



## **27th Annual Tutor & Adult Learner Conference**

### **Closing Session**

#### **Welcome**

*Dorothy M. Miaso, Executive Director  
Literacy Volunteers of Illinois*

#### **Greetings**

*Irene Williams  
Office of the Secretary of State  
Illinois State Library  
Literacy Office*

#### **Featured Speaker**

*Peter Waite  
Executive Vice President  
ProLiteracy Worldwide*

### **Presentation of Awards**

#### ***Outstanding Tutors***

- \* *Rey Cruz, World Relief Chicago, Chicago*
- \* *Claribel Gomez, Project CARE—Morton College, Cicero*
- \* *Renate Durnbaugh, Chinese Mutual Aid Association, Chicago*
- \* *Yihyun Kim, Hanul Family Alliance, Chicago*
- \* *Patricia Michel, Chinese Mutual Aid Association, Chicago*
- \* *Sarah Poontong, Southeast Asia Center, Adult ESL Program, Chicago*
- \* *Edward Schultz, Howard Area Community Center, Chicago*
- \* *Jackson Stacey, Indo-American Center, Chicago*
- \* *Scott Strain, Waubensee Community College, Aurora*
- \* *Sara Vasicek, Literacy Volunteers of Illinois, Jump Start at St. Charles*

#### ***Tutor of the Year***

*Diksha J. Bhatia, Midwest Asian American Center, Schaumburg  
Nominated by Vandana Dalal, Executive Director*

#### ***Literacy Legacy Award***

*June C. Porter*

#### ***June Porter Student is at the Top Award***

*Harrold Barnes*

#### ***Awards Presented By***

*Alex Crevi, President, Board of Directors, Literacy Volunteers of Illinois  
Ruby Camacho, Associate Director, UIC Center for Literacy  
Peter Waite, Executive Vice President, ProLiteracy Worldwide*

**Tutor of the Year**  
**Diksha Bhatia**  
**Midwest Asian American Center**

Our Tutor of the Year Award goes to Diksha Bhatia of the Midwest Asian American Center. Diksh is very passionate and gets totally involved with each assignment on hand and works diligently to complete her work on time involving her students in the classroom, writes her nominator, Vandana Dalal. She creates a very friendly environment responding to each student as per their needs. She gears lesson plans for them to understand every word in their language to clear the clouds out of their minds. This has helped many of her ESL students in preparing for their citizenship interview. She has volunteered hundreds of hours in the classroom working with the students to assist them achieve their goals.

Out of the classroom MAAC had organized a picnic where Diksha participated with the family pact creating games for young and old which was a fun highlight of the day. Since 2011 she has also been helping at our fundraising events and attending our board meetings presenting brilliant ideas for cultural programs along with new techniques in adapting and working with social media. She does not hold any position on the board nor does she hold any position in the office of MAAC. She has been a true volunteer in sharing and caring with staff and students.

The most innovative technique used by Diksha is the bi-language (Hindi) curriculum she utilizes which has many quizzes, games, pictures, play cards, flash cards and audios for pronunciation which makes it very easy for her students to understand every word. Exploring Chicago is a brainstorming technique she developed which is filled with fun out of class. This includes marketing spree tours which are guided tours conducted with permission of retail stores, which helps them to read and understand labels regarding product usage. This develops their confidence speaking with service reps at customer service desks. Guided tours to Cook County Hospital and to Swedish Covenant were also good experiences for her students in helping them to use public transportation and looking into services rendered in each department and the process of registration.

Out of the sixty five students enrolled in our ESL and the EL/Civics program fifty-five are proud citizens of the United States and twenty-one have received their driver's license. We have twenty students who have moved from welfare to workforce, which we at MAAC consider a great achievement and a testament to the time they have spent hard at work and Diksha's work with them

**Outstanding Tutors**

***Rey Cruz, World Relief Chicago, Chicago***

Rey is consistent, patient, and committed to the partnership he formed with his student, writes his nominator, Emily Erland. He stays in regular communication about any concerns or questions he may have and he tracks his hours and sends lesson updates faithfully every week. He has not only been able to teach his student, but has shared many things that he has personally learned from his student and has formed solid friendships with his student and his student's family. A story shared by Rey: "When I first met my student, I was told me that he was basically new to the English language. I thought that meant that his vocabulary was rudimentary but I soon learned he needed to learn from the very beginning – i.e. the alphabet. In the beginning, we started with the very basics like recognizing and identifying letters, sounding them out and putting them together to form his name and address. He must have put in extra work outside of our meetings because six months later, he was able to read and write the alphabet as well as the numbers from 1 to 100. When he wrote down the numbers from 1 - 50 on my dry erase board I was so happy, I took a picture."

***Renate Durnbaugh & Patricia Michel, Chinese Mutual Aid Association***

Renate and Pat are exceptional because they have been meeting a need in the Mayfair community that had gone unmet until they stepped up, writes their nominator, Karen Parrillo. When we became aware of a need for ESL instruction at the Mayfair Library, she continued, we provided a paid instructor and held a registration. At the registration, the majority of learners were at a high-intermediate level of English, but there were a few Arabic-speaking women, who were at the very beginning literacy level. With funding for only one instructor, a high-intermediate level class was formed and those at the beginning level were told they'd need to wait for volunteer tutors. They waited patiently while the volunteer call was put out. A few months later, Renate and Pat answered the call and began tutoring six women on Tuesday mornings, divided into very beginning and high beginning groups. Renate taught the very beginning group, while Pat taught the high beginning level. Word got around, and each week the women have been bringing other friends and relatives to join the groups, so that now Renate has a group of nine students and Pat has four.

In addition to using text books and CMAA's ESL tutoring curriculum, Renate and Pat use their own resources to create engaging and motivating lessons. Since Renate teaches learners who are at the very beginning level, she goes slowly repeating words, letters, and sounds many, many times. She allows the women to speak together in Arabic to clarify meanings. Some of the women in her group of know more than the others and help each other. For the high beginners, Pat prepares her own worksheets to facilitate more opportunities for conversation and enhance lessons from the text.

They share space at the Mayfair library and work well as a team and as individual instructors of the two groups. The women all feel comfortable in the same space. Since they are all busy mothers with children, not all attend each weekly session, so Renate and Pat are flexible and ready for whoever does, and quickly incorporate those who missed to get them up to speed. This structured yet relaxed and flexible approach works extremely well with this group of women who have not spent much time in formal schooling and who would not do well with more rigid or fast-paced expectations.

***James Fitzmaurice, Corazón a Corazón, Blue Island***

James Fitzmaurice stands out among our talented volunteer tutors as he has been one of our most dedicated, writes his nominator, Mayra Pimentel. Since he started in November 2016, he has been known for his kindness, dedication and infectious positive attitude. He is reliable and committed and, most importantly, compassionate with his learners. Our learners feel at ease with him - whether he is their assigned tutor or not - and are eager to interact with him. He modifies his lessons to best relate to his learners' goals and makes himself available after tutoring sessions to clarify any topics. Last year he teamed up with one of his learners to read a novel to expose her to what it was like to be in a book club. She was thrilled to come to her tutoring session and discuss their reading. Through this she not only greatly improved her English reading skills but her self-confidence.

***Claribel Gomez Project CARE – Morton College, Cicero***

Claribel Gomez began volunteering with Project CARE in 2017 and has demonstrated exceptional commitment to the program, writes her nominator, Irina Cline. She has closely worked with 21 English as a Second Language (ESL) students and has achieved excellent results in her work. Claribel tutors one-to-one and in small groups, helping her learners increase not only their academic abilities, but their confidence and independence as well. She is very responsive to the individual needs of all of her students, helping them effectively set realistic goals and use their strengths to achieve learning gains and personal goals. She is a loyal and reliable tutor even though she works full time. As a learning enthusiast herself, Claribel is dedicated to providing innovative tutoring instruction. In addition to tried-and-true tutoring strategies, she always uses new teaching methods targeted to her students' needs. For example, she draws parallels between Spanish and English

vocabulary and grammar. At times, Claribel uses Spanish in tutoring sessions; however, she also always wants to make sure that students practice their English and works very hard to boost their motivation. She always includes students in planning tutoring sessions and gives them an opportunity to choose educational materials.

***Yihyun Kim, Hanul Family Alliance, Chicago***

Whether she is teaching a large class of 20 students or having a one-on-one conversation with an adult learner, Yihyun is always able to adapt to any setting for the benefit of the ESL student, writes her nominator, Charlene Choi. Yihyun is a first generation Korean American who is fluent in Korean and English. Her background has been an advantage with the predominantly Korean students at our agency, Charlene continued. In the past, there have been some clients who had difficulty connecting with their tutors due to cultural and linguistic differences. Yihyun has utilized her bilingual skills to earn the trust of her students who continue to come back and be taught by her. However, Yihyun doesn't rely on using Korean as a crutch in the language learning process, rather she emphasizes on communicating only in English to her students to improve their comprehension, vocabulary, listening, and speaking. Yet, if her students are struggling to express themselves or lack the vocabulary to finish a sentence, they know that Yihyun will be able to understand their Korean, but she makes sure to reply back with the English translation to broaden their knowledge, creating a balanced learning environment based on trust and growth.

***Sarah Poontong, Southeast Asia Center, Chicago***

Sarah has dedicated her time and considerable talents to working with our students at our agency, writes her nominator, Seamus Doyle. She teaches a class of mixed level learners for two hours, three times a week. Despite the challenge of teaching a class of varying levels, Sarah manages to cater to each student's needs and abilities. Sarah is also one of our most reliable volunteers, rarely missing a class and, on occasion, stepping in for extra days when other volunteer tutors are unable to teach. Beyond teaching ESL, Sarah carries on our Center's tradition in encouraging our ESL students to be productive members by participating in our Center's and community activities. She sets an example for her students to follow by participating in events such as our Lunar New Year Celebration and the Lunar New Year Parade on Argyle where she encouraged students of various backgrounds to come and march in the parade. In doing this, she has not only helped teach English, but also helped to accomplish our Center's goal of building bridges between different communities in the Uptown neighborhood.

***Edward Schultz, Howard Area Community Center***

Edward Schultz enrolled as a volunteer in our Adult Volunteer Literacy Program three and a half years ago, writes his nominator, Jason Kaiser. He was quickly matched with Michelle who entered our program six months earlier as a beginning ABE student. Edward has met with Michelle on a weekly basis over the course of three and a half years. In addition to consistency of commitment, Edward is a skilled instructor. He comes to his tutoring sessions prepared with well-developed lessons. He is a frequent participant in tutor professional development activities, and he asks insightful questions that show interest in developing his knowledge base in our field. He has applied innovative techniques that employ his theatrical skills to literacy lessons, and he uses plays to engage his learner. Michelle has been very receptive to his oratory and her enthusiasm for this activity clearly supports her literacy development.

***Jackson Stacey, Indo-American Center, Chicago***

Jackson has shown much dedication and passion for teaching ESL students, writes his nominator, Evelyn Mateo. He is a very creative instructor who goes out of his way to teach students in different ways, such as having a tea party or bringing snacks to show students about American culture. He plays relaxing music to get the students into a focused mode and ready to begin learning. He always

has a great attitude and is very patient. Being new to the US, Jackson relates with his students and even though his native language is English, he is still new to the culture as are a majority of his level 1 students. Jackson uses his experience to encourage his students to not be afraid to learn the culture that surrounds them including the language. He continuously encourages his students to ask questions by repeating himself thereby creating a dialogue for everyone in the classroom, even if it's something as simple as today's date. Jackson truly enjoys volunteering his time and skills at the Indo-American Center, and we cannot be thankful enough for such a dedicated individual.

***Scott Strain, Waubensee Community College, Adult Literacy Project, Aurora***

Having led "Computers & Conversation" group for over 6 years, Scot has demonstrated a great deal of initiative, creativity and reliability, writes his co-nominators Michaels McDaid and Galina Khartulari. It was on his initiative the group was launched which he approached, they wrote, with great creativity by combining computer literacy with other critical literacy skills, teaching his students to function effectively in the contemporary multi-faceted world by enhancing fundamental literacy skills through mastering computer skills. He hardly missed a Saturday, a regular meetup day for his group, and is always accessible if students or staff need immediate IT help. Using Saturday Group Menu Websites, Scott gives his students freedom to choose what resources they want to use to learn new computer skills, reading, grammar and conversation. It encourages initial discussion and enhances argumentation, while introducing the students to available online resources. The Menu varies each week, expanding the students' ability to select a resource they need and their literacy and problem-solving skills as well. Scott's approach integrates multiple aspects of literacy skills acquisition in their contemporary sense.

***Sara Vasicek, Jump Start – Literacy Volunteers of Illinois, Jump Start @St. Charles, St. Charles***

What makes Sara exceptional is her versatility, her compassion and her ability to be non-judgmental, plus her skill at finding and adapting resources for each of her students, writes her nominator, Melissa Auer. Sara waited a long time to become a volunteer, having applied in November of 2015, but not being cleared and trained until February of 2017. That she was willing to hang in there is testament to her dedication, and very typical of Sara. Our students are young men involved in the Juvenile Justice System and they can be pretty rough. Calm and quiet, Sara has established a good rapport with each student she has worked with, but she has a special gift for working with the lower-level, more vulnerable youth. She is patient and kind, letting them know she cares. One student had only met with her a few times when he asked her to attend a hearing with him, since his family was not going to be able to attend. This is just one example of the how she closely relates to her students.