessons in the early days of class when students are just getting to know each other. “I love watching the connections students find between each other,” Emily said.

A Pittsburgh native, Emily taught English overseas in China and Tunisia before deciding to return home last year. “I draw so much meaning and purpose from my students,” she said. “My students show up with courage and resilience, and inspire me to continue growing and learning as well.”



REFLECTIONS ON 10 YEARS OF TUTORING: MEET HENRY

Henry Wilde has a mission: take math students from “I’ll never understand this” to graduation. After a decade of doing just that, for Henry it never gets old. “After 10 years, I still tell my wife I really enjoy tutoring,” Henry says. He loves getting that hard earned message saying someone passed their test. That love shows in his work. Four of Henry’s students passed the GED exams so far this year, including Sylvia, pictured with Henry at our spring GED Graduation Celebration.

Henry’s father earned his own GED in 1953 while juggling a full-time job, a farm, and five children. “I tutor in honor of him,” Henry says. “And because I know how challenging life can be without a high school diploma.”

Henry, himself, is proof of what data shows of adult education—that the greatest impact is often on the next generation. Henry graduated Westminster College with a degree in mathematics and spent 21 years as CEO of a software company before retiring in 2014.



Henry Wilde celebrates his student Sylvia’s achievement at our spring GED Graduation.

During his time volunteering, Henry has developed tools and learning pathways with student needs and barriers in mind, even using twelve different online GED practice tests to generate his own pretest. Henry believes this individual attention can make all the difference for students. Connecting to students as individuals builds confidence and a strong foundation for success. Henry has made a lasting effect on the lives of some many students. Thank you for 10 years of service to adult education, Henry! •

GIVING BACK: MEET LAURA

Languages fascinate volunteer tutor Laura Tomokiyo, and she has incorporated that passion into her professional life, working with speech technology as well as education.

“In my language learning journey, I was lucky enough to be surrounded by people who wanted to help me learn,” Laura said. “I wanted to give some of that back.”

Her current student is from Japan, and while she had formal education in English, day-to-day conversation with native English speakers can still be challenging. Listening ability and speaking fluency are the focus of their sessions.

Laura says of Literacy Pittsburgh: “I love that it is a free program that is open to anyone in Pittsburgh who wants to learn.” •



MORE THAN ONE PATH TO SUCCESS: MEET JANEL

Janel Griffin, earned her GED credential in 2024 and was invited to address this year's graduates at our GED Graduation Celebration. In her remarks, she emphasized the importance of persevering on one's own path.

"Halfway through the pandemic, my job informed us that we were considered non-essential," Janel explains. "I knew I needed to return to school and pursue an education." When she received her high school transcript, she was shocked to see that it was incomplete. Janel tried to unravel the situation for weeks and finally decided to find another way to pursue her goals: earn a GED credential.

She was impressed with how welcoming everyone was at Literacy Pittsburgh but dismayed

that her test scores were lower than she expected. "Enrollment Coordinator Sierra Brown told me, 'Don't worry—this happens often. You'll brush up on it, and everything will start to come back to you,'" Janel said. "And she was right. I pushed through and started excelling."

When a concussion from a car accident slowed her progress, her teachers, Terra Teets and Emily Laughlin, encouraged her to give herself grace and be patient with her recovery. "I'll remember that for the rest of my life," Janel said. "Words of encouragement, especially when, as a child, you never heard them very often, will set a fire in a person so bright. I'll always carry it with me."

Janel attends CCAC with a 3.7 GPA and was accepted into



2024 grad Janel spoke at this year's GED Celebration. She holds a 3.7 GPA at CCAC and will begin the nursing program this fall.

the 2025-26 nursing program. She wants to pursue a master's degree in nursing. "I learned at a young age by taking care of my elderly aunts," she said. "I want to give back and bridge that gap for women and access to healthcare." •

CONNECTING STUDENTS TO RESOURCES: MEET EZEKIELI



Ezekieli Seti, a graduate of Allegheny College, joined the Literacy Pittsburgh staff in 2024 as a service coordinator

in our Student Services Department. In this role, he helps to connect students with resources—such as bus passes, heating assistance, and activities for their children—so they can better focus on learning as well as increase their sense of agency.

"I choose to work at Literacy Pittsburgh to engage with the community serving a wide range of

demographics," said Ezekieli. "The work we do is intentional and a great service for humanity."

His favorite project is keeping Literacy Pittsburgh's Free Cabinet stocked with basic essentials donated through our Amazon Wishlist and supplied by partners such as United Way and GlobalLinks. •

LITERACY PITTSBURGH BOARD OF DIRECTORS

President

Andrea Clark-Smith UPMC

Vice President

Leslie Gromis Baker Buchanan Ingersoll & Rooney

Secretary

Ellen Freeman Freeman Immigration Law Group

Treasurer

Danell R. Cooper, CPA KidsVoice

Immediate Past President

Steven Sokoloski Highmark Health

Scott Bartlett Rich Foods

Earl Buford CAEL

Nancy J. Crouthamel Civic Volunteer

Eileen Duffield Highmark Wholecare

Mimi Fairman Carnegie Mellon University

Rich Fitzgerald Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission

Richard M. Heiser FedEx Ground

Kevin Kinross Carey Group

Michael E. Lamb McNees

Sharlene Lewis Covestro

Steve Mazza Eastern Atlantic States

Regional Council of Carpenters

Tina L. Myles Pressley Ridge

Katie O'Connor Jackson Lewis PC

Rebecca Roadman University of Pittsburgh

Bill Southern Block Communications

Jen Styran Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh

Kathleen M. Sullivan Clark Hill

Erin Weber Raymond James

Dr. Yaqi Wo PPG Industries

NEW LIFE, NEW LANGUAGE, NEW JOB: MEET ANGELI

Angeli arrived in the U.S. from the Philippines almost 17 months ago to reunite with her husband and build a life here. Her sister-in-law told her about Literacy Pittsburgh and Angeli started English classes in September.

"I recognized the importance of effective communication in my daily life, work, and relationships," Angeli said.

For Angeli, learning



Angeli came to the U.S. last year and Literacy Pittsburgh helped her learn English and get her dream job as a caregiver.

at Literacy Pittsburgh has been "a wonderful experience."

In November, Angeli met with Career Advisor Dru Pelter. "She was very eager to start

working, and she told me she had experience with caregiving," Dru said. He forwarded her an opportunity from Community Life for a nurse aide trainee.

She said it was exactly the type of job she was looking for!

In January, Dru got a call from his contact at Community Life saying that they had hired Angeli. "She said Angeli was the star of the class among potential hires!" Dru said. "She told me, 'Please, if you know of more students like Angeli, send them to me!' Safe to say Angeli left quite an impression." •

OPENING DOORS TO OPPORTUNITY: MEET PEGGY

Peggy O'Rourke's grandparents inspired her passion for Literacy Pittsburgh. Both sets of her grandparents were immigrants from Romania and Lithuania. They struggled to learn English. Peggy carried that with her and first volunteered as an English Language

Learning tutor for an organization in Virginia.

When she and her husband moved to Pittsburgh 20 years ago, she became connected to Literacy Pittsburgh, first as a tutor, and later as a board member. Peggy no longer tutors, but Literacy Pittsburgh still holds a special place in

her heart, and she has been a faithful donor for years.

"Literacy Pittsburgh helps students become good citizens and good community members," Peggy said. "Literacy Pittsburgh gives them more opportunities." •



Peggy O'Rourke shares her love of literacy with a young neighbor from Hong Kong.

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.



411 Seventh Avenue, Suite 525
Pittsburgh, PA 15219
(412) 393-7600
www.literacypittsburgh.org

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.

