

## 2009 Spotlight On Achievement Winners

### **Cholena and Kachina Dabney, Oakton Community College, Skokie**

After a traumatic break up of their family life, Cholena and Kachina were home schooled and virtually isolated for many years. When they entered the GED program they were faced with the challenges of diverse classmates, both in age and ability as well as personality and culture. They were uncomfortable in new groups, had to learn to share the teacher's attention with others, be flexible enough to embrace time limits on different subjects and to switch to different subjects with different groups in classroom settings. With humor, determination and persistence, they adapted very well. In fact they became confident enough to help other students who were struggling. They have bloomed from shy, unfocused dreamers into confident young women with goals and the plans to accomplish them. While they were excellent creative writers, they had to make their everyday writing more grammatically correct. They both worked hard and increased their reading scores considerably. Their plans include getting their GED and opening a bookstore together. Reading has opened the world to them and they want to learn more about the world they live in.

### **Ron Draper, YWCA Adult Literacy, Pekin**

Ron has been in and out of adult education programs for many years. But this time he has a greater motivation to succeed. He is a widower who is raising his stepson. He sees in his stepson similar learning difficulties to those he experienced. He wants to be able to help his stepson with homework so that he doesn't end up in a special education program like Ron did. Ron has successfully held a good job and raised two families with only a special education certificate, but now Ron has been empowered to do even more. Through adult literacy, he is making a better life for himself and his stepson. His goal is to improve his reading and writing so he can get a better job with the lumber company where he currently works as a truck driver. When it came time to renew his driver's license, he had to pass several tests to keep his job as a truck driver. Unfortunately, he did not pass everything and he lost his job. The good news is his tutor worked with him on the part he failed. When he retook the test, he passed and was back on the job within a week. In the short time that he has been working with a tutor, he has read his first full-length adult novel, his own mail and his newspaper. He is on his way.

**Marc Girouard, John Wood Community College, Quincy**

Marc was identified with dyslexia early in life. When he graduated from high school he read at the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade level. This learning disability contributed to low self-confidence and kept him from finding a job and moving away from home. When his tutor, Norma Barnwell, and the literacy program at John Wood Community College came into his life, everything changed. Norma, who is also a Spotlight on Service winner, took the time and effort to teach him the fundamentals of learning to read using phonics. After working with Norma for a few years, Marc achieved many of his personal goals. He raised his reading level, completed the Electrical Mechanics Program at the local college and moved away from home for the first time in his life. He has a full-time job but is looking for a better job that will make use of his training. Reading is still not easy for Marc but through the skills Norma has taught him, he is not afraid to try to figure out what something says. The future looks bright for Marc and he is looking forward to many more accomplishments.

**Richetta Harris-EI, Lawrence Education Center, Springfield**

Richetta had never read a book at the time she enrolled in the program at Lawrence. She is the mother of four children and her daughter was following in her footsteps. At age eleven her daughter had given up on school. Richetta, as a mother, did not want that for her daughter. Richetta works at a local restaurant and that is where Barbara from Lawrence Education Center came into her life. Barbara was a customer and began talking about where she works. Richetta told Barbara that she wished she could get an education. Barbara told her she could and gave Richetta the information she needed. She opened the door to one of Richetta's biggest wishes. In a few months, Richetta's confidence improved along with her literacy. Her daughter began noticing her mother's interest in school and that she was reading book after book. Richetta was able to help her daughter with schoolwork and got her interested in reading books and succeeding in school. Now they have begun making trips to the library and to Barnes & Noble together. Reading has given Richetta a happier family.

**Domenico Iannucci, YWCA Adult Literacy, Pekin**

Domenico arrived in the United States from Italy in 2002 at the age of 71 and not knowing a word of English. He was entirely dependent on his English-speaking wife to navigate him through his new culture. He even needed her to drive him around. As a former pilot, it was discouraging for him to have someone drive him where he needed to go. In just a few years of participating in the YWCA adult literacy program, he received a driver's license, learned to read food labels and grocery advertisements and purchased a house. He has come a long way. His next goal was to learn how to use a computer which he achieved in six short months. He enjoys emailing his children and grandchildren in Italy and researching his hobbies on the Internet. He has also mastered a web cam so he can visit with his family and friends in Italy. He is working very hard on becoming a U.S. citizen. To show how much he values his tutor and the literacy program, he carefully dresses in a suit and tie for each session and begins and ends every session profusely thanking his tutor and the staff, bowing and shaking hands all around.

### **Armando and Mariela Mayorga, DeLaSalle/Tolton, Chicago**

Armando and Mariela met each other in Mexico as children and then again as adults while attending an English as a Second Language (ESL) class at the Toman Library. Both worked very hard learning English that first year. They fell in love and Mariela had to go back to Mexico since she was here only as a visitor. They were married in Mexico and Armando came back to the U.S. to continue his ESL classes. He not only wanted to improve his English but also to pass his citizenship exam. Finding out his new bride was pregnant put even more stress on Armando. However, he achieved his first dream and became a U.S. citizen. Now the long process to bring his wife and baby back to the U.S began. In the mean time, Mariela was determined to improve her English as she waited to be rejoined with her husband. They were reunited last September and all three came to the U.S. to live. They joined the family literacy program and continue to participate in many family literacy activities. Their daughter's primary language is Spanish but her parents read English books to her daily. By the time she is ready for school, their daughter will be wonderfully bilingual. Armando is currently attending a job-training course and Mariela and their daughter continue attending English classes.

### **Lulu Qualls, Blue Gargoyle, Chicago**

Lulu grew up in Mississippi and had no formal education as a child. She only learned to write her name. She moved to Chicago with her husband and baby in the 1950's. She eventually raised 10 children. Once they were all in school, she helped provide for her children's needs by working in a drapery factory and by cleaning homes and offices. Nearly all of her children have made productive lives for themselves. Even though she has successfully raised a family and worked many jobs, Lula refuses to sit back and watch her dreams of improving her literacy skills pass her by. When she began working with her tutor, she could not read at all. She began learning the alphabet and has made progress in her phonemic awareness and vocabulary. She has also gained a whole new level of self-confidence. She is determined to learn to read and feels it is an attainable goal. She also has a deep desire to write to her granddaughter who is currently away at college, to read the Bible and participate more in her church life. Lulu navigates public transportation to and from school taking two separate buses across Chicago's south side four days a week. This would be an act of dedication for any adult learner, but especially for Lulu who is now 76 years old.

### **Oscar Ruiz, Instituto del Progreso Latino, Chicago**

Originally from Mexico, Oscar was only able to attend school up to the 4<sup>th</sup> grade. Difficult situations in life made it hard to study beyond that in Mexico. When he came to the United States, he had a desire for learning. He began taking classes at Instituto several months ago. Because his work schedule made it difficult to attend school every day, he changed his work hours. His goal is to obtain the G.E.D and with the help of dedicated teachers, he will achieve that. But in the mean time, he is improving his Spanish, learning English and continuing his elementary education. Oscar is a very dedicated and fast learner.

**Jesse Veach, Common Place, Peoria**

The oldest of twelve children, Jesse had to leave school after the sixth grade to help support his family. As an adult, he retired from Caterpillar after working there for 30 years. He wanted to volunteer at the American Red Cross as a driver which meant he needed a commercial driving license. He tried to enroll in the program at Illinois Central College but his reading level was too low. He was referred to Common Place for help with his reading. He worked diligently to learn to read and better himself. He was able to start volunteering as a driver ten years ago at the American Red Cross. Two years ago, with improved reading and dedication, he was able to get a full-time paid position as a driver. At the age of 76, Jesse proves that you are never too old to learn. He is an inspiration to all learners and tutors at Common Place.

**Freddie Williford, John A. Logan College, Carterville**

Freddie lost his job at a local manufacturing plant where he had been working most of his life. With only a fourth grade education, he felt lost even as he pursued another job. The plant that closed, had offered him the chance to go back to school but he could not fill out the paperwork. Freddie relied on his wife for many things because of his low reading skills. But his wife would not be with him in the classroom and Freddie doubted his own abilities. He was very timid and shy when he first started Adult Basic Education class. He is now able to read the newspaper, books, articles and instruction manuals without having to ask his wife for help. He is more independent and has more confidence in himself. Freddie now believes that he can reach his goals and is planning to take the GED test. He also plans to attend John A. Logan College majoring in Small Engine Repair so he can start a business. He is an inspiration to many students who are struggling when he tells them to keep trying because things will get better.