Project Read Update

Project Read: the Adult Literacy Program of the San Francisco Public Library

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To the Newcomers

by Duane Freeman

This is for the newcomers. Good luck, you are in the right place for help. I was sitting at home thinking about when I first came to Project Read for help. Looking back over the years, I met with a lady by the name of Heather. She was so nice to me. She had me do some reading and some writing, and then told me, "Yes, you do need some help." I think that was 2002. In addition, she put me with one of the best tutors by the name of Genanne. Today I would like to tell Genanne and Heather "thank you," because from that day I made a commitment that I would not give up on myself, and that I would go back to school and get a job. I needed to do more with my life.

On October 31, 2003, I started working at the VA (Veterans Affairs) hospital in the CWT (Compensated Work Therapy) program that helps veterans get back on their feet and overcome homelessness. I worked with the Engineering Department. In April 2005, I became a permanent worker at the VA working in the EMS (Environment Management Services) Department. My duties were cleaning all over the VA and in the OR (Operating Room). I worked nights for two and a half years. On May 14, 2007, I was back doing what I like to do, re-lamping lights, installing ceiling tiles, and doing all types of repairs. I am working at the VA hospital in the Engineering department as a maintenance helper and hoping to become a journeyman maintenance worker soon.

Today I feel happy and very grateful for all the help getting to where I am. We put in weekend after weekend here at Project Read reading and writing. Now that I'm back on days I can go back to school and get my BA. I'm reading more on the job and writing each day and typing as well. It's hard but I just cannot give up. So newcomers, if I can do it you can do it too. Just keep coming back and call on your higher power. All you need to do is to keep the faith.

What's inside ...

	Page
Learner writing	1-2
Writer to Writer Challenge	3
Tutor-Learner Recognition	4
Gratitude	6
Project Read Presentation	7
Thank you	7
Learner Accomplishments	8

The views expressed are those of the authors - not necessarily that of Project Read or the San Francisco Public Library.

Take Me Out to the Ballgame

by Jimmy Diaz

On Tuesday, May 22, my tutor Mark got two free tickets and we took the chance to see the San Francisco Giants versus Houston. Once near the stadium it was pretty hard to miss the ships. You can really smell the ocean. Pretty warm and breezy. So nice a night for baseball.

In the entrance we received free posters. The Hoover High School Band sang the National Anthem. Tim Lincecum, a rookie from SF Giants and Roy Oswalt from Houston Astros were the pitchers of the game. They were good pitchers.

Tim pitched up to the eighth inning. Tim was pitching like a professional. Benitez, a pitcher of the Giants, came in the eighth inning to the rescue of Tim. Tim was tired. Benitez saved the game.

Key players from the Giants: Tim Lincecum was the pitcher. Bengie Molina had a double and Ryan Klesko had two doubles. Ray Durham tied the game in the 6th with a single to right field and Pedro Feliz hit a two run double in the sixth. San Francisco won the game 4-2.

Courtesy of *http://www.lonestardigital.com*

by Mark Rowe

Jimmy Diaz and I have been working together for about three months. We usually meet on Tuesday nights at 6:00, but a few weeks ago I ran into a friend of mine on the way to the Library. He had to go to work and handed me a pair of Giants tickets. I knew Jimmy liked baseball and I couldn't let the tickets go to waste, so I decided we would have our tutor/learner session at the ballpark.

On the way there, we agreed to make it a "working" field trip. Jimmy and I took turns making notes and eating pizza, and I gave Jimmy his assignment for the next week: write a story about the game. I told him about the five "W's" of journalism- who, what, where, when, and why, and turned him loose. The results, I must say, were as inspiring as the Giants hard-fought victory that night.

We had been working a lot on phonics and sounding out words. We had also talked a lot about putting sentences together and good punctuation. In his first draft, whenever Jimmy did not know how to spell a word, he wrote it out phonetically and circled it, so we could work on it later. Sometimes he wrote the word he was thinking of in Spanish, so he would not lose the thought. When we met, we went to the dictionary a lot (Jimmy brings his own) and talked not only about how to spell the word, but also about what the word means: its definition.

A few times the sentences were too long, so we broke them up and made simple statements. Sometimes one sentence naturally led to another, so we put them together with a comma. I want to emphasize that before we did *any* editing at all, I was very impressed. Jimmy painted a beautiful picture of a beautiful evening. The sights, sounds, and smells of the ballpark and the story of the game came across very clearly in the first draft.

But Jimmy came to Project Read to improve his reading and writing skills, so we made that first draft our workshop. We talked about phonics and got the spelling right. We talked about sound patterns and sight words. We put similar sentences together and made paragraphs. We put down in words what we experienced. Jimmy's writing and recollections of that night are now a living record. Hopefully, there will be many more to come.

2007 Writer to Writer Challenge for Adult Learners

Dear Ms. Angelou,

I was searching for great poetry that's inspiring to millions of people. As an African American, I relate to your poetry and identify with the meaning. Your verses transform black pride into words. The strong morals and colorful description altered my way of thinking about life and the choices I face. Your poetry opened my eyes so that I can write my own poems.

There are many great poems in your book *And Still I Rise,* but three of them really stand out in the crowd. "Thank You Lord" says that life shouldn't be taken for granted. When you described the Lord as an African American leader, it brought new purpose to me and made me think about the Lord in new ways. I feel empowered being at church now because His words are living!

"One More Round" is about being free. Just like you, Ms. Angelou, I'm willing to do the work but I would like the same recognition. A slave is somebody who has nothing to live for. As a security guard, I'm a hard-working person who doesn't mind getting dirty, as long as I am being treated with respect.

Your poem "And Still I Rise" is the most wonderful treat to behold. You won't let anything keep you down. Neither will I. Society handed me a high school diploma but my reading and writing are not as good as I want. I'm not happy because I know I can do a lot more. I am going to stand up and be accountable for my actions and get a better education.

Ultimately, reading your book *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings,* and especially your poetry in *And Still I Rise* brought tears to my eyes. Reading these books gave me the responsibility to learn more about African American history.

Searching for ways to improve my state of mind, I discovered your writings, but I was expecting to be bored out of my mind. When I opened the book, I felt liberated with the knowledge that I obtained! You inspired me to try to compose a poem that would touch other people. So I wrote a poem about a young man setting a bad example and learning how to change his life. I hope it's okay that I'm sending you a copy.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. I hope you will enjoy my poem "Living on the Edge" also.

Sincerely, your friend and fellow poet,

DéMarcus R. Johnson

P.S. Thank you for reminding me and billions of people to follow our dreams.

Annual Project Read Tutor-Learner Recognition

Luis Herrera, City Librarian

Last month, I had the honor of attending Project Read's Tutor-Learner Recognition celebration at the Main Library. Project Read remains one of my favorite programs offered by the Library because of its value and profound impact on the lives of both tutors and learners. I also have a personal connection to adult literacy. Many years ago when I worked at the Long Beach Public Library, I was fortunate to help establish one of the first adult literacy programs offered through the California Literacy Campaign. At the time, adult literacy programs were new to libraries and often, library staff resisted these programs and questioned their legitimacy in libraries. Some questioned whether libraries should be in the business of teaching people to read. After all, don't library users already know how to read? If not, shouldn't it be the role of schools and adult education programs to teach these skills? Libraries are indeed about literacy and information and the ability to read is an essential skill needed to take full advantage of all that a library has to offer. I'm glad that the State Library and public libraries resisted these challenges and saw the opportunity for libraries to be true partners in literacy. Today, adult literacy programs are integral to library services and play a significant role in teaching adults the skills to read and ultimately become information and computer literate.

The recognition was a joyous testament to the dedication and passion that tutors bring to the program. Their compassion is a gift that cannot be measured in terms of dollars but by the impact it has on the lives of the learners whose lives are changed by gaining self-confidence and self-worth through a new found skill. The event celebrates the commitment toward self-improvement and the significant strides that learners make on their journey to personal growth. I was moved and inspired by the courage of our learners who shared their reading publicly with passion and purpose. Tutors, learners and staff should be proud of their achievements in creating a community of readers in San Francisco. Congratulations to all and continued success in the pursuit of your goals!

Luis Herrera, City Librarian

Jack and Leon

Jimmy and Mark

Captivated by *Reading Minds*

Alexis Harte

Ellen

Dorothy and Amberly, our Emcees

Randy

Queen

Lucille

Wonderful

John

Anna

Tim

My Blessed Free Vacation
by Wonderful Wright

I went to Mazatlan, and on my journey I went with my goddaughter, Adrianne Hymes, and her family. We had a nice flight to LA and from LA to Mazatlan. When we got to Mazatlan, my luggage wasn't there. Someone picked up my luggage by mistake. We went to the hotel, and we called Delta, and Delta found who had my luggage. We met the nice guy who had accidentally picked up my luggage. From there we lived on the beach, ate from the sea, picked sea shells, read Murli and meditated. We went into town to go shopping. For the first time I didn't buy a thing. We went to a beautiful church, took pictures and met good people. I ate tacos on the streets. And we had a birthday party. When we were ready to come back, they couldn't find my ticket—more drama at the end. I had a very blessed, good time.

Wonderful and friends

Gratitude
by Steve Blumenthal

As a former teacher who misses the classroom, I am grateful for the opportunity to volunteer at Project Read. It is especially rewarding to work with someone as highly motivated as DéMarcus Johnson. Again and again, I am uplifted by his perseverance, diligence and enthusiasm for learning.

We began in October, 2006. Since then, he has read half a dozen books, written an article for the Project Read newsletter, improved his spelling and handwriting, and composed original poetry.

The most exciting activity so far has been preparing for the driver's license test. DéMarcus had been unsuccessful in earlier attempts to pass the test, but he refused to give up. For two months, he read the manual repeatedly and took practice test after test.

At DMV, when DéMarcus finished the exam, he watched the scorer check his answers. One is allowed to miss six questions. As the examiner marked the third "X", DéMarcus looked worried. However, when he saw that he had missed only four all together and realized that he had passed, he shrieked with relief—and joy.

On that day, and at the end of every tutoring session, DéMarcus is sure to express his gratitude. I am glad he does so; however, the best "thank you" is always the look of pride on DéMarcus' face—when he passes the driver's test, sees his article in the newsletter, hears his poem read aloud, or reads the last page of a book.

DéMarcus has a ways to go in order to meet his long-term goal of earning a college degree. His perseverance will stand him in good stead in this regard. Meanwhile, though, he is finding satisfaction along the way, feeling a sense of accomplishment with each step. In that way, he is teaching me to do the same, and for that, I too am grateful.

Steve and DéMarcus

Project Read Staff Speak at Stacey's Bookstore

by Randy Weaver

On Thursday, June 28, Leon Veal and Randy Weaver were invited once again to make a presentation at the Stacey's Bookstore lunch time speakers' series. This was the third year in a row that our friends at Stacey's have asked us to participate in this popular weekly event.

Randy spoke first about Project Read's mission, the specific services provided, and the importance of recruiting new volunteer tutors. Then, Leon captivated the crowd by describing his own experiences and his commitment to making a difference in the lives of Project Read's adult learners.

There was an excellent turn out which included many current volunteer tutors who work in the area and were happy to add their own thoughts about the rewards of working with their adult learners. We had two members of the Wednesday Night Readers book club in attendance and they described the unique experience of taking part in these monthly book discussions.

Stacey's Bookstore has been a long-time supporter of Project Read. Besides inviting the staff to participate in these lunch time presentations, they have also provided annual discounts for Project Read volunteers, gift cards to honor our tutor contacts, and invaluable purchasing support through their corporate sales office. Stacey's is an excellent example of how local businesses can provide much needed community support to help Project Read enhance and improve our services.

Leon captivates the crowd

Leon, Ingrid Nystrom, Director of Marketing, Stacey's Bookstore, and Randy

Thank you

☺ John Gildersleeve and Mary Hilton for leading the Wednesday Night Readers meetings. ☺ Friends of the San Francisco Public Library for their generous support. ☺ Tutor contacts Vivian Altmann, Renee Feldman, Susan Fink, JoAnn Lopez, Terri Ryan, Bruce Suehiro, and Mary Hilton for providing invaluable support to the staff and fellow tutors. ☺ Anjolie Chidambaram, Lucille Cuttler, Amanda Hamilton, Georgia Hebron, Suzanne Kirk, June Nakajima, and Wonderful Wright for helping at the Tutor-Learner Recognition Party. ☺ Stacey's Bookstore and the Sports Basement for donations to our Tutor-Learner Recognition event. ☺ Amberly Polidor and Dorothy Curry for emceeing the event. ☺ Luis Herrera, John Gildersleeve, Tim Long, Wonderful Wright, Anna Bartley, Dorothy Curry, Lucille Cuttler, Ellen Egbert, and Queen Amie Kurbally for speaking at the Tutor-Learner event.

Learner Accomplishments

Kenny and Drina

Recently, people noticed **Kenny Soles'** reading has improved. At his Alcoholics Anonymous meetings friends have commented on his reading skills. At the meeting, members read out loud and they noticed that Kenny's reading has gotten much better. In addition, he has been working on his pronouns, nouns and math skills. Drina Boban, Kenny's tutor, says he has really improved in these three areas as well.

Larry Condall has made dramatic improvement in using the computer lab. He now devotes time before each tutoring session to work independently on *Spell It Deluxe*.

Thabiti Knight has been using the computer lab to improve his spelling, phonics, and music appreciation skills.

Shedrick Ferguson, Jr. did a lot of research on the history of the Civil Rights movement when he recently visited Memphis, Tennessee. He is doing further research on this subject and plans to write about it for the next Project Read newsletter.

Dolores Toussaint uses e-mail to share photographs, plan family trips, and keep in touch with loved ones.

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