

2012 State Literacy Award Recipients Florida Literacy Conference

Excellence in Education Award- Hope CommUnity Center

Founded in 1971, the HOPE CommUnity Center in Apopka Florida is a community-based organization dedicated to the empowerment of Central Florida's immigrant and working poor communities through education, advocacy and spiritual growth.

The dedicated staff and volunteers of Hope CommUnity Center, or HCC, focus on creating real world learning experiences for their ESL and literacy learners. Students learn to make appointments, go shopping, engage in conversations, communicate at work, and talk doctors and other professionals. In short, HCC strives to help students feel more empowered in their lives and more a part of their community.

Along with the English classes, HCC's literacy efforts include offering classes in Citizenship, GED preparation, computers, parenting, and tutoring for students ranging from elementary to college level. HCC has a team of thirty AmeriCorps volunteers, many of whom are working in the Orange County Public School system as tutors and resource personnel.

Recently, HCC initiated a program for mothers not literate in their native language. The group has grown from ten students to twenty-five in a matter of months. The women have learned vocabulary and phrases so that they can be better advocates for their children in school, and they are improving their English so they can function more effectively as citizens and parents in this country.

The Hope CommUnity Center has a unique way of engaging students in their own learning. "We are not merely offering services; we are partnering with people by way of mutuality," says Sister Maureen White, Director of Educational Services at HCC. Students who are beginning English today are likely to feel called to teach others as they develop beyond the beginner level. Adult learners who pass their citizenship exams almost always come back to tell the other students how it went and what to expect.

Some become regular tutors themselves, assisting others who are sitting in the seats they once occupied. Everyone feels like both student and teacher. This model honors each person wherever they are in their learning process. Through this, people feel empowered to step outside their comfort zone. Not only do community members and our students contribute to the programs, they become leaders and are essential to the very success of HCC and its programs.

Outstanding Business Partner Award- Rasmussen College

Rasmussen College in Ocala Florida has been an exemplary supporter and business partner of the Marion County Literacy Council for the last eight years.

The college, its staff, and students have contributed in numerous ways to the Literacy Council's community literacy efforts. Starting in 2004, Rasmussen has annually made

two students available through their work-study program to serve as a part time tutor and administrative assistant. These positions save the Marion County Literacy Council approximately \$20,800 year for a total savings of \$166,400 since the partnership began.

Rasmussen opens its doors weekly to offer meeting space for one-on-one and small group tutoring. They also donate meeting space for the Council's Board meetings, tutor trainings and other events such as the Florida Literacy Coalition's regional trainings.

The Literacy Council hosts two major fundraisers each year: the Annual Adult Spelling BEE and Kiss the Horse for Literacy. Rasmussen College financially sponsors and actively participates in each event.

When the Literacy Council moved to a new building in 2009, they found that they had space for a computer lab, but did not have any equipment. Rasmussen stepped up and donated sufficient computers to accommodate all their needs. They now have a lab that allows students to work independently as well as having computers in each tutoring room, allowing tutors the opportunity to include computer literacy in their sessions.

Rasmussen itself moved to a new location in 2011 and opened the doors to its old facility, inviting the Literacy Council to walk through and create a furniture and supplies wish list. The Literacy Council received two truckloads of much needed furnishings: bookcases, office and classroom furniture, computers, and break-room equipment.

Rasmussen College Campus Director, Pete Beasley has been a tremendous supporter, serving as candidate for the Kiss the Horse Fundraiser and as an active member of the Literacy Council's Board of Directors since 2009. "He is always looking for new ways to support the Literacy Council and its programs," commented the Council's Executive Director Karen Hill, "The unwavering actions of Rasmussen College and the support of its leadership and staff make it the perfect outstanding business partner for the Marion County Literacy Council."

Outstanding Literacy Volunteer- Lisa Leiby

Lisa Leiby joined the literacy efforts of Clay County Literacy Coalition when she signed up as a volunteer tutor in 2007. A retired Navy nurse, she first discovered a love for adult literacy while living in Virginia. After three years of successful tutoring with the Literacy Coalition, Lisa became qualified as a tutor trainer in 2010, and became President of the Board of Directors in 2011.

Not only does Lisa preside over the Clay County Literacy Coalition's Board, she also directs the day-to-day operations of this all-volunteer organization. In addition, she continues to lead the tutor training team, helps plan and execute community awareness and fundraising events, networks in the community, and handling the countless other unseen and unsung tasks that keep the Coalition running smoothly.

Under Lisa's leadership, the Coalition has made great strides in the last year. Including, the implementation a new tutor and student database, updating their tutor-training workshop and expanding their training team, implementing a new standardized

assessment process for ESL students, developing a strong working relationship with Clay County School District Adult Education Program, and hosting an inaugural Literacy Month Volunteer Appreciation Luncheon.

Even with all this, Lisa still finds time for the best part—tutoring her two ESL students, both with a goal of passing their certified nursing exam.

Lisa's passion for adult literacy and her dedication to the Literacy Coalition are evident by the 90-100 hours a month that she volunteers for the cause. "Lisa's leadership as president of the Clay County Literacy Coalition is invaluable," says John Chappell, Supervisor of the Clay County Adult and Community Education, "She is taking this organization to new heights, while being committed to coordinating services for the benefit of adult learners in our county. She is an enthusiastic, knowledgeable, and diligent advocate for adult literacy. Her visionary leadership is bringing Clay County Literacy Coalition into the 21st Century."

Mary J Brogan Leadership Award- Margaret Poppell

Margaret Poppell's name is synonymous with literacy in the Pensacola area and in education circles throughout Florida. Joining Learn to Read of Northwest Florida in 1987, Margaret has served as a tutor, trainer, and Board Member.

Margaret has volunteered over 2,100 tutoring hours, working with literacy and ESL students since retiring as a teacher. As a literacy and ESL trainer for the past two decades, she has contributed to the training of over 2,000 literacy and ESL tutors in her community.

Margaret responded to an invitation to serve on the Learn to Read Board of Directors to fill a need, and she ascended to the presidency for the same reason. Her unpretentious and passionate advocacy for literacy and her committed, sleeves-rolled-up, let's-do-this-together approach to challenges resulted in the Board's unanimous support for her reelection as president for the next fourteen years. She stepped down in 2005, but agreed to remain on the Board as long as she could "make a contribution."

In addition to her work with Learn to Read, Margaret has had a variety of other volunteer and leadership roles in her community and in the state of Florida. These include volunteering in the Guardian Ad Litem Program, the Retired Senior Volunteer Program, SHINE, and the Council on Aging of West Florida. She served as Literacy Chair of the Florida Retired Educators Association and on the local boards of Reading is Fundamental and First Book.

In her late eighties, Margaret shows no signs of slowing down; continuing to contribute in any way she can including as a volunteer teacher for Learn to Read's weekly English conversation classes for ESL students.

Those who know Margaret well speak about her passionate commitment to and hardworking support of the causes she supports. Since joining Learn to Read twenty-five years ago with a goal of teaching someone to read, Margaret has made a true

difference for so many, devoting her life to adult literacy and the support of others in need.

Flight for Freedom Award- Vilma Sosa

Vilma Sosa has three children: Cindy, 13, who was diagnosed with autism at two and a half years old, Jessica, 10, a straight-A student, and Natalie, 3, who participates with Vilma in the Parent Power Family Literacy Program, operated by SB Idea in Palm Beach County. Vilma has been a student in this program for the last three years and her teacher, Cristina Abelenda, says, "She is like having another teacher in the classroom because she is a leader who is always willing to help everyone in class, in any way she can."

Vilma is also a strong advocate for autism awareness in her community. One of her main goals is to have her older daughter, Cindy, learn how to live independently. She feels strongly that people need to be educated about autistic children's behaviors, so they will be more compassionate and less judgmental to other parents like her when they are put in challenging situations. Vilma raised over \$500 for the Palm Beach School for Autism by selling cookies, collecting shoes for recycling and participating in the Palm Beach Walk for Autism. She even wrote an article published in the SB Idea's Newsletter to help educate people in her program about autism.

In addition to her untiring dedication and her commitment to her continued education in the Parent Power program at Forest Hill Elementary, Vilma helps support her family financially by cleaning houses two days a week.

Vilma is a very fast learner, reports her teacher Cristina. "She is also a quiet, humble person, who has never called attention to herself. She is a teacher's dream", says Christina, "a true role model for other classmates because she doesn't just talk about what is important to her in her life; she lives it every single day!"