

**Tutor of the Year**  
**Melissa Marie Tuason**  
**South-East Asia Center**

Melissa has been involved with the Center for five years and possesses exceptional initiative and dedication to Adult ELLs [English Language Learners] in the Uptown neighborhood, writes her nominator, Joe Cole. After moving to Chicago in 2010, Melissa noticed over time that upon visiting markets and other places serving daily needs, there was a large population of new arrivals with limited English skills. In particular, she saw women struggling to convey what they needed in everyday life. This sparked an interest in seeking out a volunteer opportunity to help these women improve their communication skills, thereby making day-to-day life easier and more comfortable. Although the women Melissa tutors have been in traditional ESL classrooms, being in a small group of women from the same background but of varying levels has inspired confidence in each of her students to improve.

Melissa's ESL class, she says, is more of a senior group in that it is generally made up of women around their 70s, the youngest being 60 and oldest 80. Melissa likes to be multi-purpose in her lessons; she says that she is not a fan of those focused solely on grammar. Rather she prides herself on the practicality of her lesson plans, noting that her students don't have big goals nor does she have big goals for them. She chooses practical topics so her students can be more independent and less reliant on family members, such as going to the doctor for specific procedures, how to use Uber, or how to ride the CTA etc.

In addition to the practicality of her lessons, they are also varied, incorporating audio, video, song and news reports. She also encourages her students to discuss their opinions. Not only is the format through which she teaches English varied but so are the voices she is exposing her students to as she uses conversation and videos with different accents knowing that since Chicago is a multicultural city, students will often encounter different accents.

Melissa has also made strides with her small group – for instance, two years ago, it was near impossible to get them to role play, however, pretend conversation are easier now. And, her students are now able to imagine as she gives them not just the take-aways from her lessons but a place for them to be independent individuals. It is thanks to Melissa's work that her students have a place where they can talk and ask about anything, a place where these ladies can comfortably voice their opinions and question other's opinions.

**Outstanding Tutors**

***Jean Araujo, Literacy Chicago***

Jean has gone beyond the call of duty, writes her nominator, Joanne Telser-Frere. She came to us to be a one-on-one tutor but soon found herself not only tutoring several students on their quest to become US Citizens, but teaching a multi-level Citizenship class as well. She successfully guided these students through the naturalization process, even though their English was at different levels, as she has the ability to engage the lowest level students while still holding the interests of the more advanced.. Jean uses a variety of sources to find information and interesting material instead of just following the book and incorporates videos and other visuals as well as role play to work with students' different learning styles. She also created a document with

Spanish equivalents and sample explanations of the more difficult vocabulary in N-400 [Application for Naturalization].

***Fantazia Berry, UIC Center for Literacy, FAST Southwest\****

What stands out about Fantazia and makes her exceptional, her co-nominators Elisha Hall & Susie Karwowski write, is her love of teaching, attention to detail, and desire to lead new tasks, She loves teaching and will eagerly accept any professional development opportunity. For example, Fantazia is currently working on completing the rigorous ICCB Math Content Standards training which will further enhance her already strong teaching skills. Fantazia is a low key and calm person when she is not teaching, but when she starts teaching she becomes very animated which is great for parent engagement because her enthusiasm is infectious. Her work not only helps students academically but ultimately it is her patience and perseverance that allows them to believe in themselves and feel good expressing themselves.

***Shirley Blount, Corazon a Corazon***

Shirley has been of great support to Corazon a Corazon over the last 6 years, writes her nominator, Mayra Pimentel. Her motivation to help others speak English in order to have more opportunities has been admirable. Shirley is very warm and patient and her soft-spoken nature sets her learners at ease. She creates an environment in which her students are free to ask as many questions as needed and is more than happy to review lessons until her learners are ready to move forward. She is always willing to converse with new tutors and give them tips and the new tutors appreciate her input and feel more comfortable after speaking with her.

***Dorothea Duncan, Black Hawk College Adult Literacy Program***

Dorothea came to the Adult Literacy Program in 2012 and just this past year has worked with 25 students and volunteered for 385 hours, her co-nominators Marney Tope and Sue Bowman write. She is a most dedicated and reliable volunteer who is creative, responsible, and genuinely cares about each student not just in the classroom in which she volunteers, but all of the students in our program. Dorothea is a retired home economics teacher and uses this background knowledge to help students individually by explaining and answering questions they may have. With one student in particular, Dorothea entirely changed her attitude towards learning and is more prone to learn because Dorothea took an interest in her and helped her achieve her goals.

***Rose Marie Healey, Heartland Human Services***

Rose Marie is a former school administrator and holds an MBA, writes her nominator, Mary Roepke. She is very organized and goal-oriented, which the students really like. She is great at explaining numerical concepts clearly and patiently. Her strategies in working with GED students include: rewording /rephrasing challenging problems, working from practice test in order to ensure material mirrors real GED content, helping students select high quality resources, and emphasizing the strategy behind GED preparedness, i.e. you need to be able to read and understand word problems, not simply memorize formulas. Her students credit her with helping them reach those important goals.

***Diana Howard, YWCA Pekin Adult Literacy***

Diana has been a dedicated volunteer tutor since 2007 and is the longest standing tutor in our program, writes her nominator, Tonja Ohnemus. Diana has a great commitment to her learners.

And goes above and beyond tutoring by developing and facilitating a book club every year. She develops a theme for the book club and works with the local library to get book copies available to everyone attending. As a tutor, she works with her learner to not only increase his reading level, but achieve the life skills he needs to be a successful small business owner. Diana efforts have earned her a Spotlight on Achievement Award from the Secretary of State Literacy Office, and her past students have been recognized with awards as well.

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***Jim Jacob, Triton College - Access to Literacy Program***

Jim is a stellar volunteer and dedication is second to none, writes his nominator, Britt Pisto. He's been with Triton College's Access to Literacy Program since 2011 and constantly goes out of his way to find unique ways to work with his students. He is a reliable, trustworthy teacher who takes time to explain new ideas to each of his students, following through from lesson to lesson. Jim's appetite for learning and innovative teaching is always at the forefront of his tutoring. Having taken a ukulele classes, Jim was able to incorporate his music skills into his tutoring sessions. Jim continues his own learning by attending numerous trainings. As an avid reader, teacher, and advocate for his students, he is an outstanding role model for our program.

***RoseMary Kennedy, YWCA Pekin Adult Literacy***

RoseMary is a retired educator allowing her to understand the importance of literacy services in the community, writes her nominator, Tonja Ohnemus. She has been with the program since 2015 and throughout that time has demonstrated a reliability to the program and its learners. RoseMary serves many hours with her learners and preparing for her tutoring sessions. She invites her learners to attend community events with her outside of sessions and uses the outings as a learning experience. She encourages learners as a tutor and most importantly as a friend, which contributes to their success. She is always willing to assist in any way to help as needed – we recognize her for her dedication to the program but more so the progress of her learners

***Kathy Knerr, Project CARE at Morton College***

Kathy has been tutoring with Project CARE for over 10 years and assisted both English as Second Language and Adult Basic Education students with different educational background and learning needs. Kathy brings positive energy to all her tutoring sessions and is exceptional because of her perseverance and enthusiasm in helping her learners overcome challenges and guiding them towards reaching their goals in small but notable steps. Kathy is able to go beyond conventional teaching methods to reach her students where they are. She emphasizes that the definition and the rate of progress is different for every student. There is nothing as energizing as tutoring for Kathy as she gains as much from them, as they from her.

***JoAnn Marciszewski, Project CARE at Morton College***

JoAnn has been a volunteer literacy tutor for Project CARE at two different times in her life, first for about 10 years starting in the mid-90s, and now again, since November 2016. JoAnn is an exceptional volunteer because of her enthusiasm about reading and the use of innovating teaching techniques that make learning both effective and enjoyable for her students. She is very sensitive to cultural and educational backgrounds of her students and helps them learn about cultural references and local history in addition to practicing their reading, writing, and speaking skills. She encourages her students to write what they know so their learning is related to their life thus helping her students acquire new life skills as well as achieve academic goals

***Agathe Massat, Arlington Heights Memorial Library***

Agathe is really eager to jump in and help the students in any way that she can since starting with our program, writes her nominator Allie Gourley. Her work has been amazing and is greatly appreciated by us. She has done a particularly commendable job of bringing together some of her students into small group sessions. She is able to realize where the needs of different students overlap and how to tailor her lessons plans for a group as opposed to just one student. She ensures that all members are comfortable working and talking together and has been successful in creating this type of environment. The program is able to count on her to communicate clearly with them and take the initiative to volunteer elsewhere whenever she can.

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***Lisa Nieman, Howard Area Community Center***

Lisa has maintained a warm and comfortable working relationship with students for the 8.5 years she has been with the Howard Area Community Center, writes her nominator, Stan Nevin. Over these years, she has developed an impressive knowledge of English grammar and phonics, along with other areas of ESL teaching. Lisa is really good at treating students as individuals, and tailoring her explanations and teaching approaches to their specific needs. When working as a class assistant, Lisa often takes written notes on teaching ideas that she wants to incorporate into her work with students. As a class assistant, Lisa is able to provide students with the one-on-one experience they seldom can get during a class of 12-15 students.

***Sunita Parikh, Metropolitan Asian Family Services***

Sunita is a self-motivated tutor who takes the responsibilities that come with tutoring very seriously, writes her nominator, Jasbir Mann. Her innovative tutoring techniques and teaching strategies which includes the use of flash cards and puzzles, makes learning fun for her ESL students. She brings her teaching abilities to her learners' levels to understand their issues and difficulties, using her innovative ideas very effectively towards the task at hand. It is this teaching style and her friendly positive behavior that makes learners very comfortable with Sunita. Not only is learning fun but also useful for her students as they are now able to speak English, shop, go to the doctor, and use social media, among still other tasks with confidence.

***Roy Peregrine, Jump Start at IYC-St. Charles/ Literacy Volunteers of Illinois***

Roy is not only a math tutor at the IYC-St. Charles but an incredibly dependable one, making him an invaluable asset to the program, writes his nominator, Melissa Auer. He comes in like clockwork every week and this means a lot to the students he serves. His dedication is even more commendable because of the isolated location of the IYC and the environment—a detention center. Roy prefers to tutor with pencil and paper, rather than in the virtual school program used at the center and also likes to mentor our young men with life lessons they sorely need. The most successful thing that Roy does is provide practical applications for math. Our students need basic explanations of how interest works, how fractions and percentages are calculated, because they have no experience with these things, and Roy is able to do that in a very down-to-earth way.

***Kirtikumar Shah, Metropolitan Asian Family Services***

Kirtikumar has a very calm personality, is positive and takes any responsibilities he is given seriously, writes his nominator, Jasbir Mann. He is able to place himself in the shoes of his students learning another language because he himself speaks multiple languages. His approach and training in second language learning and his ability to understand the cultural background of

older adults as well as their individual needs, makes him exceptional. He encourages English conversation and involvement outside of the classroom and uses simple language and creative ways of helping his senior students lead their daily lives. He provides information that his learners need rather than what he knows and their confidence grows !

***Betty Rae Smith, Literacy Volunteers of Illinois***

Betty Rae is a team player with a capital “T”. She has a gentle nature, laughs easily and has a great sense of humor all of which makes her a favorite tutor. She comes religiously every Monday afternoon giving of her time to brighten the days of the incarcerated kids. It is possible to compare this to magicians who can pull a rabbits out of their hat. Betty Rae gives them a space to not only learn academically but pairs that with exercises and moments to get to know her students. Betty Rae and her students came up with an idea of an essay called “What I’m Going To Be Doing When I’m 18.” It was this idea that allowed Betty Rae to hear about their dreams and build practical ideas for her students’ futures.

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***Steven Spiegel, Indo American Center***

Steven has been volunteering at IAC since 2017, diligently spending two hours of his Saturday morning teaching a diverse group of learners everything from phonics to accent differences, writes his nominator, Renuka Sharma. Steven is a high school teacher by day and wants to give back. And so, instead of biking, hiking, taking walks on the beach, reading, or spending his time relaxing, Steven chooses to work with learners from almost 10 parts of the world speaking 15 languages every Saturday at the Indo-American Center. He is extremely knowledgeable and caring, and is a selfless individual and outstanding tutor for the Indo-American Center.

***Marcella Stoller, YWCA Pekin Adult Literacy***

Marcella has volunteered with us since 2017, writes her nominator, Tonja Ohnemus. Her motivation and passion for literacy comes from personal experiences and desire to help individuals who struggle with reading: Years ago, her daughter was diagnosed with dyslexia and she had the opportunity to go through intense training with her. Having seen the successes of her daughter – who is now in college – Marcy wanted to give back to others in her community. Marcy is a positive and encouraging person with a natural tutoring ability. She knows her subject matter and how to teach it. She is well trained in dyslexia techniques and is an asset in our program as she is always willing to help learners and tutors on this subject.

***Andrea Vetter, YWCA Pekin Adult Literacy***

Andrea has been a tutor with us since 2015, writes her nominator, Tonja Ohnemus. She has worked with a variety of students from ESL to ABE and is currently working with two different learners both of whom have developmental delays. She is exceptional with motivating and encouraging these current learners; it takes a very special person to work with learners with these types of special needs. Andrea a retired librarian and very knowledgeable and passionate about literacy. She is very in tune with her learners and their abilities and needs, and tailors the tutoring towards their interests. She uses a variety of techniques including games, journaling and book clubs, which are working as her students have shown gains in learning and confidence levels.

***Martha Villanueva, UIC Center for Literacy, FAST Southwest***

Martha has demonstrated empathy and patience as a volunteer tutor at the UIC Center for Literacy AmeriCorps MORE Program, her co-nominators, Carina Gonzalez and Lisa D'Erandi de Padilla write. She can empathize with the parents she tutors in math in the Spanish GED program because she passed the GED in 2016 as a student herself. Now, as a volunteer tutor in our program, she is patient with our immigrant students because their struggles are hers. Some students who want to give up are reassured by Martha's patient approach as she individualizes their tutoring. Once the students realize that Martha will try new methods until they understand, they keep working hard until they persevere. She is a great asset to our team and is a one of a kind tutor who inspires students by her own strong work ethic.