



Welcome to the VIRTUAL CLASSROOM

Born from a pandemic, the remote learning program at Seeds has become a permanent service for adults who want to complete their high school education.

"Expanding our footprint has been a goal I've had for Seeds for some time," said Bonnie Entler, President & CEO. "This definitely isn't how I expected to do it, but in many ways, this is an even greater accomplishment. Our reach is so much more significant with the Virtual Classroom. Students can live absolutely anywhere and participate!"

The Virtual Classroom has attracted a whole new demographic of adults.

"The adults who have entered the program since our closure came to us BECAUSE of our virtual offerings," said Carmine Stewart, VP of Programming. "We're seeing adults who likely would never have attended in-person and have a greater comfort with technology."

In fact, at the time of this writing, 300 new students have enrolled SINCE THE CLASSROOMS CLOSED. The year of COVID can't easily be compared to other years, but under normal circumstances 450 students would have typically enrolled during the same time period.

FORMALIZING THE STRUCTURE

After 7 months of trial and error, the Virtual Classroom now operates using Zoom for both telephone and video tutoring. The 170 lessons recorded by tutors have bolstered the archives and are

available any time. Video tutoring now more closely resembles the classroom.

For tutors and students, the new process is much simpler. One, single link takes students and tutors to the Virtual Classroom and there are no complicated schedules to remember. The Virtual Classroom is open during the same hours as on-site, 4 days a week, 3 times a day.

Staff members now have greater involvement and can better pair tutors and students, just as they would in the classroom.

Zoom also allows for "breakout rooms," enabling tutors to work individually with a student -- reinforcing a critical component of the Seeds program.

ADAPTING TO CHANGE

There are many new students and tutors for whom the Virtual Classroom is all that they know. But the 200+ tutors and more than 600 students who were with us pre-COVID had to adapt along with us. Their patience and willingness to try new approaches has been nothing short of miraculous. Here's just one example.

At Seeds East, student JOE ALLEN has a table he prefers (and it's not in the computer lab.) He has specific tutors he enjoys working with, and he has a solid routine. He's been

a student at Seeds since fall of 2016 and passed math in February. His first tutor, Deenah, encouraged technology in the classroom, but, like so many others, he preferred pencil and paper. When Seeds closed, he came in to pick up paper packets (pictured above)!

Deenah prepared Joe for virtual learning by emailing him videos from Khan Academy and then they'd review concepts by phone. They'd settled into a new routine, and it was working -- until Deenah could no longer tutor. Disappointed but undeterred, Joe found new tutors he works with three days a week and is now very close to passing science.

"Originally, he was hesitant to try video, but now he loves it!," Site Coordinator Kara Krawiec said. "He made the transition to Zoom seamlessly and never misses an opportunity for a social video chat with his friends from Seeds." *



Check out more stories like Joe's on the pages that follow, and hear from our first graduates from the Class of COVID.



BONNIE ENTLER,
PRESIDENT & CEO

Dear Friends,

When I told my staff I wanted to expand, this is NOT what I had in mind.

In fact, I never could have anticipated that we'd be where we are today.

Eighty-eight percent of our students fall at or below the poverty line. They didn't grow up with technology so they aren't comfortable with it. For years, we've tried unsuccessfully to engage them, dedicating significant time and resources to digital literacy programming. We emphasized the importance of email, online navigation, and typing skills. We tried games. We tried job skills. But they simply weren't interested.

That's why I am both surprised and delighted to announce a program expansion: the Virtual Classroom. We now have graduates who have NEVER been inside of a Seeds classroom.

Remote learning wasn't a choice we made consciously. It wasn't the result of months of research and development. **It was our ONLY option and it required immediate implementation.**

Seven months later, we've learned a few things and our program is better as a result. The most important outcome is that our students are still learning. More and more adults are receiving the literacy services they desperately need to improve their lives and *they are coming to Seeds to make it happen!*

Our board also expanded, although that was planned. We've welcomed nine new members in 2020: John Grace, Bobby Grebenc, Stephen Ligus, Christopher McLaughlin, Eileen Mikkelsen, Nancy Pratt, Dawn Southard, Tonya Suber, and Andrea Vecchio.

Together with our existing members, they approved a 4-year strategic plan and have already begun implementation. But it won't be easy.

Cleveland has just been named the poorest large city. As I'm sure you agree, that is NOT ok. We must **DO better**. We must **BE better**. Our cities and communities deserve the best.

The only way to address this issue is to admit education is a basic need. It's not a luxury for some; it is a *need* for all. By providing equity in education, Seeds becomes part of the solution.

At a time when many organizations are doing everything they can to avoid closing, I can honestly say I am hopeful for our future. Seeds has weathered recessions, changes to the very test we prepare students for, and now a pandemic.

With your continued support, we will emerge stronger than ever. We literally couldn't do it without you.

~ Forever grateful, BE.

BY THE NUMBERS IMPACT of EFFORTS

**\$143,500
REVENUE LOST**

to date from cancelled special events and Foundations reducing their support



**UNEXPECTED
\$20,000 EXPENSE**

for COVID-Prevention and PPE, including cleaning supplies, HEPPA filters, barriers, & more



300+ NEW STUDENTS

have enrolled in the Virtual Classroom



34 SECTIONS

of the official GED test passed during our closure



18 GRADUATES

since our classrooms closed



Taiesha Collins, GRADUATE FROM "CLASS OF COVID"

TAIESHA COLLINS grew up in a rough neighborhood. She did well in high school, but only *when she paid attention*. "I'd clown and pay more attention to my friends in a class setting," she admitted.

Like so many students, she didn't finish because she needed to work to support herself. For years, she was a bartender. Sometimes the tips were there, sometimes they weren't.

Now, the 24-year-old has a toddler at home. "Kids are EXPENSIVE," she laughed. "I love her, but I have to get a better job to support her the right way." But finding a better job meant having her high school diploma, or an equivalent like the GED.

Referred by a 2017 Seeds grad, Taiesha joined the Virtual Classroom in July and got started working with Tutor Bill and Site Coordinator Kara right away.

After seeing high practice test scores in Social Studies, Science, and Language Arts (Reading), the team at Seeds focused on math with her. **In just two months, she had completed**

all 4 sections of the GED and couldn't be happier.

As a Virtual Student, her experience was much different than that of her friend who graduated previously.

"But it really doesn't matter WHERE you study with Seeds. It's the PEOPLE at Seeds that make the difference. There are so many great tutors, and it's really the staff that motivates you to stay on your feet and keep going," she said.

"That Kara — When I passed math, with a score higher than any of my passing practice tests, we screamed and squealed and did all kinds of dancing over the phone."

College-bound, Taiesha is still deciding on a career path, but she's certain about one thing: "If you need to finish school, do it. Be motivated and really WANT it. You can work at your own pace at Seeds. *The individual attention is what made the difference for me.*" *



Teron Collins, GRADUATE FROM "CLASS OF COVID"

TERON COLLINS was hesitant to post the photo of his HSE certificate on Instagram, but he knew that his story could inspire others who might be in the same situation he was in just a few, short months ago.

"The GED was *the last thing I wanted to do* because I WENT to high school for FOUR years and ONE test prevented me from earning a diploma."

Teron attended East High School in Cleveland and had the credits to graduate in 2010. He just couldn't pass a necessary science exam. Filled with frustration and discouragement, he gave up on the test and told himself it didn't matter that he never received the diploma he'd rightfully earned.

Teron's support system of family and friends understood his frustrations, and kept pushing him to let go of the stigma sometimes associated with the GED. Fearful that he'd been out of school too long to succeed, he reluctantly began to consider it.

"I pushed past my fears. I put aside my doubts and my frustrations, and told myself *I am gonna do this thing!*" he said.

In late June, ten years after he should have graduated high school, he attended virtual orientation and immediately started connecting with the tutors.

Teron spent the majority of his time studying math and science with Jenny Rosenberg. "I love her so much," he said. "She smiled the whole time and was so encouraging. She helped me see I was looking too deeply into the questions. She was the only person to ever tell me the answers are in the questions if you know how to look. She gave me lots of little gems that helped look at the problems differently."

Jenny wasn't his only tutor, though. "They were such a blessing. They're all amazing and different with their approaches to tutoring. I worked with several until I found the one that was right for me."



Teron and Jenny often went over their budgeted tutoring time, "because that's how much she cared," he said. He even connected with her by text and email a few times. ("I don't know if that's allowed," he confessed, "but her willingness helped me so much.")

Were there times he wanted to give up? Absolutely, he admits. But there were always people to encourage him to keep going. "[Site Coordinator] Kara [Krawiec] is so sweet. She encourages you in a way that you just can't help yourself but to learn. You do it for her."

Teron passed his first test in July and took the remaining three in August, **becoming the first Seeds of Literacy student to graduate without ever stepping foot in the classroom!**

And that's not all. He works at Starbucks, a company that will pay 100% of an employee's tuition at Arizona State University online. He'll start pursuing his bachelor's degree in Religious Studies right away. "There are many opportunities for Christians with this degree, so I'm honestly not sure what I want to do just yet. All I know is that I want to share my faith with others, and learn about their faiths. I want to pursue humanitarian efforts and make a difference."

After posting his certificate pic online, he's already making a difference. He's received numerous direct messages from other adults curious about how he did it, and he's more than happy to send them to Seeds.

"I tell them no matter how hard, how challenging, DON'T GIVE UP. Be encouraged. Move forward. Get with Seeds for great tutors. Don't rush, take your time. Have people around you who can keep you going. If you don't have that, Seeds will be that support for you." *

ROLE CHANGES AT SEEDS

The economic impact of COVID on Seeds required a restructuring of responsibilities and role priorities.



PROGRAM STAFF

The new Virtual Classroom will be led by former digital literacy coordinators TODD SEABROOK and MELINA LINDSEY. The pair are well-versed at the logistics and challenges of remote learning and have developed a rapport with students who previously avoided entering the computer lab. On-site coordinators CHRIS RICHARDS and KARA KRAWIEC will continue to engage our students and support the Virtual Classroom until our physical locations open.

LEADERSHIP ADDITION

Telling the story of Seeds in a compelling way is a critical part of fundraising, student recruitment, and advocacy for literacy awareness. President & CEO BONNIE ENTLER and VP of Programming DR. CARMINE STEWART complete their leadership team with a new addition:

KATIE KUCERA returns to Seeds to resume her role as Communications Director, a position she first held in 2017. With nearly twenty years experience in communications and branding, she is leading stakeholder communications efforts, social media, public relations, and design. She freelanced with Seeds after the pandemic struck and realized how much she missed the organization. *Returning to Seeds full-time feels like coming home*, she said. *



3104 W. 25th Street
Suite 3
Cleveland, Ohio 44109
SEEDSOFLITERACY.ORG



OUR MISSION

To provide personalized education that empowers adults to thrive in our communities.

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VIRTUAL CLASSROOM TUTOR PROFILE: JULIE REA

JULIE REA was excited to become a tutor and a simple Google search brought her to Seeds.

"I think working with a student one-to-one, where you can really understand what they need to know — and how they learn— is incredibly effective," she said.

But Seeds closed shortly after she completed Tutor Training. She never had a chance to tutor onsite.

Still, Julie Rea has become a household name for students and staff alike. Determined to make a difference, she was one of the first volunteers willing to tutor virtually and was a pioneer in the Virtual Classroom, eager and available to help.

Technology has proven to be a difficult adjustment for many students and tutors. But Julie was a champion of virtual learning and her enthusiasm encouraged others tutors to participate. Her comfort with technology puts students at ease and she is able to troubleshoot any tech difficulties that arise during lessons.

She developed and presented more than 20 lessons which are now available in the Seeds archives for students to review at any time. The majority of them cover math concepts.

"My goal is never to let another person believe that they are just not a 'math person,' because math makes sense!" she declared. "It is a useful tool. I want everyone to know that they can learn math, and use it in their daily lives!"

Like Seeds, Julie sees education as a social justice issue.

"I believe that the adults who turn to Seeds for help have been failed in the past — poorly served, overlooked, forgotten — by an education system that has refused to change or adapt to the students in its care. Whatever small part I can play in helping someone overcome this neglect, I believe I need to do it."

"She has proven to be a real treasure and we thank her for the enormous impact she has made in such a short time," said Site Coordinator CHRIS RICHARDS. "She's not just willing to help whenever she's needed, in any capacity, but she is also *exceptionally* good at explaining difficult concepts -- both educational and technological."

Julie's efforts at Seeds during the pandemic, and her deep respect and empathy for the students, earned her a Most Treasured Volunteer award from The Center for Community Solutions. The virtual presentation was held October 23.

Seeds is lucky that a Google search led her to us.

*Join us in congratulating Julie, and all of our Virtual Classroom tutors, who have made this transition possible! **

