

# Literacy Links

Winter  
2008

*a newsletter for volunteer tutors*

Editor, Kris Magaurn, *Chair, Portland Literacy Council*

## Washington County Program Provides Learning and Support to Families

*By Carol Mazer, PODER Family Literacy Coordinator*

Jennifer Ortiz, 10, a fifth-grader and violin student at Tom McCall Upper Elementary School in Forest Grove, can tell you a lot about the PODER Family Literacy Program. She, her sister Erandi and mom, Matilde Rodriguez, came to PODER over three years ago. Matilde needed to learn English and wanted help improving her parenting skills. Despite the fact that she was working full time in a tech assembly plant, Matilde and her girls made a commitment to attend the program three nights a week, set their own education and family goals and work month after month to achieve those goals.

While Matilde was in English and parenting classes, Jennifer and Erandi came to school-age groups run by volunteer tutors from Pacific University and the community. "They help you with your homework when you don't understand what you're supposed to do. You're always having a fun time, but you're really learning too," says Jennifer.

In Spanish, the noun *poder* means "power" or "strength;" as a verb it means "to be able to." It is also a Spanish acronym for *Padres Orgullosos de Estudios y Retos*, acknowledging parents' commitment to lifelong education and the challenges of moving their families ahead. Ninety-five percent of these families fall under federal government guidelines as low or extremely low income.

The PODER program provides excellence in instruction and reinforces positive change, serving about 25 families annually - 32 to 38 adults and 50-plus children - who spend 8 to 10 hours a week in evening classes. Parents learn English with a course content of child development, parenting, work force and community participation. Staff support and coach parents as they learn how to become successful first teachers to their children, providing coordinated training, role-modeling and hands-on practice which help them acquire real skills for literacy development in the home.

Matilde came to PODER with fears about the future and a plateful of challenges, but also with a determination to

do her best. "I'll never let anyone tell me I can't do something. I can only learn my own limitations by trying." She wanted a better job, a healthy home life, citizenship and to learn how to resolve personal and family relationships in positive ways.



*Matilde Rodriguez (center) with her daughters Jennifer (left) and Erandi (right) Ortiz*

In Lucy Beltran's Parenting Education Support classes, she and her cohort learned about self-esteem, positive discipline, organizing household tasks and involving children in age-appropriate ways, advocating for themselves and even more important, forming a supportive community of Spanish-speaking immigrant women. "One day, I came to class so frustrated about working, cooking, cleaning, disciplining the girls, and I just let it all out. Everyone began giving me ideas and encouragement, and from then on it got easier."

In PODER, adult classes are taught by a mix of paid teachers and volunteer tutors, trained through TELT (Training Effective Literacy Tutors). Other adult instructional activities include Spanish literacy, GED preparation, computer literacy and resource education, as well as cultural and arts activities to help further self-expression. School-age children receive homework help, tutoring and enrichment activities. High quality early childhood education is provided by Head Start teachers who use the *Creative Curriculum* for children 0-5 years of age. The final component of Even Start programs like PODER is Interactive Literacy Activities Time where parents follow and support their children's learning.

*see pg. 2*

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## Setting Learning Goals with Your Student by Kathleen Holloway, VLT Coord., PCC SE Center

Adults tend to be practical. They have probably come to tutoring because they recognize that they need certain skills to be able to do particular things in their lives. If you as a tutor can focus the lessons with your student(s) on developing these skills so that they can reach their goals, motivation will remain high and students will most likely make progress.

Identifying goals and the necessary steps to reach them, requires higher level thinking skills. Walking your students through the goal setting process will help them develop the critical thinking skills of analysis, evaluation and estimation. You will need to adapt the process to accommodate your students' level of English and literacy abilities. Depending on your student's level, you may need more than one tutoring session to finish this process. Once you have identified long and short term goals with your students, ask them to help you map out the steps to reach them, what kind of resources/materials and support are needed and how to evaluate whether these goals have been achieved or not. Use this information to design lesson plans for your student(s). Affirming your student's progress as you work together is important so don't forget to discuss ways to celebrate the successes along the way!

**Use these questions to generate discussion that will help your student(s) identify their goals.**

- Why did you decide to return to school? What do you want to learn in this class/tutoring session?
- What do you need to be able to do in your daily life that you can't do now?
- What things do you do well? What things are hard for you?
- What are you doing now to reach your goals? What things in your life make it hard to reach your goals?

I will know that I have learned the skills I need to learn, because \_\_\_\_\_.

- Create a timeline with your student:

Before	Now	3 mos.	6 mos.	1 yr.	5 yrs.
Things I learned	Things I want to learn				

**After discussing some or all of these questions, fill out this form with your student(s):**

What are your strengths? (What do you do well?) \_\_\_\_\_

What is your long-term goal? \_\_\_\_\_

What are the steps to reach this goal? \_\_\_\_\_

What support do you need to reach your goal? \_\_\_\_\_

How will you celebrate reaching your goal? \_\_\_\_\_

Remember to return to this goal-setting form as frequently as needed to evaluate progress and revise goals if necessary.

*(Kathleen Holloway will be presenting a workshop on Goal Setting at the Tutor Conference March 15 at Reed College.)*

### *PODER, continued from pg. 1*

Erandi Ortiz is now 13 and has become an assistant tutor to Ana Brouwer, an Americorps member who is creating a solid volunteer program for PODER. She helps Ana set up projects for the younger kids and works with them on their reading. Through the auspices of her 8<sup>th</sup> grade class at Neil Armstrong Middle School, Erandi will be going to Costa Rica this summer and Ana too, as a class chaperone.

"The best part of the job for PODER staff," says coordinator Carol Mazer, "is bearing witness to the devel-

opment of these families. Some show the fruits of dramatic growth like the Ortiz Rodriguez family, and in others we can see quiet, but profound changes that will positively impact all family members for years to come. We provide the tools, but it is they who are doing the work, day by day, year after year."

Matilde's outlook and prospects have changed over time too. "I've learned how to talk to people, to give my point of view diplomatically. I've grown as a person and I value myself." Last year, soon after gaining her citizenship, *see pg. 3*

## A Unique Tutor-Student Relationship by Sherri Prodani, VLT Coordinator, PCC Cascade

Volunteer tutor, Mary Byers, a retired federal employee, has tutored Saara Hirsi, an English as an Other Language (ESOL) student for over a year. They usually work together one-hundred and sixty hours a



Mary Byers with Saara Hirsi at her GED graduation

term. Saara, a Somali refugee, who is legally blind, came to the United States by herself to explore the possibility of restoring her eyesight, but she was told by a doctor that she would never regain her sight. That was in 2002. Since then, due to Saara's perseverance and determination, and thanks to Mary's help, Saara has earned her GED, served as an interpreter for the Hillsboro School District to help with translation between the district and local African diaspora families, and has helped TriMet develop announcements to help blind people. Currently, she works as an interpreter at Head Start for parents of Somali children.

You may remember Saara and Mary from last year's Tutor Conference, where both Saara and Mary spoke during the luncheon. I thought it would be interesting to follow-up from last year and see how the relationship was going. I interviewed them on October 6, 2007:

*How long have you been working together?*

We've been working together 14 months

*How many hours a week do you work? And where do you meet?*

We meet 10-14 hours a week in the library.

*Mary, what kind of subjects do you study together?*

I accommodate Saara's vision by reading her homework assignments; explain vocabulary word, practice with writing and conversation. I was happy that Saara passed to the next level, Level 6.

*Saara, how has Mary's tutoring helped you? How have you progressed?*

My vocabulary, speech, and writing are all better. My confidence is better.

*What kinds of tutoring are you doing now?*

We focus on typing on voice recognition CCTV—books made bigger. We also communicate through email. We do other things outside homework, such as read books not on the curriculum. I (Saara) go to Mary's home and we watch movies and television and discuss the shows.

*Saara, what are some of your goals?*

I want to go to college and study social science or psychology. I am not sure, but I want to work with people.

*Mary, what are your plans for Saara?*

Get her off to college!

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### *PODER, continued from pg. 2*

she began a new job as a community nutrition trainer for Oregon State University Extension Services. Among the perks are free tuition for OSU classes.

Erandi and Jennifer have watched their mother do all these things.

"She communicates better. Before she worked horrible hours, but now we have more time," Erandi says.

"I was pretty proud of her about the job," adds Jennifer. "It makes me pretty excited because I think if my mom can do it, I can do it!"

Erandi's growing self-confidence and unwillingness to be denied her success mirror her mother's. She loves astronomy, but maybe she will be a pediatrician. "I like PODER because it helps a lot of people improve their lives and communicate better with their children."

PODER offers its program at the United Methodist Church in Cornelius, OR. Among the many community groups and services that maintain partnerships with PODER are Big Brothers, Big Sisters of Metropolitan Portland, OSU Extension, Tualatin Riverkeepers, Washington County Libraries, Health Department and Sheriff's Department Crime Prevention, Morrison Child & Family Services, Lifeworks Northwest, Girl Scouts, Cornelius Fire Department, YWCA Camp Westwind, Oregon Legal Aid Services and more.

For further information, contact Carol Mazer, PODER Coordinator, [carol.mazer@ocdc.net](mailto:carol.mazer@ocdc.net)

**Annual Tutor Conference is Saturday, March 15<sup>th</sup>**

*Promoting literacy  
in our community.*

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***Announcing the Portland Literacy Council's  
Annual Tutor Conference  
"Fitting the Pieces Together"***

**Saturday, March 15, 2007  
Reed College  
3203 SE Woodstock Blvd.  
9:00am - 3:30pm**

The conference will offer a variety of workshops featuring new presenters and new topics, along with many favorites. The day includes three workshop options, a delicious lunch, an inspiring program of speakers and a chance to meet other tutors who share the same passion. The conference registration fee is \$28.00.

Look for registration information in the mail in February,  
or contact Kris Magaurn at [kmagaurn@gmail.com](mailto:kmagaurn@gmail.com)

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