



# The SEED

FALL 2024

## A GED WAS HIS **PASSPORT TO GERMANY**

**ALUMNI CHECK-IN:** Patrick Stamper's dream has always been to help others as a paramedic, but one thing stood in his way: lack of a high school diploma.

Patrick, 24, is a Seeds 2023 alum. He has always wanted to work with Emergency Medical Services, but with no GED, his applications went unanswered. Then, something happened that made him decide to reignite his education journey: he found out he was having a baby. "I was preparing to become a dad, so I knew I had to buckle down and really focus on family things instead of just myself," he said.

### THE CHALLENGES

When Patrick was a senior in high school, his grandmother fell sick, and he dropped out to focus on caring for her. Later, when he was ready to get his GED, another barrier came up: his father got sick, too.

"My father ended up having black spots on his lungs causing me to focus on working to ensure everything would be fine if we were given bad news. Thankfully they cleared after two years. That's when I was finally able to focus and earn my GED."

### PATRICK'S TIME AT SEEDS

Patrick tried some other programs before Seeds, working in a classroom

with one teacher and several other students. But that wasn't what he needed to succeed.

"Seeds having tutors who were one-to-one was the biggest thing that worked for me," he said. "I ended up choosing Seeds because of the hospitality I was given, and the flexible, online help."

Like many people, Patrick found math to be his biggest roadblock. With the help of a tutor, though, the challenge slowly started to become easier.

Patrick's focus and dedication to his new family was infectious.

"He's such a kind and friendly person," says Kara Krawiec, Director of Student Success. "He had a baby girl on the way, so he wanted to make sure he completed his GED before she arrived. It was such a pleasure to get to work with him, however briefly."

### A CHANGE IN SCENERY

Now, Patrick is serving in the Army as a Combat Engineer. His role in the military has taken him all over the world, from being placed in one of the hardest companies—the Fort Leonard Wood Army Installation in the Missouri Ozarks—to being stationed in Germany for five months, an experience he loved.

### LIFE AFTER SEEDS

Once Patrick's Army contract is over he plans to return to Cleveland and join EMS—something that would not have been possible without the help of Seeds.

"My life changed drastically after Seeds... the second I received my GED I went and applied to every college I could for my EMT-B. It certainly helped my process in joining the Army, too. With my GED I was able to have the job where I eventually ended up crossing paths with my recruiter."

Patrick is very proud of his work at Seeds and in the Army as a Combat Engineer. His proudest moment, though, is having his daughter.

"I think dads who are trying to better themselves for their families can relate with my story. No matter how hard things are, you can always pull yourself up and be in a better place," he said, noting that you don't have to do it alone. "There are people out there who are willing to take your hand and help pull you up. Seeds is a perfect example of that!" ◀

*by Erika Scharf, Intern from Oberlin College*

Read this article in its entirety

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*Dear Friends,*

We wrapped up our fiscal year in June with two incredible celebrations at new venues.

#### CELEBRATIONS

On the 15th, we brunched at the Botanical Gardens and honored JENNY ROSENBERG, our friend, tutor, and donor. She received the Cultivator Impact Award for her generous donations of time and treasure.

Thirty of our 120 graduates attended the graduation ceremony with friends and family at Cuyahoga Community College's Metro Campus Center. The new venue allowed colleges and workforce partners to have tables to network with the graduates. It was a great feeling to provide that service, pointing our graduates in the next direction when their time at Seeds ends.

#### ...AND CHALLENGES.

We have had our share of challenges, too. We've faced power and HVAC issues. Then, tornadoes ripped through Northeast Ohio, leaving hundreds of thousands of residents without power for days—including our students, tutors, and staff.

But through it all, the Seeds Family has continued to show up and provide services for the students. Our tutors and staff are truly selfless and genuinely want what's best for our learners.

Your continued support has been instrumental in helping us celebrate successes and navigate our obstacles. Thank you for believing in our mission and for being an essential part of our community.

With gratitude,

*Bonnie*



BONNIE ENTLER,  
PRESIDENT & CEO

## BOTANICAL BRUNCH BLOOMS

On Saturday, June 15, over 130 guests gathered in Cleveland's Botanical Garden to raise funds for adult education at Seeds.

The event featured creative and sustainable paper bouquets made by staff, which many guests took home.

Despite filling in as a speaker last minute, 2024 graduate JESSICA LEE confidently shared her story of abuse, a legal system that failed her, and an addiction. Because of Seeds, she's now enrolled in college.

Tutor MIKE MARJENIN became tearful while speaking about his students, needing a moment to compose himself. In that moment, guests learned students aren't the only ones who benefit from the tutoring experience.

This year's Cultivator Impact Award went to long-time tutor and donor JENNIFER ROSENBERG.

Introducing her, Chris Richards said, "She helps to bring people in, and when they're here, she helps to bring them together. As both a tutor and a donor, she is not only focused on the work we're doing *today*, but in helping us grow our capacity to do more in *the future*." ◀

*Thank you to all of our generous sponsors, including FirstEnergy, Carnegie Management & Development Corporation, and Huntington Bank.*

For more photos and details:  
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Much of this issue of *The Seed* was written by ERIKA SCHARF, our summer Communications Intern. A senior at Oberlin College, she's studying English and Gender Studies. She works in Oberlin's Writing Center, with an ESOL class, and also runs the student magazine *Wilder Voice*.

At Seeds, she cheerfully did all the intern-type things: helped with decorations, worked the check-in table at our Brunch event, and helped prepare for Graduation. She recorded dozens of videos for our TikTok channel, engaging new audiences.

But her most valuable contribution to Seeds was her dedication to telling the stories of our Student Ambassadors through a series of feature profiles.

Erika tutors literacy and math to K-5 students in Oberlin Elementary, and volunteers with the Boys and Girls Club in Elyria, Ohio. She resides in Howland, Ohio with her puppy Ruby.

**She was a wonderful addition to the Seeds Family this summer and will be missed!**







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Proclamations from Senators  
Sherrod Brown (D-OH) and  
JD Vance (R-OH)



← **Speakers Top to Bottom**  
Keynote: Teralawanda Aaron (Seeds '04),  
*President & CEO of The Spot Youth of  
Empowerment,*  
Eriselda Kola,  
Cordine Anderson,  
Jeffrey Turner



Video Address from  
Cleveland Mayor Justin Bibb

Spectrum awarded Seeds the Digital Education Grant of \$25,000 for efforts in bridging the digital divide. The check was presented by former Senator and Seeds Board Member SANDRA WILLIAMS, along with Ohio State Representative TERRENCE UPCHURCH and Cleveland Councilwoman DEBORAH GRAY. This is the second year Spectrum has supported Seeds, bringing their total contribution to Seeds to \$65,000.



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[WWW.SEEDSOFLITERACY.ORG/GRADUATION2024](http://WWW.SEEDSOFLITERACY.ORG/GRADUATION2024)

Photography generously provided by  
Victoria Stanbridge Photography,  
Tim Arai, and Jordaine Dinorog.  
Graduate portraits provided by Mark Yanochko.







# OVERCOMING ALGEBRA

Carol Baraga is not a know-it-all, but she does *know a lot*.

Growing up, Carol liked school. She self describes as an easy learner, someone who could enjoy all the subjects.

But she had a wicked adversary: algebra.

"I kept raising my hand because I didn't understand. I was stuck really bad. I kept asking for help and they said *'it's in the book, just read the book'*. They just pushed me aside," she said.

"It made me so aggravated. I thought, I could have a job making money instead of doing this...So I quit"

Her journey back to education came nearly 50 years later when someone she knew started studying at Seeds of Literacy. She had worked in an office for years, using the math skills she did know to work with stores' monthly incomes and file taxes. She was smart and capable, and she knew it.

But something was bothering her—she still didn't have a high school diploma.

"I thought, I got to do this because it's driving me crazy."

## FINDING SEEDS OF LITERACY

When she heard that Seeds of Literacy was FREE 1-to-1 tutoring she didn't hesitate to sign up. This was finally an opportunity to show that she could do it.

"I made sure that both of my kids graduated from high school, and now this is my time!" Carol said. "I want this GED so badly. It will be a big deal to show that I am worth passing the GED."

## REIGNITING CONFIDENCE

Since starting at Seeds in March 2023, Carol has been working on the very thing that pushed her out of school in the first place: algebra. She knows that once she masters that, the other subjects will be easier for her. With the support of a tutor, Carol has been tackling math.

"I feel more confident in what I'm doing because before I felt down, people were calling me stupid. I'm not stupid. I just need help with certain things; show me a couple times and then I'll take off"

Carol loves Seeds because of the flexible structure, support from the staff and tutors, and the convenience of the location. She brings her jovial attitude and bubbly personality to the classroom and the events she attends as a Student Ambassador.

Although Carol is normally all smiles, it hasn't always been easy for her, especially with her MS.

"When I left the hospital, I had to learn how to write again. Even talking to people, I had to learn how to do charades otherwise nobody's going to understand what I'm trying to say," she explains. "So I had a lot to overcome."

Carol says one of the best feelings is getting positive feedback from the tutors and staff like Chris Richards. "He tells me, *all I get is good reports about you. You're doing excellent. Keep it up. You seem frustrated sometimes, but you just got to work a little harder at it. Just repeat it to*

*yourself. Can't get everything at the same pace at the same time!"*

## LIKE MOTHER LIKE SON

What's even better is the support Carol gets from her son. When her boys were younger, she would buy them math workbooks to work on a year ahead every summer. She wanted them to be ahead of the game and practice their skills so they wouldn't have to worry as they got older. In a true full-circle moment, as Carol encouraged her boys to work hard and study, they now encourage her.

"I get so excited and I text my son. He keeps telling me, you're doing so good. Mama, you're doing great. I'm there for you."

## THE MOTIVATION

Carol has no patience for naysayers — she thinks that if she can do this, so can everyone else.

"Don't give up," she repeats. "People think it's a waste of time because they don't think they can learn anything. They think it's a waste of time because they've been out of school for a little while and don't know how to pick back up. **I'm 63 years old. If I can do it with my illness and everything I had, then you can do it.** I mean, what do you got to lose? That's what I kept saying to myself, what do I got to lose?" ◀

*by Erika Scharf, Intern from Oberlin College*

For more profiles of our hard-working students:  
[WWW.SEEDSOFLITERACY.ORG/BLOG](http://WWW.SEEDSOFLITERACY.ORG/BLOG)

# TUTOR SPOTLIGHT



**“The first time I was on an airplane, I never landed,” tutor Mike Marjenin often says. Right after graduating high school, he and some friends decided to go skydiving.**

Mike, who had never flown before, recalled that his parachute opened on its own after 2.5 minutes of smooth sailing. “It’s only 15 seconds if it doesn’t open,” he added with a grin.

As life-affirming as skydiving is, Mike discovered that tutoring at Seeds of Literacy comes close to matching that feeling — it just took him nearly half a century to find it.

After spending 45 years as a financial manager at American Greetings, Mike was ready for a well-earned retirement. But he wanted to make the most of it by finding a meaningful volunteer opportunity. When asked how he learned about Seeds, he credits his wife. A neighbor had mentioned it to her, and she thought he’d enjoy it.

## **TUTOR TRAINING IS PROVIDED**

In Fall 2021, Mike signed up for tutor training. He still remembers the shocking statistics he learned about adult illiteracy that day and the immediate impact they had on him. He observed a tutor working with a student and was eager to jump in.

Although Mike wasn’t a career educator, he paid close attention during the tutor training offered by Seeds. The training, combined with observing other tutor-student pairs, prepared him well.

## **LISTENING FIRST**

When Mike first meets a student, he finds himself listening more than speaking.

“You go there, and you hear their stories,” he said. “...all the different reasons they had to leave school initially.”

“It almost feels like I’m taking a confession,” he continued. “They think they did something wrong by leaving school and feel the need to confess before they can start learning again.”

Mike admits that any struggles he had in school pale in comparison to those of his students. “Their drive is incredible. They have a goal. If I can help them remove some barriers to reach that goal, I’m all in.”

Numbers come easily to Mike, making him a popular tutor in both virtual and in-person classrooms. His years of experience in financial planning, quarterly estimates, monthly reports, and product pricing have made him a natural math tutor.

Recently, Student Ambassador Iris (pictured) requested him specifically. She only has the math section of the GED left, and Mike is honored to help her through it. “We work well together,” he said, admitting that it feels good to be requested by students.

## **BALANCING PASSION AND PATIENCE**

Mike acknowledges that he sometimes gets a little agitated when he’s unable to help a student grasp a concept after several attempts. But it’s a learning experience for him too. “It helps me hone my virtue of patience,” he said. He and the student both keep at it.

It’s no surprise that this mild agitation does nothing to deter him from tutoring. COVID didn’t either. Mike started tutoring virtually during the pandemic, and as the classrooms reopened, he put on a mask and endured temperature screenings before each class. He was a regular.

“Virtual or in-person, all that matters is the one-to-one interaction,” he said. “That’s what hopefully results in a productive session.”

There’s only one thing that keeps Mike away from Seeds — or, more accurately, three someones. Granddaughter number 3 joined 1 and 2 earlier this year. “Sometimes I can’t come in on my usual days because I’m babysitting with my wife,” he said proudly. We can’t really blame him for being a doting grandpa.

At the Seeds Botanical Brunch this summer, Mike was a guest speaker. Just as he did for this interview, he had to take a moment to compose himself before admitting, “Each student inspires me. I get so much more from them than they probably get from me.”

“Tutoring is such a rewarding experience, and I’d encourage anyone to give it a try,” he said to the audience. ◀





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