

Massachusetts reads and succeeds!

A monthly series dedicated to the people and the organizations whose efforts in literacy make Massachusetts a great place to live and learn.



IS SOMEONE YOU KNOW A LITERACY CHAMPION?



Each year the Massachusetts Literacy Champions Awards Program recognizes and rewards multiple individuals whose efforts in literacy education improve our communities. We invite you to meet these champions, and to share their stories in the pages of this series. The Massachusetts Literacy Foundation, in partnership with Verizon, is proud to honor these Massachusetts Literacy Champions and all the educators they represent throughout the Commonwealth.

www.foundation.verizon.com

Democracy in Action

by Silja Kallenbach

Silja Kallenbach is Director of the New England Resource Center at World Education, recipient of a 2008 Verizon Massachusetts ESL Technology Grant. A strong advocate for adult education, she was recognized as a Massachusetts Literacy Champion in 2006 for her innovative contributions in the field of adult literacy.

She has been instrumental in the creation of such programs as VERA, a non-partisan Voter Education, Registration and Action campaign and The Change Agent, an adult education newspaper for social justice.

People who have not completed high school or are learning English are the least likely to vote. This stereotype is about to be broken in New England thanks to the Voter Education, Registration and Action (VERA) campaign.

The campaign reaches out to adult literacy programs to teach about voting and why it matters. More than 6,000 adult learners are participating in Massachusetts.

A strictly non-partisan effort, the VERA campaign promotes the efforts of people like Ann D'Auria, director of Education from Julie's Family Learning Center in South Boston, whose approach is to "make it personal, to show students that they have a stake in the election."

She and her counterparts across New England are helping adults clarify what issues are important to them and to learn what each candidate's stance and record is without telling them how to think or who to vote for. D'Auria's students even wrote to a presidential candidate of their choice and participated in a mock election. This is a good way to learn English, math and civics. It honors a key tenet of adult education that content should be relevant to adults' lives.

D'Auria's students are proof that her approach works. Take Karen Lynch, 21. Born and raised in South Boston, this mother of two young children is voting for the first time in November.

"I never thought about voting before. I had bigger problems in life," Lynch said. "But I look around here and I see so many people having so many problems. In my class, we studied the pros and cons of different issues to help us form our opinions. My top issues are housing and homelessness, and a woman's right to choose."

Thousands of U.S. born adults and new citizens are voting for the first time this November.



Adalgisa Perez, 30, from the Dominican Republic, a student at El Centro Del Cardenal, run by Catholic Charities, is one of them.

Perez, who works as cashier at Wal-Mart, now knows what issues matter to her.

"My top issues are the economy, education and health insurance," she said. "In the past I thought voting made no difference. Now I think my vote can make a difference."

For some adults, the mechanics of voting are intimidating. Leonid Mejia, originally from the Dominican Republic and a student at El Centro del Cardenal, says that it was not until he learned in his English class how to fill in a sample ballot that he felt confident to go into a voting booth in November.

A student at Charlestown Adult Education, Hussein Mohieddin, who emigrated from Syria, has lived in Boston for 11 years but will cast his first vote this November.

"We need a president who can save the economy from crashing," he said. "I voted in Syria but in my country your vote doesn't matter. I thought I wasn't important but I learned that my vote counts here."

Bereket Yoseph, 30, emigrated from Eritrea and is studying English at the Community Learning Center in Cambridge. He's an enthusiastic first-time voter. And coming from a country that has been at war since he was born, Bereket wants the U.S. to pull out of Iraq, to "stop wasting money in the war."

Not all VERA participants are citizens and eligible to vote. But many are like Nicole Brown, 31, from Trinidad, living in Boston since she was age 4, who has made it her mission to motivate her friends and family who can vote to vote.

"So far, I've gotten six people to vote, many of them for the first time. I tell them if you want change you got to vote. I tell them their vote counts. My top issues are health care, taxes and education."

Perhaps even more important than the fact that so many adults are motivated to vote for the first time is that they are thinking for themselves. Anyone can register to vote and vote, but how many voters are doing what these adult learners have done: taking time to reflect on what issues matter to them and why? In that process, adult education plays a critical role.

The Voter Education Registration and Action campaign is organized by the New England Literacy Resource Center based at World Education, Inc. in Boston.

For more information, visit www.massliteracy.org or www.nerlc.org/VERA

Verizon ESL/Tech Awards Announced

Most Massachusetts residents recognize Verizon as the leading communications provider of phone and internet service that they indeed are, but in fact, Verizon delivers so much more to the communities they serve. This year, eight nonprofit organizations will be able to expand the reach of their innovative, technology-based literacy programs across the commonwealth, as the result of \$185,000 in grants from the Verizon Foundation.

The grants will support English as a Second Language (ESL) literacy programs throughout the state. Specifically, the grants will enable these organizations to expand their reach into diverse communities through the use of broadband and video technologies.

Says Donna Cupelo, Verizon region president of New England, "Literacy is a critical component to helping people succeed in the 21st century. We are proud to support eight great institutions that provide immigrant learners with the necessary tools to lead happy and productive lives right here in Massachusetts."

The 2008 ESL Technology

Grant winners are:

English For New Bostonians
Holyoke Community College
Operation Bootstrap
Quincy Community Action
UMass/Dartmouth
The Immigrant Learning Center
Worcester Public Library
World Education

For more about these winning programs, please visit: www.massliteracy.org



VOLUNTEER. OPPORTUNITIES IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Since 1991, the RE-SEED program at Northeastern University has trained retired, science-focused professionals to volunteer in Massachusetts classrooms and share their knowledge with middle school science teachers and students to enhance learning experiences.

Any retired scientist, engineer or others with scientific background who would like to learn more can call RE-SEED at 617-373-8388 to request an information packet. Additionally, there will be an informational session at Northeastern on Wednesday November 5, 2008 at 11:00 a.m. (Lunch and parking provided.) Call Feby Kiragu at 617-373-5154 for details.

The Fall 2008 Volunteer Training program begins on Nov. 17, 2008 at Northeastern University. Volunteers will learn how to apply their expertise in a way that makes science exciting to young learners and relevant to everyday life.

To contact RE-SEED:

Visit: www.reseed.neu.edu

Call: 617-373-8388

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