



Community Partner Award

Zion Lutheran Church, Lyndale Neighborhood Association

Nominated by Erin Cary, Education Program Manager

Zion Church was Lyndale Neighborhood Association's first partner and has been their host site since 2012. From the beginning, the staff, especially Pastor Meta Carlson and Deana Miller, has helped the evening program prosper by opening their beautiful space to learners and welcoming students into the building before class.

Program manager Erin Carey wrote: "Zion's consistency as a safe, warm and inviting space to hold classes has helped keep learners coming back over the years, and their efforts to honor and respect the contributions that everyone brings to our local community has helped define our program's values as well."

Outstanding Volunteer Award

Karin Lindberg, Metro North ABE

Nominated by: Polina Huffman, ESL Instructor

In September 2013, Karin's background in, and enthusiasm for, speech therapy drew her to volunteer at Metro North ABE in the pronunciation class. Karin's unique ability to recognize and eliminate common pronunciation mistakes and increase the confidence of each and every one of her students quickly allowed her to lead the class.

Karin always finds time for her students and is incredibly dedicated to them. Karin's dedication to helping students succeed goes above and beyond the classroom. Recently, she went out of her way to prepare a nervous student for a job interview. Undoubtedly, with Karin's help, this student and many others will go on to succeed in whatever endeavors they choose to take on.



Noreen Oesterlein, Saint Paul ABE Hubbs Center

Nominated by: Ruth Rodriguez, Volunteer Coordinator

When it comes to volunteering, there is no task too big or too small for Hubbs Center's volunteer extraordinaire, Noreen. Noreen has worn many different hats during her time as a volunteer at Hubbs: she started as a classroom assistant in an English as a Second Language (ESL) class while she was pursuing her bachelor's degree, and then went on to help out in a customer service class. Noreen has also volunteered on a number of special projects. Just last year, in addition to several household items, Noreen donated beautiful handmade bags to a silent auction held by the school to raise funds for a learner emergency fund.

Hubbs Center staff describes Noreen as, "upbeat, inspirational, positive and encouraging." Above all, Noreen is an excellent role model for adult learners. At 70 years old, she credits herself as a lifelong learner. In addition to all she has accomplished as a volunteer, Noreen has also been pursuing her Master of Arts in Deaf Poetry. She plans to graduate this spring from Metropolitan State University and is considering pursuing her doctorate.

Tom Mouw, Metro South Adult Basic Education

Nominated by: Mary Jo Bayliss, Outreach and Volunteer Coordinator

Tom is described by those who know him as, "a man of integrity with a heart of gold." Whether it be through individual support, tutoring or even teaching driver's education, Tom consistently and selflessly provides the holistic and practical support necessary to help students however he can. For example, sensing a need for students to get a feel for being behind the wheel, Tom purchased a driving simulator and now regularly helps students become familiar and comfortable with the skills necessary to pass their driving tests.

Tom patiently guides each student to success with profound patience, respect and a desire to see each of his students living with dignity and independence. Students immediately know this is a person fully invested in helping them in whatever way he possibly can.



Roma and Stephen Hurley, Roseville ABE and Karen Organization of Minnesota

Nominated by: Rebekah Jacobson, Community Engagement Specialist

Roma and Stephen are the exception when it comes to thoughtfulness and dedication in their work. They started as assistants to an ESL teacher, but they have since expanded their efforts to provide significant and thoughtful support above, beyond and outside of the traditional class structure.

Roma uses her skills as a nurse to teach and lead health and nutrition lessons. She's also taught students how to read blood pressure, and recently started doing foot care clinics with Karen seniors. Stephen contributes significant technological expertise. He has led computer training classes and helped set up a computer lab. In addition, he's currently developing and implementing an interactive Karen language website.

Both Roma and Stephen demonstrate their commitment to helping and learning about the Karen culture and community in Minnesota by working with Karen elders, studying the Karen language and making it accessible to other Minnesotans, taking students to the food shelf and the library, and initiating special projects at the Karen Organization of Minnesota. There is no doubt that Roma and Stephen approach their students with respect and love.

Joanne Blyler, Duluth Adult Basic Education

Nominated by: Patricia Fleege, Duluth Adult Education Manager

Joanne has been a volunteer at Duluth ABE for nearly 11 years, mentoring students in all areas of reading, writing and speaking. Currently, she volunteers up to three mornings per week in reading acquisition.

Joanne is a lifelong student as well as a volunteer, and those who know her know she is just as interested in learning from students as she is in providing reading support for them.

Joanne's compassion for others reaches beyond the walls and the work of the school, as she also volunteers at the local food shelf where she sees and assists some of the students. Through her experiences working with students outside



of the classroom, she helps the learning center staff better understand the lives of students and the resources they need. Patricia Fleege, the manager at Duluth ABE, put it best when she said, “Joanne is quite honestly a fantastic example of what is right in education and the world.”

Salli Brown, Alexandria Area ABE

Nominated by: Sylvia Galbraith, Manager

Salli has been involved with literacy and ABE in the Sauk Centre area since the 1970s. Her accomplishments include creating awareness of ABE and literacy services in the area by distributing outreach materials, recruiting volunteer tutors and providing them with training, and starting a volunteer tutor newsletter. She has also helped develop several fruitful partnerships with community groups and employers.

At 86 years old, Salli is a well-respected individual in the ABE community and continues to give back. Today she assists new staff members and tutors students. A quote from her colleague and friend, Peggy Stokman, says it all: “Salli has been so dedicated to teaching literacy and to her students. The amazing thing is she is as enthusiastic now as she ever has been. She always gets a twinkle in her eye when the conversation turns toward ESL and tutoring. A truly inspiring person!”

Peggy Stokman, Alexandria Area ABE

Nominated by: Sylvia Galbraith, Manager

Peggy has been teaching English and helping learners study for their citizenship test since she moved back to Minnesota in 2001. Indeed, in the last few years alone, she has helped over 30 students become citizens. She is incredibly involved in the city, county, church, the Sauk Centre/Melrose Literacy Project, and often acts as a translator for her students and other community members. Her passion lies in making immigrant communities feel like they belong.

In 2012, she was featured in an MPR News article that highlighted her passion for bridging the divides she observed in her community. In the article she emphasized that embracing diversity is necessary to becoming a cohesive



community. Peggy's dedication to her whole community will continue to have ripple effects for decades.

Honorable Mention for the Outstanding Volunteer Award

Alexander Hilton-Watson, Saint Paul ABE Hubbs Center

Wayne Marsh, Franklin Learning Center

Jeanette Reuter, Minneapolis Public Schools ABE – South Campus

Mary Lilly, WEST ABE Wayzata

Tom Renner, WEST ABE Wayzata

Jane Rubin, Osseo Area Schools

Volunteer Service Awards

1,000 Hours

Arlona Bergman, Metro North ABE-Blaine

Susan Ketchmer, Metro North ABE-Blaine

Randy Thoen, Metro North ABE-Blaine

Valerie Meyer, Hubbs Center

Marie King, Crystal Learning Center

Sara Andersen, Metro South Adult Basic Education-Bloomington

Corrine Mady, Crystal Learning Center

Jo Johnson, ABE-Mankato

2,000 Hours

Connie Ahrens, Metro North ABE-Blaine

Adan Ibrahim, Franklin Learning Center

Joan Tuttle, Franklin Learning Center



3,000 Hours

Gloria Noren, Minneapolis Adult Education-North Campus
Shirley Seek, Franklin Learning Center

6,000 Hours

Salli Brown, Alexandria/Sauk Centre/Melrose

9,000 Hours

Curt Cameron, St. Paul Schools ABE

21,000 Hours

Judy Halverson, Franklin Learning Center

Outstanding Learner Award

Yanfang Ren, Central MN ABE Saint Cloud

Yanfang has been a student since November 2009. She and her two young children moved to the United States in 2009 from China to be reunited with her husband, and she enrolled in English classes shortly after. Yanfang realized early on that if she was going to be successful in her new home, she needed to learn the language even though it would be hard work. Yanfang started in the beginning level one class and has progressed through all ESL levels. She is currently working towards her high school diploma through the Minnesota State Adult Diploma program, and is expected to graduate this spring. In addition to her studies, Yanfang has participated with a student panel to present their immigration story to various community groups. The community groups welcome this opportunity to get to know their newly arrived neighbors and the changing cultures in Saint Cloud. Yanfang's program is so impressed with her progress and the legacy that she has started for her family.



Staci Landsem, Detroit Lakes Adult Basic Education

Staci came to ABE with a desire to gain skills and earn her GED. Staci wanted to be a stronger provider and set an example for her three children by pursuing her education and her dreams. She emerged as a leader immediately. She supported other students, helped them understand systems and encouraged others to enroll in class.

Staci actively seeks out and engages in new experiences and learning opportunities. She was the first student in Detroit Lakes to complete the Northstar Digital Literacy certificate in all modules.

After earning her GED in June of 2016, Staci immediately took two more large risks, stepping into new roles and demands. First, she enrolled full time in the Early Childhood Associates Degree Program. Second, she applied for a job as Program Assistant with Detroit Lakes Adult Basic Education. Now she is the new Program Manager and continues to bring new students to the program, welcome all learners every day, and respond immediately to students' emotional, academic, and life needs. She recruits and trains new volunteers, manages materials for the consortium, supports distance learning students, and handles all of the consortium data entry. Her program is immensely proud of all that she has accomplished and all that she will achieve.

Seid Jama, Franklin Learning Center

Seid came to the United States in 2013 with limited English skills, and immediately dedicated himself to “catching up” with his education. He began attending school every day at Minneapolis ABE, but decided it wasn’t enough. This led him to enroll at the Franklin Learning Center to supplement his learning. While working two jobs and taking care of his family, Seid still managed to come to Franklin Learning Center at least twice a week. He now has clocked in over 400 hours of class time.

Seid serves as an inspiration and a role model for students in and outside of school, and students and staff are always grateful to have his presence in class. He recently received his GED, and now helps other students study for their subjects when the program is short-staffed, and offers them advice and



encouragement. Seid is humble and kind, and he always has a smile on his face. He is always thinking about his family and the future.

Brian Lucius, Franklin Learning Center

Brian came to the Franklin Learning Center with the goal of improving his reading, writing and math skills. Because of his job, he only comes on Saturdays, but since that first day, he's been at class nearly every weekend. Nancy Thornbury, volunteer coordinator at the Franklin Learning Center, said, "Brian is an inspiration for all of us through his dedication and commitment to improving his reading, math and computer skills. He always comes to school with a smile and a story to tell."

For five years, Brian has inspired volunteers, teachers and other learners. He never lets personal issues get in the way of his learning, and is now able to read on his own, knows how to use a computer, and feels like he can get the job he wants. The learning center is grateful to have his stories, his passion for snowmobiles and his respectful manner at school.

Lucille Fischer Outstanding Learner Award

Miguel Chavez, Neighborhood House Saint Paul

Miguel has been a learner, ambassador and volunteer with Neighborhood House for the past seven years. He started classes back in 2010 and has outlasted every teacher he's had. Over the years, he's tenaciously worked his way up through the levels into the GED/College Readiness program in which he is currently enrolled. Miguel can't come to class in the summers because he works in landscaping, but every fall, the teachers at Neighborhood House begin looking for him to return to class – and he always does.

Miguel has become famous in the Adult Education program, taking three classes every day Monday through Friday. He changes a classroom for the better, and goes above and beyond for fellow students. Good humored and curious, he reaches out to other students, making a point to learn their names and their stories. Age, first language, country of origin, and any other



differentiator are not barriers to Miguel when it comes to creating a community, and his positive attitude and energy motivates others to participate and engage with him. Miguel will sit down next to the person with whom no one else has connected and befriend them.

Last year, he helped another student get her GED by signing up with her to take his own GED tests at the same time, carpooling and putting in extra study time to help them achieve their mutual goals. He often helps with interpretation during events and presentations to help ensure everyone understands the content. His teachers, as well as his friends and peers, are so impressed with how far Miguel has come.

Magartu Dawe, Crystal Learning Center

Magartu is a true leader in her school, district and community – both locally and nationally. She enrolled in school to get her citizenship and to improve her English and academic skills to better provide for her three daughters.

Magartu studied hard for her citizenship test, and after initially failing, she bounced back, studied even harder, and is now a U.S. citizen. She then came and spoke to her citizenship class about the importance of persistence in reaching your goal. Recently, she spoke at her graduation ceremony representing new citizens. As luck would have it, the Mayor of New Hope was there, and when she heard Magartu’s speech and her career goals as a New Hope police officer, she immediately offered Magartu a position on the city board!

Outside of school, Magartu is very involved with the union for her janitorial position. In addition, she recently testified twice before a congressional committee in Washington D.C. about the plight of the Oromo people. Her ultimate goals are to get her GED, go to college and become a police officer in New Hope. She is relentlessly positive, takes an active stance to change things in her life and society, and inspires others to get involved.

About the Lucille Fischer Award

Again this year, we are happy to be able to award two Outstanding Learner recipients with a \$250 Lucille Fischer Award. This award celebrates the memory



and work of Lucille Fischer, who was a beloved Adult Basic Education (ABE) teacher and the first instructional supervisor for the St. Paul Public Schools ABE/GED program in 1970. Under Lucille (or Lucy's) leadership, St. Paul became the first program in Minnesota to hold a GED graduation ceremony with caps and gowns. Lucy was also a founding member of the former professional organization, the Minnesota Association for Continuing Adult Education (MACAE). We are grateful to the leadership team of this former professional organization for making these awards possible!

Thomas M. Kraemer Memorial Education Grant Fund

Yesenia Ventura

Sponsored by Lauren Hagen of the Hubbs Center

Lauren wrote: "I met Yesenia in September 2016. Right away Yesenia demonstrated critical thinking skills by establishing a personal timeline in reaching college enrollment. Yesenia attended classes at Hubbs Center for 8 years, and this journey shows her commitment to her education. Many students become discouraged by the long path to achieving their education goals, but not Yesenia. She has unparalleled drive. Yesenia has demonstrated her ability to achieve her education goals so far, and she shows no signs of slowing down."

Yesenia is pursuing a degree at St. Paul College with the goal of going to law school and becoming a criminal defense lawyer. She plans to apply her grant to tuition and books for college.

Cesar Hernandez Garcia

Sponsored by Diane Miller of Neighborhood House

Diane wrote: "As a student and as a person, I have nothing but admiration for Cesar. He is a very dedicated student who participates and encourages other students, and is determined and committed in his studies. He is so humble and unassuming, and continually impresses me with his insights. Cesar is one of the leaders on our academic vocabulary night, demonstrating his strong command



of the language and his critical thinking skills. Following a seasonal job, Cesar returned to class and the next evening the class went to St. Paul College to take the Accupacer entrance exam. Cesar passed the test with the high score of 98 – the only student to pass the exam that evening. This is a testament not only to Cesar’s high academic abilities, but also to his dedication to keep up with his studies, in spite of his 14-hour days, 6 days a week work schedule for two months. He quietly and persistently works and moves towards his goals, without complaint or excuses. His work ethic and attitude are commendable.”

Cesar is attending Saint Paul College and intends to major in zoology. He plans to apply his grant to tuition.

Adriana Sanchez Rendon

Sponsored by Andrea Morgan of the Hubbs Center

Andrea wrote: “Adriana has always had a methodical approach to her academic, personal and career goals. As a mother of a young child, Adriana knew that pursuing her GED would be a long road. I was privileged to witness her thoughtfulness and clarity. This ability to realistically assess her capabilities and plan for success accordingly set Adriana apart from any of her classmates. She does not take on more than she can handle, and what she decides to pursue, she achieves.”

Adriana is attending Saint Paul College. She intends to apply her grant to tuition and car insurance.

Chanel Aboua

Sponsored by Andrea Morgan of the Hubbs Center

Andrea wrote: “Chanel is an extraordinary student. I have never seen progress like hers before and her dedication to her goals is clear. Chanel has shown herself to be thoughtful and reliable – she always comes to appointments prepared and on time, and she is very conscious of her responsibilities to school, work and family. Chanel is hard working, goal-oriented and incredibly intelligent. I am confident that she will go very far and achieve every goal she sets for herself.” Chanel is attending Saint Paul College and intends to earn a Bachelor’s degree in Business Management, to help achieve her goal of



participating in the economic development of Africa and America through the development of trade. She intends to apply her grant to tuition.

About the Thomas M. Kraemer Memorial Education Grant Fund

This award is intended to assist ABE learners in their pursuit of further education. Thomas M. Kraemer served as the President of the Minnesota Literacy Council Board of Directors from January 1994 until his accidental and untimely death in August 1995. In recognition of Tom Kraemer's leadership and his commitment to lifelong learning, this education grant fund has been established in his memory.

About the Minnesota Literacy Council

The Minnesota Literacy Council shares the power of learning so all Minnesotans have the opportunity to be successful students, workers, family members and community citizens. Literacy-rich preschools and summer reading programs start Minnesota's youngest readers off on the right foot. Free English, GED preparation and job-readiness classes prepare adults for post-secondary education and careers. Support in program best practices, educational technology, volunteer training and national service hosting strengthens over 400 community-based literacy sites across Minnesota.

About the Loft Literary Center

Incorporated in 1975, The Loft Literary Center is one of the nation's leading independent literary centers. The Loft supports the artistic development of writers, fosters a writing community, and builds an audience for literature. For more information about the Loft, please call 612-215-2575 or visit www.loft.org.