



The SEED

Spring 2023



HER SECOND GED: KEEVA LONG

ALUMNI CHECK-IN

"I know loss," 2021 graduate Keeva said. "I buried babies. I grew up in public housing. I have a felony." But she **OVERCAME**, and wants others to know that they can overcome, too.

If those challenges weren't enough, Keeva was **shot three times**, an uninvolved bystander in a drive-by-shooting in 2009. She was paralyzed and had to learn to walk again.

"I wanted to succeed not *in spite of* these things, but *because of them*," she said. She used them to make her better, not to be the reasons she failed.

IDENTITY FRAUD

The now-47-year-old became a mother at 16. She didn't want to live off of government assistance with a child, so she left school to work. Another child and several years later, she earned her GED in 1996.

Keeva applied for college and financial aid nearly a decade later. It was because of those applications that she learned she was a victim of fraud. After she first earned her GED, the number was used to obtain financial aid and general identity information on the West Coast. There were too many complications and too much red tape and she was told getting another GED was the best way to start over.

She then saw a sign in a window on Kinsman: Free GED.

A HOME AT SEEDS

Keeva gets emotional when she remembers her first few days with Seeds. "I was embarrassed, I thought I was too old and couldn't handle it. But as soon as I walked in, I was greeted so warmly and welcoming," she said.

She quickly realized there were students older than her, and that the attention she received was individualized. "Every time I think about it, I get chills," Keeva said. "There was someone to help me. One-to-one. They were **VOLUNTEERING** to help ME! They didn't see me as a failure!" She met doctors, lawyers, construction workers, and educators, all volunteering as tutors.

This site is located in what Keeva calls a blighted area, but it impressed her that the volunteers still showed up for her – for all of the students.

"This program was designed to help you win and not feel bad," she continued. "Someone is always saying 'let's do it.'" She appreciated the encouraging family atmosphere.

Keeva preferred learning in the classroom, so when COVID hit, she was tempted to give up. Fortunately, she had another graduate to inspire her: Margo Hudson.

"I kept Miss Margo's pamphlet right where I could see it every day. If she could do it, I could certainly do it. When I wanted to quit, I looked at her picture." Now, she volunteers as a literacy ambassador at Farmer's Markets with Margo.

THE FUTURE

Keeva is in her 3rd semester of college and will switch to Cleveland State for her bachelor's soon. She's in the urban development program, but has additional aspirations.

She refuses to be defined by her past and wants her story to inspire others.

"I want all the young people to know that they can overcome their background," she said. "They have to want it."

She believes that people don't realize what she has been through and what she has overcome because she wears nice clothes, has a job, and a nice car. "But I shop at Goodwill," she said with a smile. She knows what it's like to struggle.

"Every brick that was thrown at me, I used it to build steps, a ladder up," she said. "You take life by the horns or give up, and I'm not letting anyone give up." ◀

Dear Friends,

Our 25th Anniversary Year has been a lot of fun so far. Students and tutors have won prizes for attendance, mini parties were held when the 25th coincided with class days, and we celebrated *Thrive!* with one of our most worthy alumnas: Ms. Margo Hudson. We recorded parts of the event, so if you missed the inspirational speeches given by Margo and others, check out our website.

Margo kept the momentum going when her face appeared on the side of an RTA bus as an ambassador for a city-wide reading initiative (more on that below).

Our Anniversary Year unofficially wraps with a Silver Jubilee at Stillwater Place at the Cleveland Metroparks Zoo! We're looking forward to celebrating 25 years of hard work and will toast to 25 more, in a venue new to us.

DONOR SUPPORT

Our donors didn't just raise \$25k in honor of 25 years — *they did it in just four months!* With the challenge of new or increased donations met, our generous benefactor will now match that amount.

Ending 2022 on that high note, I didn't think the calendar year could start even better. *But it did.*

Our friends at Community West supported our adult literacy efforts with a \$38,100 gift. Shortly after, Ceasars Entertainment Inc. and the Cleveland Cavaliers presented our Director of Grant Development Kerry Klein with an over-sized check for \$40,000.

With no guaranteed funding year to year, *every gift* goes a long way to ensuring our services continue.

STUDENT SUCCESS

Our donors aren't the only ones stepping up this year. We expect a record number of graduates. As I write this, we're just a few students shy of surpassing our total number of grads in 2022 — and we still have several months until our fiscal year concludes at the end of June. At this rate, we may need a bigger venue, and what a wonderful problem to have!

GROWING TUTOR NEED

We do have a significant obstacle. We promise one-to-one tutoring, even in the Virtual Classroom, *but have sometimes been unable to deliver.*

Simply put, the demand for tutors is growing faster than our capacity to recruit. If you haven't thought about it before, I urge you to consider volunteering as a tutor. We provide all the training and student materials, and only ask for 1% of your entire week. Best of all, you don't have to tutor math (unless you want to!) If you are already tutor, I challenge you to recruit someone else.

Thank you for helping us to serve the community for the last 25 years and helping us have enough tutors for the next 25.



BONNIE ENTLER,
PRESIDENT & CEO

~ BE



1 MILLION BOOKS

The city that reads together grows together. That's the purpose behind Cleveland Mayor Justin Bibb's citywide reading challenge.

The challenge goal is for the entire city to collectively read one million books in 2023. Readers can log their minutes read and books completed in a free app called Beanstack. The challenge website is updated weekly to show the city's collective progress. Through Beanstack, "badges" are earned and readers can visit their local Cleveland libraries to win prizes for their progress.

Seeds is one of more than 30 grassroots organizations championing the challenge. Several members of the staff serve on the Cleveland Reads initiative committees, helping plan, promote, and foster a love of reading.

Seeds Grad & Tutor Margo Hudson was selected as a Literacy Ambassador and Cleveland Reader for the challenge. She's pictured on promotional items for Cleveland Reads, and is even pictured on the side of a Cleveland RTA bus!

► Watch the city's progress and learn more: WWW.CLEVELANDREADS.COM



Suzanne McWhorter, student data analyst, received the 2022 OACE Support Staff of the Year Award at the OACE Annual Conference in October.



Seeds is the place to be for adults who need assistance reading. Following the launch of Cleveland Reads, Seeds was featured on:

- WKYC's We the People, hosted by Leon Bibb
 - WKYC's broadcast promoting the campaign kickoff, featuring Margo Hudson on a bus
 - NPR'S "Hey Cleveland, can you read a million books in 2023?"
 - WOJU 95.9FM Community Affair
- SEEDSOFLITERACY.ORG/NEWS



BY THE NUMBERS

We all know the importance of literacy for day-to-day living. It's crucial for paying bills, understanding medical instructions, gaining and improving employment, shopping for groceries and household goods, and helping children with their homework.

Seeds of Literacy has served more than 15,000 adult students. Our alumni say improved literacy skills and the GED changed their lives, and that Seeds made it possible. But it's not just the adult learners who benefit from the program. Volunteer tutors also tell us that Seeds gives them purpose and the students are inspiring.

What does 25 years look like? *(Through the first half of our fiscal year)*

STUDENTS



- 6,457 GED test sections taken
- 7,861 GED practice tests taken
- 76% of students enrolled are actively attending

TUTORS

Tutor with the Most Hours

SISTER KATHLEEN RUDDY = 6,073 hours

Active Tutor with the Most Hours

SHARON VEJDOVEC = 2,854 hours



Active Tutor with the Longest Tenure

JANE BOHNE - joined 3/1/2000

EMPLOYEES

Longest Administrative Tenure: 20 years, BONNIE ENTLER

Longest Staff Tenure: 15 years, CHRIS RICHARDS

Staff Who Left and Returned: 4



- CHRISTINE LEE 2002 - 2008 & 2021 - current
- KERRY KLEIN 2011 - 2012 & 2021 - current
- KATIE KUCERA 2017 - 2019 & 2020 - current
- TODD SEABROOK 2017 - 2018 & 2019 - current

Seeds of Literacy started in church basements across the city of Cleveland. We now have two centralized classrooms serving the city and a virtual classroom world wide, so our numbers will continue to grow.

\$25K FOR 25 YEARS

SEEDSOFLITERACY.ORG/DONATE



In September, a generous, long-time supporter pledged to match, dollar for dollar, the first \$25,000 in new and increased contributions through the fiscal year.

BY DECEMBER, THAT GOAL WAS MET!

THANK YOU to everyone who increased their donation or donated for the first time. You helped us secure **\$50,000** to support the general operating budget.

25TH GRADUATION TO STREAM LIVE

WEDNESDAY
JUNE 28

Broadcast will begin around
6:30 pm ET.

www.seedsofliteracy.org/graduation2023





TUTOR SPOTLIGHT: THE IN-LAWS



Word of Mouth is the #1 recruitment source for students and quite often, for tutors too. Lynne recruited her brother-in-law to work in the Virtual Classroom.

LYNNE MEILLEUR-BRENNER came to Seeds in 2018, not knowing what to expect, but ready to make a difference. She signed up for tutor training after learning about Seeds from the Cleveland Foundation, who stressed the impact the organization has on individuals, families, and the community.

"I took the in-person training and found it informative, professional, and friendly," she said, "Not overwhelming. I felt prepared." The rest is history.

The Rocky River resident is now a regular, tutoring 3 times a week. "I'm surprised and continuously impressed by how dedicated the students are while balancing jobs, families, and all of life's demands," she said. Adult learners **choose** to come to Seeds, and it shows.

IN THE FAMILY

Lynne didn't have to stop tutoring when COVID hit. She just went Virtual. Her brother-in-law John wasn't so lucky.

JOHN BRENNER lives just outside of Columbus and tutored math with several agencies in the area until the pandemic made it impossible. He thought his tutoring days were on hold indefinitely... until he learned about Seeds from Lynne.

Having tutored elsewhere, he was qualified and felt he knew what to expect. "But I have learned to appreciate just how difficult a task is for many students," he said. "Some have been out of school for a very long time. Some left school very

early. Almost all seem to have difficulty with math. It's a long, tough journey for many. Yet, some make it!"

Although both Brenners have a semi-regular student each, they count on the staff to pair them with the student that needs them most at any time. As a retired engineer and researcher, John likes to work with students challenged at the higher levels of math, but he's happy to help any student, at whatever level they may need.

Lynne likes tutoring math also, but it's second to her love of reading. "I still learn so much and I like to share that awareness with students."

THE CHALLENGES

Eliminating transportation requirements is a huge benefit of the Virtual Classroom. Students and tutors alike appreciate the flexibility it affords. But sometimes the tech itself poses a problem and requires a calm patience from the tutor.

Lynne struggles when a student has a poor internet connection. Dropped and inconsistent connectivity can make it frustrating. "And, the student devices are often limited in size," she said. Ideally Seeds recommends that students join the classroom via a tablet or computer but some only have a small phone screen available.

"Seeing their work sometimes gives me a clue as to what they are thinking, and then I can better address problems they

may be having," John said. That's just not always possible in the Virtual Classroom.

THE REWARD

"I found the one-to-one model and virtual capabilities to be an attractive means to get back in the game," John said. "It's been nice to eliminate all the travel associated with in-person tutoring and without Seeds, I probably would not be tutoring at all."

For Lynne, the *people* keep her coming back: the staff, other tutors, and of course, the students. Like many of our tutors, she's especially delighted when a student sees their own achievement. "The accomplishments of the students, whether it's passing an official test section, or just learning how to add fractions, it all adds up."

"I truly believe that literacy is the way to improve individual lives," John explained. "The local community, larger region, and nation are impacted that way – one life at a time."

To those considering tutoring, It's easy, John said. "Pick your favorite subject and give it a try."

Lynne admits it's not for everyone but still encourages others to learn more. Even in a one-to-one tutoring session, you aren't alone in the classroom. "The site coordinators are wonderful, supportive, and helpful," she said. ◀

*Volunteer training sessions are offered every 6 weeks. Ongoing professional development is also available. Tutors need not worry about creating lesson plans. The staff has all of the curriculum and lesson plans ready for each student. "Class" (one-to-one tutoring) is just 2 hours a session and is offered 3 times a day, 4 days a week. YOU choose which days and times work best for your schedule, even if it changes each week. One class session is the equivalent to **just 1% of your entire week!***

▶ SIGN UP AT WWW.SEEDSOFLITERACY.ORG/VOLUNTEER



SINCE EARNING HER GED IN 2012, **MARGO THRIVES!**

She's going to need a bigger table for all of her awards. That was the unanimous decision at the 5th Annual Seeds of Literacy *Thrive!* event November 4, 2022, where more than 180 guests filled the ballroom at the Crowne Plaza Playhouse Square.

WITH DELIGHT

This year's honoree, Margo Hudson, had a section of the room dedicated to her success since graduating from Seeds. It was adorned with newspaper clippings, framed letters from Governor's Kasich and DeWine, along with the Governor's Courage Award, photos of her with celebrities and local government officials, and a letter from President Biden.

Margo Hudson signs her emails "With delight" – a phrase that perfectly sums up her sunny, hopeful, positive, and energetic personality. She pursued her GED at Seeds of Literacy for eleven years, and took the test six times before passing – a true testament to her perseverance.

Since graduating from Seeds in 2012, she's been a tireless advocate for adult literacy, sharing her story at homeless shelters, food pantries, health fairs, library events, and at Cleveland Hopkins Airport, where she works.

It was "with delight" that Seeds presented her with this year's Cultivator Impact Award. Margo's former tutor (and inaugural Cultivator Impact Award recipient) Bill Litzler stood from the audience to say a few words.

With tears of pride in her eyes, President & CEO Bonnie Entler introduced her, announcing that Margo isn't just a former student and volunteer for Seeds. She's also become a personal friend.

VOICES OF LITERACY

To help guests understand more about adult education, additional speakers shared how literacy is impacting their own lives. Current student Delilah Brown shared how she spent most of



her life caring for her family. Three years ago, she made a vision board with goals that make self-care a priority. One of those goals was "Get your GED." Those three simple words were harder than she expected, she explained. It had been more than 30 years since she so much as picked up a textbook, but she enrolled at Seeds. She's now a 3-section passer who intends to take the final section soon.

Dr. Joseph Daprano has partnered with Seeds for more than a decade as an Assistant Professor of Internal Medicine and Pediatrics at MetroHealth and Case Western Reserve University's School of Medicine. Without warning, he opened his presentation speaking for several minutes in Melanesian Pidgin, the language spoken in Papua New Guinea. The audience listened, clearly confused. **But no one said "I can't understand."** Some patients are intimidated by white coats, and are too embarrassed to admit they don't understand what the doctor is saying. His point was made. This is part of a demonstration he gives his first-year med students to illustrate the impact of literacy on healthcare.

The event is estimated to have raised more than \$80,000 for general operating expenses. ◀

PHOTO CAPTION: Sister Kathleen Kilbane founded Seeds 25 years ago as part of the Congregation of St. Joseph. She attended the event with Ann Gannon (far left), who was one of the original site coordinators at Seeds! They are pictured with Margo (center), Bonnie, and Carmine (far right).

▶ Read the full article and check out fun photos from the event: SEEDSOFLITERACY.ORG/THRIVE2022



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OUR MISSION

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



STILLWATER PLACE

at THE CLEVELAND METROPARKS ZOO

Friday **MAY 19** *6pm-10:30pm*

Seeds Silver Jubilee

~Sponsored in part by CARNEGIE MANAGEMENT & DEVELOPMENT CORP ~

For 25 years, Seeds of Literacy has fought illiteracy. Before we move on to the next quarter century, we invite you to join us in celebration of how far we've come as an organization and Seeds Family.

This special Silver Jubilee will be held at the beautiful Stillwater Place at The Cleveland Metroparks Zoo and includes:

- *Cocktails at the Carousel*
- *Heavy Appetizers*
- *25-Year Retrospective*
- *Backtraxx band*



Tickets

