



literacy chronicle

WINTER 2009

NEWS AND BEST PRACTICES FROM THE LITERACY COOPERATIVE OF GREATER CLEVELAND

Program creates pathways to new careers

Remington College and Parma ABLE join to take learners beyond GEDs

Erika Zmina was an adult when she first discovered that school could be fun. A high-school dropout, she earned her GED and a medical assisting diploma within eight months through an innovative program offered by Remington College and Parma Adult Basic Literacy Education (ABLE).

"I looked forward to coming everyday," Zmina said of her classes at Remington. "It was fun for me, and I learned a lot."

Zmina found a good job at Marymount Hospital. She also convinced two sisters and an aunt to follow in her footsteps and enroll at Remington to earn their GEDs and, eventually, receive training for new careers.

Finding ways to connect educational/training programs with the needs of industry, while increasing individuals' earning potential by helping them secure credentials needed for good jobs, is a new call to action in the literacy field. Known as "career pathways," this effort aims to increase awareness, access, affordability, resources, and alignment for high school students, adult learners, and the incumbent workforce as they pursue educational opportunities around a career focus.

Literacy providers now are asked to simultaneously prepare their students for both the GED exam and a postsecondary experience, plus create community partnerships that provide smooth transitions to that next step.

Through a partnership with Parma ABLE, Remington takes students from GED classes to technical careers — all on one campus. Remington became a Parma ABLE location in 2003 when one of its GED examiners approached the college. Over time the college became one of the Parma program's busiest locations, with Remington adding a staff position in 2005 to assist with GED coordination.

Susan Sheehan, director of Parma ABLE, attributes shared knowledge of programs as key to its working relationship with Remington.

"Communication between us is very open and regular, and both sides understand the whole picture," Sheehan said. "Their staff knows our procedures, and we know theirs. We realize that aligning our systems is a great benefit to the student."

Maire Hawkins, Remington's GED Coordinator, cited commitment from both parties.

"I think this partnership demonstrates how two completely different communities can work toward one common goal when there is a strong commitment and leadership from both sides," Hawkins said.

Continued inside



Four members of the Zmina family have attended Remington College to earn their GEDs and pursue careers: (pictured left to right) Colleen Zmina-Phillips, who earned her GED; Sarah Zmina and Jessica Zmina, who currently attend the college, and Erika Zmina, a Remington graduate. They gathered inside a classroom lab where students practice drawing blood.

In this issue, learn more about:

Education programs that assist inmates • Using technology with learners • Upcoming events

Director's message

I hope you had an enjoyable holiday season, and I wish you a happy and healthy new year.

Appropriately, our first newsletter for 2009 focuses on transitions. Whether it's a child making the switch from pre-school to kindergarten, a student moving from elementary to high school, or an adult heading back to school to earn a GED or improve career prospects, these transitions hold the most challenges and greatest risks for learners, who can easily fall through the cracks. The more we can ease those transition points, the more likely they are to succeed.

Our cover story focuses on ways educators in Parma are smoothing the transition for GED students seeking careers. The Parma Adult Basic Literacy Education (ABLE) program provides GED preparation classes and GED testing on-site at Remington College. This collaboration has created a win-win-win situation for the literacy program, the college and, most importantly, the students. What would seem like a simple partnership is making an enormous difference.

Inside, we take a look at behind-the-bars efforts to help inmates at Grafton Correctional Institute transition from prison to life on the outside. Literacy and vocational training services provided both prior to release and afterwards aim to reduce recidivism and arm inmates with job skills to help them earn livable wages.

The Literacy Cooperative, too, is looking to build partnerships that ease learners' transitions. Watch upcoming newsletters and our web site, www.literacycooperative.org, for more success stories and for opportunities to gather with other instructors or institutions.

Robert Paponetti

Executive Director

The Literacy Cooperative

Education programs aim to prevent their return to prison

Inside well-patrolled buildings surrounded by barbed wire, inmates at Grafton Correctional Institution hone skills that could prevent their return.

Student mechanics rebuild a '60s muscle car, while horticulture apprentices tend rows of plants in the prison's greenhouses. In a computer room, student inmates quietly complete GED lessons, making strides towards earning their diplomas. Down the hall, inmates learned life skills and anger management via a distance learning course connecting them with five classes in other Ohio prisons.

At Grafton Correctional Institution, the concept of re-entry is no longer saved for the final days of inmate's sentence, but discussed and planned for well in advance.

The key to productive lives rests with education. Studies show that incarcerated men and women greatly reduce their risk of recidivism if they raise their literacy levels, achieve credentials, and gain workplace skills. Researchers following released inmates in Ohio, Maryland, and Minnesota for three years found that those who participated in educational programs during incarceration were one-third less likely to return to prison and earned higher wages than inmates who did not attend such classes, according to a 2001 study commissioned by the Office of Correctional Education and the U.S. Department of Education.

The Grafton prison, operated by the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction, offers post-secondary, vocational, and workforce classes through the Ohio Central School System (OCSS). A fully accredited charter school, OCSS has operated in the Ohio corrections system since 1973 and is available in the state's 32 prisons.

The school's programs provide necessary skill-building for a population with traditionally low literacy levels. In 2007, OCSS reported that 80 percent of its prison population did not complete high school and 40 percent read below a sixth-grade level. As a primary component to rehabilitation, classes are mandatory in Ohio for inmates who lack high school diplomas.

Inmate Rodney Boyd is committed to staying out of jail and improving his prospects after his release. At the start of his sentence, Boyd received a reading and math assessment. Though he attended Glenville High School up to the ninth grade, his assessment placed him in an adult basic education class at a sixth grade or below level. A dedicated teacher, coupled with hard work on Boyd's part, helped him quickly advance to a pre-GED class. He eventually progressed to the GED class, gaining enough knowledge to attempt the test for his diploma. He passed three of five sections his first time around; he is now preparing to take it again and obtain his diploma before his release in February.

"Now that I'm older, I know this is what I really need," Boyd said.

m to assist inmates, prison

“What I really look forward to holding onto [after my release] is the experience and the time I shared with the teachers here. They opened my eyes to a lot of things.”

PRISONS PLAN AHEAD

The state’s eyes have been opened as well, due to a 2001 ODRC study of re-entry procedures and recidivism rates. The study, “The Ohio Plan for Productive Offender Reentry and Recidivism Reduction,” listed 44 factors important to successful re-entry, including offender programming, employment readiness, re-entry planning, family involvement, and community partnerships. In seven years since the study, state prisons have worked to implement a new strategy of preparing inmates for release well in advance of their actual release dates.

One way to do that is through the Transitional Experience Program (TEP), a six-month distance learning course that teaches inmates self and family development, money management, job readiness, communication skills, and how to come to terms with their criminal records. Kurt Lehr, a GED and TEP instructor at the Grafton prison, said the program is making strides.

“I’m hopeful for all of them, but I also realize that there’s probably a handful that are going to be back; that’s bound to happen,” Lehr said. “But I do think that this is a necessary step. [The State] knew there was a necessary component that was missing, and [TEP] does it.”

When inmates are released, the TEP program continues on the outside through the state’s partnership with Community Connection for Ohio Offenders, based in Lima. Released inmates are given an email account and access to a website that provides statewide employment, housing, and other community resources. They are also given a toll-free telephone number that provides referral information and website technical support.

Lehr said inmates benefit from access to technology.

“The main thing that stands out is just how technologically deficient they all are,” he said. “One third of my students don’t know how to hold a computer mouse, don’t know how to access anything; they don’t understand pins, passwords, and access codes.

“This class fills a necessary void.”

FELONS FACE CHALLENGES

Still, many barriers exist for prisoners upon their release according to “A Portrait of Prisoner Reentry in Ohio,” a 2001 study published by the Urban Institute.

That year 5,358 inmates returned to Cuyahoga County, representing 22 percent of all inmates released. Of those, 53 percent had been incarcerated at least once before. A large proportion returned to the five most disadvantaged neighborhoods in Cleveland — Central, Hough, Glenville, Mount Pleasant, and Union Miles — where unemployment rates are high, many live below the poverty level, and drug-related arrests are above average.

Another challenge is the attitudes of employers, many of whom are leery to hire felons. A 2002 report from the Urban Institute, “Can Employers Play a More Positive Role in Prisoner Reentry?,” found that fewer than 40 percent of employers would hire ex-offenders.

In Cleveland, three programs aim to improve the outlook for inmates and build bridges to potential employers: Lutheran Metropolitan Ministry’s Community Re-Entry; Employment Connection’s Providing Real Opportunities for Ex-Offenders to Succeed (PROES); and Towards Employment’s NETWork 4 Success.

NETWork offers a four-week, intensive program enforcing strict attendance, dress code, and positive attitude policies, allowing the agency to confirm the work readiness of participants. Meanwhile participants receive ongoing coaching and support, both to assist them and to increase employers’ comfort with the arrangement. The service also serves as an avenue for intervention when necessary.

The goal is to create opportunities for inmates like Boyd to seek careers, contribute to their communities, and demonstrate what a second chance looks like.

Boyd said he is ready to enter the workforce, support his three children, and apply his new skills at work and home.

“I look at it as though I came here for a reason...,” Boyd said. “There was something in this place that I had to take home.”



Inmate Rodney Boyd, left, reviews his resume with instructor Kurt Lehr, who teaches GED courses and life skills classes at Grafton Correctional Institution in Grafton, Ohio.

For more information:

Ohio Department of Correction and Rehabilitation
www.drc.ohio.gov

The Urban Institute
www.urban.org

Towards Employment
www.towardsemployment.org

Community Re-Entry
www.lutheranmetro.org

Providing Real Opportunities for Ex-Offenders
www.city.cleveland.oh.us/government/departments/econdev/wfdev

Program creates pathways to new careers

Convenience to their home, friendliness and availability of staff, and the opportunity to continue their education in one location made a significant impression on the Zmina family. Colleen Zmina Phillips, Erika Zmina's aunt, said she was pleasantly surprised by the welcoming atmosphere at Remington.

"The girls were always coming home talking about how this [teacher] cares about them, or that [teacher] offered to help," Zmina Phillips said. "I do think it makes a difference having the GED classes here. I came for the GED and now I am excited about doing something else.

"If I were in another school, I don't think I would have made the connection about schooling beyond the GED."

Career pathways aim to create more success stories like hers. The need is great; only 27 percent of GED holders obtain postsecondary education according to a 2006 GED Testing Program report. Other studies show that as few as 10 percent of GED holders complete one year of schooling and just 3 percent acquire an associate degree.

One probable cause is that non-traditional students such as GED graduates have little or no exposure to college-level reading and math, use of computers, or writing research papers. These students often lack confidence in their ability to succeed, and many are in need of personal and career counseling. Challenges include financial constraints, lack of time management skills, and unfamiliarity with college culture and processes.

Breaking Through, a project of Jobs for the Future and the National Council for Workforce Education, promotes four strategies as fundamental to increasing college access and success for low-literacy adults.

- Integrated structures and services between adult basic education (ABE) and English as a second language (ESOL)
- Accelerated learning that keeps students continually engaged
- Partnerships between education and labor, known as labor market payoff, and
- Comprehensive supports, including career counseling, personal case management and assistance with transportation and childcare

The first strategy, integrating structures and services between ABE/ESOL, focuses on creating an obvious, easy-to-navigate path where students have a clear understanding of how to enter, exit, and re-enter at various points along the way from a GED to a certificate or degree.

The second strategy, accelerated learning, addresses frequent start-stop tendencies of adult literacy learners in the college environment. Individualized educational plans, content

appropriate to their lives, and short-term, intensive programs help students make significant gains that lead to successful completion.

Labor market payoff, the third strategy, takes queues from employers and economic trends to focus on in-demand occupations.

The fourth strategy, comprehensive supports, aims to assist learners so they remain actively enrolled and participating.

Erika Zmina benefited from a similar approach at Remington. She and her sisters, Jessica and Sarah, all used financial aid, tutoring, career services, and participated in student potlucks. Erika's medical assisting program taught both administrative and clinical skills during eight months of study, and she recalled spending most days in the lab.

"There are a lot of clinical things you do here, and they teach you everything hands-on," Zmina said. "My other aunt went to another school and she learned to draw blood on oranges. Oranges can't say ouch! Here you practice on other people, so it's totally different."

Mock interviews with actual employers, "dress for success" days, awards for perfect attendance, and internships keep Remington students focused on being a good fit for the needs of employers.

"Coming here was like coming to work," Zmina said. "If you did anything unprofessional, you got points taken away. Anything you wouldn't do at work, you didn't do here. So I was never nervous about going to work or anything I had to do. I was prepared."

For more information about Parma ABE GED classes, contact Susan Sheehan at 440.885.8797, or visit www.parmacityschools.org/able.

For more information about Remington College's programs and Cleveland Campus, call 216.475.7520, or visit www.remingtoncollege.edu/cleveland.

OTHER RESOURCES:

Breaking Through: www.breakingthroughcc.org

National Transition to College Network: www.collegetransition.org

Salaries by education level

According to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2004 American Community Survey, "Income, Earnings, and Poverty," full-time workers age 25 and over with varying levels of education have dramatic income differences.

MEDIAN WEEKLY INCOME:

Less than a high school diploma:	\$337
High school diploma or GED:	\$490
Some college or associate degree:	\$607
Bachelor's degree:	\$841

Instructors Learning Network talks technology

Speakers share useful sites for networking and instruction

Technology was the focus of the September meeting of Instructors Learning Network (ILN).

At the beginning of the day, when asked about knowledge of various websites, discussion boards, and online social networks, one ILN member replied, "We know it's out there."

By day's end, attendees had learned present-day tools for instruction, outreach, retention, and networking through ILN's hands-on, interactive session.

Staff from WVIZ/PBS Ideastream, which hosted ILN, started the session by highlighting resources available on their own website. Among useful tools was PSI: Physical Science Investigation, which offers science concepts for grades 5 through 8 and includes a virtual lab with a series of 20 experiments. Each experiment includes lesson plans, additional resources, professional development videos for teachers, and instructional video segments for students. ILN members agreed that seeing science in action could dramatically enhance literacy students' learning.

With each person stationed at a laptop, the group was then introduced to some innovative uses of technology such as the ILN Online Discussion Group, which allows instructors to connect, share information, and learn new techniques beyond regular meetings. Members learned how to create profiles, post discussion questions, and share educational materials so that valuable networking can occur anytime.

Members also learned how to increase retention through use of a free social network homepage, similar to Facebook or My Space. Students and tutors invited to be part of a network could post pictures, answer questions, receive program updates, go to specified web links, and receive recognition for accomplishments. The homepage creates a group identity and strengthens ties to an organization.

Attendees also learned about a tool available to organize favorite websites called portaportal. A clean, fast, easy way to locate websites, portaportals can replace search engines or bookmarks. WVIZ/PBS technology trainers shared two portaportals they created that are available for public use.

Members saw an opportunity for immediate implementation of each tool presented, and they were energized as they discussed how these free websites and applications will make them more effective in their work.

ILN's next meeting is Feb. 27 and will focus on student persistence. For more information, call 216.393.4545.

Resources:

ILN Discussion Group:
www.ideastream.org/moodle
Create username and password

WVIZ/PBS Ideastream resources:
www.wviz.org/psi
20 science lab experiments aligned with the Ohio Science Content Standards for grades 5-8

www.pbs.org/teachers
Standards-based lesson plans for pre-K-12th grade using PBS programs as the subject source, online professional development, and discussion groups

www.teachersdomain.org
Online library of more than 1,000 media resources

www.pbs.org/kids
Educational games with PBS program characters

Online social network:
www.ning.com

Portaportal organizer:
www.portaportal.com
Available portaportals: guest login: GEDRESOURCES, guest login: techsampler

By day's end, attendees had learned present-day tools for instruction, outreach, retention, and networking through ILN's hands-on, interactive session.

TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

Join the Literacy Cooperative as we explore strategies for helping your learners succeed.

Programs are free, but registration is required. Log on to www.literacycooperative.org and click on our online calendar for full descriptions of these classes and for late additions to the workshop schedule.

January

Teacher Talk and Literacy Rich Classrooms Using Low-Cost Strategies

Friday, Jan. 23
9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.
(Lunch provided)

Location: Trinity Cathedral and Commons
Presenter: Annie Lopez, Ph.D., principal consultant, Limitless Learning
Participants are eligible for 6 Ohio Department of Education-approved "Step up to Quality" credits for these sessions.

Successful Transitions Through Supportive Services

Friday, Jan. 30
9:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Location: Northeast ABL Resource Center
Presenter: Christina Theuerling, coordinator, Northeast ABL Resource Center

Make It/Take It Workshop

Friday, Feb. 6
9:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Location: Northeast ABL Resource Center
Presenter: Christina Theuerling

February

Classrooms without Conflict: Using Discipline to Help Children Succeed

Friday, Feb. 20
9:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.
(Lunch provided)
Location: Trinity Cathedral and Commons
Presenter: Annie Lopez
Participants are eligible for 3 Ohio Department of Education-approved "Step up to Quality" credits.

March

Reach More Families: Practical Ways to Promote Family Literacy

Friday, March 20
9:00 a.m. -12:00 p.m.
(Lunch provided)
Location: Trinity Cathedral and Commons
Presenter: Annie Lopez
Participants are eligible for 3 Ohio Department of Education-approved "Step up to Quality" credits.

Training locations:

Trinity Cathedral and Commons is located at 2230 Euclid Avenue, Cleveland. Free parking is available from the entrance on Prospect Avenue at East 22nd Street.

Northeast ABL Resource Center is located at Henn Mansion, 23131 Lakeshore Blvd., Euclid.

To register:

Space is limited. Contact Erika Mason by phone, 216.393.4549, or by email at emason@literacycooperative.org.