



# VOCAL NEWS

Literacy Volunteers of Illinois



## Approaching the End of the Year !

In just over a month our program year for most of our members and host sites will come to an end and what a year it's been! We began the year with virtual interviews, followed by a virtual orientation, virtual monthly training sessions, virtual service activities (save one at the Fisher House on MLK Day), and, virtual member meetings culminating last month in our final Quarterly Member Meeting on June 4th, which of course was virtual. While the virtual format has provided some flexibility, especially in travel for our suburban and downstate members, it can never replace that one-to-one contact in all of us getting to know each other, which includes members communicating with and relying on each other as comrades in service.

So while the pandemic has robbed us of those personal relationships that in past years served us so well, still great work was accomplished throughout the program year. This was not accomplished however without some rough patches and we were sorry to learn in our June meeting that several members in our Kewanee contingency were affected by the pandemic ranging from contracting COVID themselves, to losing loved ones including one member who lost her spouse to the deadly virus.

As all of our program activities were virtual this program year, members reported the same for them. While a few reported returning to their offices this past Spring, still most of their contact with clients – be it teaching, tutoring, counseling, mentoring, and even volunteer recruitment and training was remote – save for the Kewanee YMCA which has been open since last June and the Illinois Youth Centers where our members have been able to tutor in person for most of the program year – though both had outbreaks that caused two week closures.

While members in June spoke to the accomplishments and, in some cases, challenges encountered in their remote work, almost all reported that their agencies are slowly reopening with most requiring that clients seeking in-person services be fully vaccinated. The Literacenter too has reopened and we are again keeping regular business hours, Monday through Friday. If you're fully vaccinated, you can stop in and see us anytime; if you're not you are still welcome, but a mask is required.

As we look to the close of this program year and the start of a new one, we are excited to welcome to our staff, Amy Meade, our new VOCAL Program Coordinator. Amy will soon be reaching out individually to members and host sites alike and is available to assist with all program activities. She can be reached through e-mail at—[ameade@lvillinois.org](mailto:ameade@lvillinois.org) or by phone at our main # 312-857-1582 or our program cell phone—312/912-4493.

Finally, we will have an opportunity wrap-up this program year with an in-person End of the Year Celebration. While many restaurants are not fully open for large groups, we have the perfect outdoor activity—a Tailgate followed by a White Sox Game at Guaranteed Rate Field. We thank the Chicago White Sox for their generous ticket donation. The date is Thursday, August 19th. Tailgate with food and beverages begins at 11:30 followed by a 1:10 p.m. game. We hope to see many of you then !

- Dorothy M. Miaso, Executive Director



## LVI STAFF

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## Night of 1,000 Stars — Goes Virtual

Night of 1,000 Stars is a celebration of the many hard working adult learners as well as their tutors across the city of Chicago. It was first started by the Northside Literacy Coalition some 30 years ago, and was celebrated annually for years with more Literacy Coalitions—South, West and Hispanic Literacy Council—joining in on the celebration as time went by. Finally, in 2017 the Night of 1,000 Stars became a citywide celebration.

Hampered by restrictions on in-person gatherings this year, the Chicago Citywide Literacy Coalition (CCLC) undertook a virtual event asking programs from throughout Chicago to send in videos of their work. From that the CCLC produced and released a wonderful video dedicated to the many amazing adult learners in programs across Chicago. The video starts with Secretary of State Jesse White giving a brief speech celebrating the hard work of the tutors, as well as encouraging the former students to follow suit and help out others who were once in their position.

Following the speech, the volunteers at the various literacy organizations shine the spotlight on their students by giving a brief speech about how hard their particular student worked and all the positive experiences that they have had working with their student. Throughout the video the students share their stories of working with the organization and how they have been able to grow because of their hard work and the wonderful tutors. The stories are nothing but inspiring with many of the students having overcome obstacles with the language barrier and are now able to navigate life and go to school or start a career.

Take Faye Yu for instance who came to the Pui Tak Center 2015 not knowing that much English. At the center Faye first learned the basics such as forming simple sentences expressing thoughts and feelings in English, and how to speak to medical staff. After a few years Faye started to master the English language and even made many English speaking friends, she then used her English skills to get into community college and has since received her Real Estate License.

Then there is the inspiring story of Daniel Chucarro who made the best of a difficult situation, and decided to use the stay at home order to work and finish a manuscript for his first novel, *Journey to the Light* which is a science fiction novel that he wrote in Spanish but has been translated into English with the help of the lovely tutors at the Erie Neighborhood House. Not to mention the volunteers at host site, the Touch Gift Foundation, who got a shout out from Katriel Jean Baptiste for their tremendous effort and willingness to be flexible in order to help out as much as possible.

It is beautiful and inspiring to hear the stories of the hardworking students and to see the care and camaraderie between them and their tutors. These are just a few of the many stories and I highly recommend watching the whole video which can be viewed on YouTube. Search Chicago Citywide Literacy Coalition and up it will come.

- *George Mendoza, Literacy Volunteers of Illinois*

## Member Spotlight: Hope Wetlesen

Hope is a second term AmeriCorps member who serves at *World Relief Chicago*. Having been raised in a military family she grew up traveling from place to place having lived in Norway, Florida, Colorado, and Germany. Before serving she was a student at Moody Bible Institute where she studied applied linguistics. Hope joined AmeriCorps because she wanted to work with World Relief and LVI so she could serve refugees and immigrants in the community and gain experience at a non-profit organization.



At her host site Hope serves as the ESL Tutor Coordinator where she matches volunteer English tutors with refugee and immigrant background adults and supports them during their learning journey. She also does a lot of administration and testing for their English classes. Hope finds it very rewarding to help people learn English as it empowers them and opens a plethora of doors that were once closed for them. She also enjoys connecting volunteers from the community with clients and seeing the friendships grow. For her it can be really challenging navigating between all the different cultures and personalities of the students and volunteers. The pandemic and social distancing had made it more difficult to teach low-level students or those with low-literacy skills.

After her service Hope intends to earn her masters in either in Social Work or Refugee and Migration Studies utilizing the Segal Award. Which she will find very useful as she would like to continue helping refugees. Her hobbies are learning other languages (currently Arabic), exploring the different neighborhoods in Chicago, and reading.



**World Relief-Chicago's** mission is to engage communities to foster dignity and wholeness for immigrants and refugees in transition. English language and literacy development to obtain employment and integrate more fully into the Chicago community is a key avenue that World Relief uses to accomplish its mission. Education services include intensive English Language Training, part-time ESL programming, family literacy and in-home tutoring. Also offers weekly employment preparation and cultural adjustment training.

## Member Spotlight: Madilyn Atkins



Madilyn (Maddie) Atkins is a first term AmeriCorps member serving at *World Relief Chicago*. She is from Spokane, Washington. Before AmeriCorps she attended California Lutheran University where she studied Religious Studies with an emphasis in political science, while there she was an honors department research assistant for the religion department. She also served at World Relief as an intern which is what actually inspired her to apply for the AmeriCorps position.

At her host site Madilyn serves as the Young Adult Mentoring Coordinator. For her the rewards of her service have been seeing the successes that her mentees have accomplished with their mentor, and the challenges have been navigating grant requirements and learning about the non-profit sector.

After her service Madilyn would like to pursue her childhood dream of becoming a jeweler. In the future her dream is to move to the UK with her family and build a life there. Her hobbies include hanging out with her puppy and partner, and having a nice picnic with them at the lake.

## Member Spotlight: Gabriela Napolitano



Gabriela (Gabi) is a first term AmeriCorps Member serving at *World Relief Chicago*. She is from Oak Park and before joining AmeriCorps she was studying at DePaul where she majored in French and Sociology. Gabriela joined AmeriCorps because she too had interned before at World Relief and she liked the experience so much that she applied for the AmeriCorps position.

At *World Relief Chicago* Gabriela is the Health and Digital Literacy Program Coordinator. She helped lead their community ambassador program which included community outreach and hosting virtual COVID health classes, among other things. She also works in case management in the PC department. For her it is rewarding being able to support others in whatever way they need, but it's challenging dealing with the many social inequalities immigrants face in this country.

After AmeriCorps Gabriela plans to teach English to high school students in France. In the future she would like to create a new book genre for multilingual people that switches between languages seamlessly so that people can read in two languages at once. Her hobbies include reading cookbooks, loving her dog, and talking to the person next to her on an airplane.

## Member Spotlight: Sierra King



Sierra King is a third term member currently serving at the *Touch Gift Foundation*. *Sierra is from the south side of Chicago*. Prior to joining for this term Sierra was actually already serving in AmeriCorps. In 2018 she was working as an Illinois Disaster Corps Member at the American Red Cross (2018-2019). Next, at Habitat for Humanity Chicago as a Volunteer Coordinator (2019-2020). This is her first time as a part-time member and she joined in order to change career paths.

At her host site Sierra's position is that of Digital Literacy Coordinator / Site coordinator. Her duties include teaching adults how to use the computer and the various common programs such Email, Microsoft Office, etc. She finds it rewarding because she knows that the skills that are taught are very useful but ironically she finds it challenging to teach people how to use a computer via the computer as the meetings are virtual. After her time with AmeriCorps is over Sierra is not sure exactly of what she will do but she will continue working her full-time job as a Case Manager. In the future she sees herself as a Program Manager or Director of a non-profit organization. Her hobbies include traveling, bike riding, and learning new things from YouTube.



Touch Gift Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit community service provider offering hunger and homelessness relief assistance, health and wellness, financial literacy, professional development, mentoring and advocacy. The *Touch Gift Foundation* conducts weekly workshops to help build communities, edify people, and to encourage personal development, growth, then sustainability.

## Member Spotlight: Amy Dyer

Amy Dyer is a first-year AmeriCorps member serving at World Relief DuPage. She is from the western suburbs and attended Northern Illinois University studying Hospitality Administration. Before AmeriCorps she worked for the Northern Illinois Food Bank and coordinated community and federal food assistance programs. She joined AmeriCorps for a new and exciting experience in a field that she is interested in learning more about, which is serving and working with refugees. All the while she is working towards her M.A. in Humanitarian and Disaster Leadership from Wheaton College.



At World Relief DuPage, Amy is a Young Adult Mentoring Coordinator. She finds it very rewarding to walk alongside someone offering support and services that enable them to become self-sufficient. And, she is inspired every day seeing how much effort clients put into overcoming obstacles in order to achieve their vocational or educational goals. Amy however, has struggled like many with the ongoing pandemic. The lack of in person contact has made it challenging to provide strong relationship-building opportunities for clients and volunteers.

After service Amy plans to complete her graduate degree and look for other work opportunities. In the future she sees herself working in humanitarian aid meeting the needs of victims of disasters or violence. She is interested in marine conservation and her current hobby includes tackling waste by facilitating trash clean-up at her favorite local spot – The East Lagoon.

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DUPAGE/AURORA

**World Relief Aurora/DuPage** empowers local churches to see the most vulnerable people transformed economically, socially, and spiritually. WRDA serves the immigrant and refugee communities in DuPage County and greater Aurora. WRDA's Social Services program provides immigrants and refugees with the support and tools needed to achieve stability and move toward health integration into their local community including case management, employment services, children and youth services, mental health counseling, and support for WRDA's Education/ESL programming.

## Member Spotlight: Brittany Hertzell



Brittany Hertzell is a second-year member serving as the Afterschool Club Coordinator at *World Relief Aurora*. Before joining AmeriCorps Brittany was attended Aurora University where she earned a Bachelor's and Master's in Social Work. While in school she interned at World Relief and loving the experience she applied for the AmeriCorps position so that she could continue working at World Relief and help the community.

As the After-School Club Coordinator. Brittany works in the children and youth departments coordinating their after-school and summer programming, where they work on English skills as well as social and emotional development. The rewards of serving at *World Relief Aurora* are getting to work with children, the relationships built, learning and experiencing cultures from all over the world, and working at a non-profit with so much heart and an incredible staff. But serving also comes with it's own challenges especially during the pandemic where it has been very hard since the meetings are held virtual which makes overcoming the language barrier even more difficult.

After her service Brittany plans on pursuing a doctorate in social work. She has also secured a job at Grace Holistic Center for Education in which she will be working clinically with adolescents. In the future she plans on opening her own therapeutic practice.

## Member Spotlight: Frank Leone

Frank Leong is a first term AmeriCorps Member serving at *World Relief DuPage*. Currently he is attending National Louis University and majoring in Human Services. Before joining AmeriCorps Frank was actually interning at World Relief DuPage which is where he got inspired to join AmeriCorps because while there he received a recommendation from a friend who was a former member! She told him about the great opportunities and possibilities related to AmeriCorps, and Frank, not yet having a ton of experience, thought it would be a great opportunity to gain experience in the field of community service.



At his host site Frank serves as an Afterschool Program Coordinator. He finds the service he provides to be very rewarding as he gets to become a part of a student's success story, with every tutor session and after school program providing positive experiences and triumphs in the education of the students. Unfortunately, like a lot of people in these trying times caused by the pandemic, Frank has had difficulty connecting with students since they do not meet in person but rather via Zoom. After his service, he will continue aiding those who need help while also pursuing a Masters in Social Work. His hobbies include fishing, spending time with his family, gardening, and dancing.

## Member Perspective: Tutoring at the IYC



This year I have finally found a job that I love and look forward to each new day; that is tutoring at IYC Chicago. Each day I go in I get to work with and help incarcerated young men with whatever subject they need help with. Sadly a lot of the young men come to me with their self-esteem shattered. They wrongly believe that they are not smart or that they can not learn, thoughts that they believe to be reinforced by the many tests and evaluations that they have been given that tell them that they are performing at a below average level for their age.

However, oftentimes the students never had access to good education or a safe environment where they could attend school regularly. A struggle which I know all too well, I grew up in a very poor household in a neighborhood which at the time was riddled with gang activity, my father would be gone for 12 hours everyday working multiple jobs to feed my family. The school I attended from Pre-K to the eighth grade was severely underfunded and lacked art, music, and gym classes. It is these factors that affect a children's development and cause many to fall behind and believe that they can not learn or that there is no point in pursuing an education. By working with the students I get to show them that they can learn and that with enough effort and patience there is no mountain that they can not climb. But, it is a slow process as many times we have to go back and relearn the fundamentals or I have to find different examples or methods to contextualize and teach new material but that slow process is worth it.

Once we get through the fundamentals or areas of struggle I am frequently astonished by the creativity, cleverness, and rapid learning ability of the young men. Over time the students regain their confidence and interest in learning and they even start to actively seek out tutoring. To see the young men at the IYC go from not believing in themselves to telling me about all of their plans to go to college or to become a nurse, lawyer, electrician, or plumber is, to me, the greatest reward as I have hopefully showed someone that they are not their mistakes and that they can grow and learn just as well as anybody else and with hard work they can accomplish anything they put their minds to.

- George Mendoza, Literacy Volunteers of Illinois

## Life After AmeriCorps—Two-Part Series

### ***YOUR AMERISTORY AND WHAT'S NEXT***

First in the series, *Your AmeriStory and What's Next* offers a chance for AmeriCorps members finishing their term to both reflect on their year and envision their future picture of success. In the course, members will think about and document what they did, learned, and experienced in their year of AmeriCorps service. This course also helps members understand and practice networking, telling their AmeriStory, and considering what service might mean in their future.

### ***MASTERING THE JOB SEARCH TOOLS***

Part Two of the series, *Mastering the Job Search Tools* focuses on the key documents and preparation that will help members secure their next steps. This course covers resumes, cover letters and interviewing.

*The sessions are on demand and available to be watched at any time—they also count for training hours. If you have not already set-up your account go to - <https://on3learn.difitalchalk.com> and use the log-in credentials that were sent in an email on May 16th.*

## Training from Literacy Works

### ***QUARTERLY BOOK DISCUSSIONS***

***THURSDAY, JULY 29TH — 5:00—6:00 P.M.***

Literacy Works' reading group is a social justice, radical education, focused group. Each year, four books are chosen to read, followed by quarterly discussions. The reading group is informal in nature – one doesn't need to commit to the whole year and the sessions are free to all. This month's selection is a book that focuses on social action - *Whistling Vivaldi: How Stereotypes Affect Us and What We Can Do*. To register or learn more about the book club and other training offered, go to [litworks.org](http://litworks.org).

## LVI SOCIAL MEDIA



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# Happy Birthday!

Sierra King—7/09

## Belated Wishes

February

Hope Wetlesen – 2/26

March

Madilyn Atkins – 3/28

April

Alvin Cole – 4/13

Veronica Del Toro – 4.24

Gabriela Napolitano – 4/26

Kayla Thomas—4/30

May

Valerie Painter – 5/14

Frank Leong – 5/14