

LITERACY WINTER 2022 ILLINOIS

Jesse White
Secretary of State
& State Librarian

Literacy programs are again demonstrating their resilient nature in the midst of the pandemic. Programs around the state are creatively addressing the challenge of providing services to adult learners when face-to-face contact is limited and social distancing is required. Adult learners have also risen to the challenge of adapting to the situation, showing that a desire to learn can overcome any barrier.

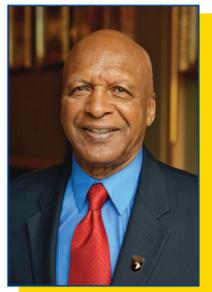
Libraries and literacy programs recently took part in the 30th Annual Family Reading Night by holding events and encouraging families to turn off televisions, computers, phones, video games and other electronic devices, and spend time reading together. This edition will highlight some of the events held around the state.

As a reminder, each year literacy programs nominate adult learners and volunteer tutors for recognition through the Spotlight on Achievement and Spotlight on Service Awards. Take the time to nominate and recognize outstanding learners and tutors in your program.

Best wishes for continued success in 2022.

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Bouncing back from the pandemic — stories from literacy programs

Literacy programs around the state have begun to recover from the initial impact of the pandemic. Thanks to forward thinking and the ability to pivot quickly, program staff changed the way tutoring and instruction takes place. Programs are continuing to transition from traditional methods to hybrid models, incorporating a mixture of remote and in-person learning. It is no secret that the pandemic has disrupted everyone's life in some manner causing each of us to make adjustments to normal daily activities. The quarantine and social distancing requirements forced literacy programs to rethink and reinvent the delivery of services to both adult learners and families. As COVID-19 rules continue to change daily, programs have been able to give learners and families options to continue learning with only minor disruptions. Read on to learn about two literacy programs, their initial reactions and the adjustments they made to adapt to the "new normal."

Joliet Junior College, Department of Adult Education and Literacy (DAEL)

The past year and a half had a huge impact on the DAEL adult learners and its families as the program transitioned from shock to recovery, evolving and reviewing past practices for a new world. Prior to the pandemic, its Adult Volunteer Literacy and Penny Sevens Family Literacy programs served more than 40 families and an additional 170 individual adult learners with the assistance of 130 volunteer tutors. Instruction was completely in person at college campuses, schools and libraries. In March 2020, everything changed. The learners and their families experienced remote learning with their children, time constraints, child care shortages for those who are essential workers, challenges receiving technology for their children



The pandemic did not deter Beatriz Muritto, an adult learner at Joliet Junior College, from attending tutoring sessions and becoming a U.S. citizen.

or themselves, and often unemployment or illness within their families. The immediate impact on the programs was devastating, as 25% of tutors chose not to continue due to their fears of infection, leaving many students without support. More than half of the students enrolled in the family literacy program hesitated to continue.

Through the innovative use of video conferencing software, retraining staff, teachers, tutors and cooperation

(cont. on pg. 3)

Family Reading Night 2021 highlights from around the state

The 30th annual Family Reading Night (FRN) sponsored by the Secretary of State's office was held statewide in November. The event encourages families to spend time reading together. "Reading as a family creates a positive learning environment and has been proven to be beneficial for the development of language skills in children," said Secretary of State and State Librarian Jesse White.

In addition to families reading at home together, many agencies around the state held special events both in person and virtually. The following are some of the activities that were held:

In Chester, the Regional Office of Education #45 held an event for the parents and children in the English as a Second Language (ESL) classes and the adult general education classes. A highlight of the evening was when a family learning English read aloud to the group. Two of the daughters read from a book in "The Baby-Sitters Club" series, while the father of the girls read from a book about the U.S. Constitution that the literacy program uses to teach civics. Participants had a group discussion about the books and then enjoyed snacks together.

South Suburban College's Adult Volunteer Literacy Program in South Holland invited all residents of the college district to a virtual event using Facebook live that included two guest readers, along with the college's adult literacy grant coordinator Dianne Needles reading "Fiona Flamingo."

Eric Stiles and his puppet read the book "The Hare and the Tortoise," while college trustee Joseph Whittington read the children's book that he authored and illustrated, "What Does a Goldfish in a Bowl Know About a River." To access the archived video from the evening, go to South Suburban College's Facebook page and click on videos.

Warren CUSD #205 and the Warren Township Public Library collaborated and held a virtual event that included books read by the librarian from the Warren Township Public Library, the principal from Warren Grade School, and the mayor of Warren who is also an officer with the Jo Daviess County Sheriff's office. Students were given a make your own book kit to take home that included a snack for the evening. "The Adventures of the Itty Bitty Frog," "The Day the Crayons Came Home" and "Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus" were the reading selections for the night. A recording of the event is available at <https://www.205warren.net/2021/11/family-reading-night-2021/>.

In Arthur, CUSD #305 hosted an author visit at Lovington Grade School from Elana K. Arnold who wrote the book series "A Boy Called Bat." The night included an in-person presentation by the author, a book fair, craft and game time, and snacks. Families had the option to attend the event remotely through Google Meet video.

The Warren County Library in Monmouth prepared FRN activity bags and sent them



An FRN participant from Chester shows off her book and bookmark from the event.



A family at Universidad Popular participates in FRN.

home with the participants of the Regional Office of Education #33's Penny Severns Family Literacy program. The activity bags contained a book for each child, coloring sheets and a card game for the family. One of the books included in the bag was "Laugh Out Loud Jokes for Kids."

Universidad Popular in Chicago invited families to attend the event in person or virtually. Those attending from home chose books from the public library or books they had at home. Families attending in person were given books to read together. After reading as families, everyone gathered to share their thoughts. Those attending from home were able to participate in the discussion and share their stories. "Families were very engaged in the reading activity and children loved drawing, playing and having family time together," said Lilia Segoviano, literacy program coordinator at Universidad Popular. "Reading is important every day, but this yearly event really helps us reinforce it to our families."



A mother laughs after her daughter read a joke from the FRN book included in their activity bag.

Bouncing back from the pandemic — (cont. from pg. 1)

with partners, the literacy programs transitioned to online learning and started to think outside of the box for further programming. Tutors, though initially hesitant, quickly adapted to online instruction and learning. New and continuing tutor training now takes place completely online and incorporates Burlington English software, in addition to video conferencing software. Interactive online resources have blossomed into key tools for tutors in the remote environment. The resources help tutors and learners become comfortable with this new instructional delivery method. Tutors are now confident in using Zoom, Google Slides and Flipgrid as a normal part of tutoring sessions. Recruiting online tutors through VolunteerMatch and the college's website has allowed the program to target individuals with at least some technology skills. After the initial loss of so many tutors, there are new challenges with this latest population of tutors. "Students and working professionals are wonderful volunteers with excellent skills, but we realize that they are unlikely to return from year to year as many volunteers, primarily retirees, previously did," explained Mandy Dwyer, instructional coordinator at DAEL.

Family literacy programming faced different challenges, given the number of required program components, as well as the need to engage children remotely. Through the valiant efforts of the project facilitator, a Weebly site was quickly created to house literacy activities. Families began to meet weekly on Zoom to read, play and talk together. Craft kits were delivered to each family to give them fun, practical activities. These included science experiments like creating geodes and aqua-robots, along with story-specific crafts like worry dolls. The enthusiasm of the children, who loved the online communication, helped encourage parents to participate and improve their own technology skills. Memberships to the Morton Arboretum and the Brookfield Zoo were provided to families in place of the normally scheduled field trips. These were wildly popular, with most families reporting several visits to their chosen destinations. Once in-person classes and family literacy programming became allowable, an online option was still offered, giving families more flexibility in attending.

Dwyer added, "We all know that our students, tutors and staff are resilient, and after a year and a half of innovation and constant learning, we now know we are more capable of meeting the needs of our community members and expanding our services."

Triton College, Access to Literacy Program

In the midst of the pandemic, program staff made the decision to strive to thrive in their given circumstances. The last year proved to be challenging for many of the learners and volunteers, but with that challenge came resilience and perseverance. Access to Literacy's journey to recovery has been filled with questions and uncertainty, but as time passed, learners and tutors found themselves overcoming hurdle after hurdle, which gave them hope. "We are still learning how to navigate this pandemic, but we hope that our story can inspire other programs and communities facing similar challenges," says Udon Thao, program coordinator at Access to Literacy.

When Access to Literacy transitioned to online learning with limited in-person meetings, a variety of challenges presented themselves — which included accessibility to technology, functional Wi-Fi and limited digital literacy skills. These barriers, in addition to the presence of COVID-19, detrimentally affected the program. With barriers increasing and participants decreasing, the program decided to focus on its strengths. Focus shifted to assessing the immediate needs of the learners and volunteers to mitigate existing barriers. Staff members were able to provide training sessions through Zoom and phone calls; create videos for navigating online platforms; provide loanable technology; and cultivate safe spaces as a support system. Through monthly meetings, icebreakers, team building activities, and phone calls with the learners and volunteers, staff members were able to strengthen and build trust.

"Creating intentional spaces that allow learners and volunteers to express their needs, challenges, ideas and aspirations have been the driving factor of our journey to recovery," Thao said. "We cultivated a space where our learners and volunteers could feel heard and part of a whole community, especially when decisions impact them directly. Despite barriers, we have witnessed the resilience and strength of our learners and volunteers as they push themselves out of their comfort zone to learn new skills. For Access to Literacy, we are taking one step at a time, and as long as we continue to foster safe spaces and learn how to support each other, we will get through these tough times."

Celebrate volunteers during National Volunteer Week in April



A volunteer tutoring an adult learner at a Secretary of State Illinois State Library funded literacy grant program.

In Illinois, volunteer tutors play a crucial role in literacy programs by providing unpaid time to improve the lives of adult learners and their families through education. Last year, 3,258 volunteer tutors provided nearly 108,000 hours of tutoring to 6,120 students. According to the Independent Sector, volunteer service equates to just over \$29 per hour in Illinois. Volunteers in 2021 provided over \$3.1 million of service. The perfect time to thank volunteer tutors for all they do is during National Volunteer Week, April 17-23, 2022. For information on the annual celebration, as well as ideas for recognizing your volunteers, visit the Points of Light website at www.pointsoflight.org/nvw.

Volunteer tutors can also be recognized through the Spotlight on Service Awards that are presented annually by Secretary of State and State Librarian Jesse White. Literacy programs are encouraged to nominate outstanding tutors who have made a difference in the life of an adult learner and their community for this honor. Nomination forms are available at the following link and are due on or before Feb. 21, 2022, ilsos.gov/publications/pdf_publications/Ida211.pdf.

To subscribe to *Illinois Literacy*,
call 217-785-6921 or
800-665-5576 (Illinois only), #3.





<https://join.mobilize.us/blog/volunteer-recognition-ideas>

Volunteer recognition is essential for retaining and growing a base of support. Here are 50 strategies for recognizing volunteer tutors.

<https://www.volunteerhub.com/blog/celebrate-volunteers-retention/>

Implementing a volunteer recognition program can improve retention rates and simultaneously keep volunteers feeling engaged. Discover how even the smallest signs of gratitude can go a long way with volunteers.

<https://volunteernh.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Volunteer-Recognition-and-Appreciation-Ideas-Heather-Turner.pdf>

This site lists a number of ideas and resources on how to recognize volunteers even with the barriers presented by the COVID-19 pandemic.

ON THE HORIZON

- **March 7-11**– Illinois Head Start Annual Conference (Virtual), <https://ilheadstart.org/>
- **March 10-11** – Illinois Adult and Continuing Educators Association Conference (Virtual), <https://www.iacea.net/>
- **March 22-25** – International TESOL Annual Convention (Hybrid), <https://www.tesol.org/>
- **April 11-13** – Commission on Adult Basic Education (COABE) Hybrid Conference, <https://coabenationalvirtualconf.pathable.co/>
- **April 3-9** – National Library Week, <https://www.ala.org/conference/sevents/celebrationweeks/natlibraryweek>
- **April 17-23** – National Volunteer Week, <https://www.pointsoflight.org/nvw>
- **May 3-9** – Children’s Book Week, <https://everychildareader.net/cbw/>

More literacy event information is available at ilsos.gov/departments/library/literacy/home.html (click Calendar of Literacy Events).

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Jesse White, Secretary of State and State Librarian • Greg McCormick, director, Illinois State Library**

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