

2009 Spotlight On Service Winners

Norma Barnwell, John Wood Community College, Quincy

Norma began volunteering as a tutor ten years ago after she retired from teaching first grade. She had time on her hands and wanted to use her teaching skills in a different way. Her first students were a married couple that spoke very little English. After a short period of time, they spoke English fluently, obtained good jobs and also obtained their U.S. citizenship. In fact, they became such good friends that when Norma became ill and needed help, they brought her food and visited with her as she recuperated. Norma's next student was Marc Girouard, who is a Spotlight on Achievement winner this year. She researched his dyslexia and arranged to meet with him twice a week for shorter sessions instead of once a week for a longer session. She quickly deduced Marc's interests and capitalized on them. With Norma's help, Marc graduated from a technical school and volunteered at the local community theater. He gained enough confidence that he decided to move away from home. The primary role of a volunteer tutor is to increase the literacy skills of adult learners. Norma does this, plus much more.

Mary Berger, Township High School District 214 Community Education, Arlington Heights

After retiring, Mary wanted to do something that would be enjoyable, challenging and helpful to the community. That desire led her to District 214's Read to Learn literacy program to volunteer as a tutor. She began her training on one of the coldest days that tutor training was ever held. She drove herself to the training, wheeled herself in from the parking lot and arrived at the training room in a wheelchair. The trainers knew right then that Mary was someone special. Mary has been special ever since -- helping many students with reading and writing English. Her first English as a Second Language learner could not read in his native language and, due to an accident, was now in a wheel chair. That student not only learned how to read but he learned to how to live life to the fullest despite his disability. Mary is currently working with a small group and having fun getting to know people from China, Poland, Taiwan and Egypt.

Bob Gilbert, Lawrence Education Center, Springfield

At 90 years of age, Bob still walks several miles every day. He has walked as far as five miles one way to his tutoring appointments. Although he has had students with cars who have canceled their tutoring appointments because it was too cold, Bob has never canceled a tutoring appointment. After World War II, Bob ran a successful optical business. However, he had left home before completing high school, so, in the late 1980's, Bob came to Lawrence and earned his high school diploma. During this time he started to help other students. One of his teachers noticed and encouraged him to become a tutor. Bob has tutored adult learners that are disabled, incarcerated, in drug and alcohol abuse programs, in re-entry programs, dealing with homelessness, striving to get in the military and dealing with mental health issues. One of his former adult learners made a big impact on Bob when he told him how much his life had changed since he started tutoring. He had never been able to read but working with Bob, he began to read. He was so excited that he called his mom and started reading from a book. He said, "Hey mom, that was a book, a story, and I can read it. I can read, Mom." He could tell his mom was crying because she was so proud of him. And Bob was too.

James Himmelspach, McHenry County College, Crystal Lake

After retirement, Jim worked for two years at a company that trained customers to use their product. This helped him become comfortable speaking to groups and figuring out what clients need to know. When the job ended, he was looking for something that would keep him busy and also let him do something for others. When he heard about the Adult Literacy Program at McHenry County College, it seemed like the perfect fit. Jim chose to work with adults in English as a Second Language (ESL) because of the high need for volunteers in that area. When he started, he knew very little Spanish so he took a one-semester course. The literacy program also provided classes in Spanish for volunteers taught by ESL students who were more fluent in English. Learning a second language as an adult gave him a better appreciation for the difficulties the ESL students face in learning English. For six years Jim has taught two and one-half hours two nights a week. He not only participates in the required professional in-service trainings but also attends free workshops and uses his own money to attend literacy conferences. His greatest reward as a volunteer is seeing adult learners progress and advance. One of his memorable experiences was when he received a CD of Mexican music in the mail from an ESL student, along with a letter that was written in Spanish. In the letter, the adult learner told him that in his country it is considered somewhat foolish to volunteer except for helping your own family or neighbors. The learner told Jim the world needs more good people like him.

Steven Monroe, Lester and Rosalie Anixter Center, Chicago

The Anixter Center is a social service agency with a mission to assist people with disabilities to live, work and play successfully in the community. Seven years ago, Steve began teaching a creative writing class. On his first day, he worked with several different levels of reading abilities as well as different types of disabilities among the adult learners. The effort and excitement in the group impressed Steve so much that he committed on that first day to continuing to help out. He soon found out that there was a tremendous, untapped amount of creativity in the group. After reading short stories together, they decided to write their own story. Each week they discussed the characters, motivation, plot and purpose. All of their stories present people with challenges in a positive light. All members of the class contribute to the story. One of his students was severely challenged and it seemed next to impossible to engage him. After the first week, they worked together for one hour reading from the book they selected for that trimester. Steve would read and then the student would repeat his words for the entire hour. As class ended, Steven looked up from the book and saw that his student was sweating profusely with the strain and effort vivid on his face. With a lump in Steve's throat, he told the student "You did great today." The student didn't repeat Steve's words. He said, "I did great today!"

Veronica Pacheco, Waubonsee Community College, Aurora

As a student of Waubonsee Community College's English as a Second Language (ESL) program, she noticed a great need for tutors and volunteers. Once she graduated from the program, she decided to take the training to become a volunteer. For the last 12 years she has been volunteering in the ESL classroom and helping design materials to enhance the curriculum as well as volunteering for many other special projects. Several years ago, she began volunteering four nights a week in her mother's ESL classroom. Veronica always has a smile on her face, infinite patience and a willingness to help the students learn. One of her first students was attending classes with one of his daughters and had a hard time reading and writing even in his native Spanish language. They began working with the alphabet and she encouraged him to write simple sentences whenever he had spare time. He was reluctant to participate at first but as his confidence grew, his writing skills improved and he was more comfortable reading aloud when asked to do so. Even though he had to drop out of school because of conflicts with his work schedule, his improved reading and writing had a positive impact on his job where he is doing better than ever. Eventually he was able to return to school where he continues to improve his English and Spanish.

Becky Price, YWCA Adult Literacy, Pekin

Becky struggled in school and was diagnosed with an auditory processing disability. Because people took the time to help her, she was able to learn skills to cope with her disability. She believes that experience gave her an ability to relate to her student's difficulties in learning. Becky has been working with a young woman with severe emotional and other disabilities three hours a week for the last four years. Becky firmly states that her student has done more for her than she can possibly do for the student. Tutoring has taught Becky that she has what it takes to give back to someone else. She not only tutors but volunteers at her church, a local nursing home and attends every tutor in-service training and every literacy event with her student. The two are frequent guest speakers at tutor training. Becky probably spends more time volunteering than working for pay. She is always looking for ways to help at the YWCA.

William Summers, Kaskaskia College, Centralia

Will has been a volunteer tutor since 1995. He has worked with a variety of adult literacy students in reading, writing and math helping them reach their goal of obtaining a GED certificate. He attends continuing education sessions in order to be the best tutor possible. Currently he is tutoring one-on-one with two learners who have special needs. These learners' goal is to improve their reading and math skills. However because of their needs, they have a difficult time and their progress is slow. Will's patience and skills have helped these learners reach their goals and give them the self-esteem to continue with their education. Will believes that we should all do what we can to help other people. There are so many people that are in need of more education.

**Shirley Turbov, Township High School District 214 Community Education,
Arlington Heights**

When Shirley retired she was looking for something to do that was enlightening. So, she began volunteering as a tutor in 1996 and has been doing it ever since. She is currently tutoring a group of students in an English as a Second Language conversation class. She loves meeting people from different countries and learning about their culture. She develops a friendship by helping her students settle into life in the United States. In fact, Shirley met a young woman in her building that is from Turkey and brought her to the Read to Learn program. Since this young woman does not drive, Shirley drives her where she needs to go. They have formed a very strong friendship. When the semester ends, Shirley is not ready for any lengthy break. She informs her students that she will continue to tutor during summer break as well as the winter break. Some of her students stay in the United States and some have to go back to the native country. She always stays in touch with them. In fact one of her students missed Shirley so much that she and her husband came from Japan just to visit her. One thing Shirley has learned as a volunteer tutor is that all people are the same. They want the same things. They just speak different languages.

Panda Turner, Carl Sandburg College, Carthage

Once Panda graduated in 2006, she was given the opportunity to work with the literacy program. With a family of three children, she finds the time to volunteer as a tutor in math, reading and computers. She doesn't stop there, she will also pick up adult learners and their families to ensure their attendance in school, library events, parenting workshops and parent and child activities since public transportation is not available. She volunteered to get the necessary training so she could be the direct service person when the mental health center transported students to the Adult Basic Education class at Carl Sandburg. Panda helps in the English as a Second Language class and often pays for the snacks out of her own pocket. In return the students are teaching Panda to speak Spanish. This past December, Panda organized an Angel Tree for the children in the Family Literacy program. With the economy the way it is, the children would not have had a very good Christmas. It was a tremendous amount of work but worth it in the end. She hopes more people will volunteer their time and get as much enjoyment out of what they do as she does.