

Pennsylvania Adult Basic and Literacy Education (ABLE) Annual Outstanding Adult Student Awards

Even Start Family Literacy Winners 2006-2009

Pennsylvania ABLE Annual Outstanding Adult Student Awards, also known as Success Stories, recognize adult learners who have discovered that education can help them achieve their goals. These individuals' stories celebrate their perseverance and accomplishments, and their teachers' dedication and effectiveness as they work together in cooperative partnerships representing the best in adult education and family literacy practice.

These outstanding adult learners represent the thousands of learners in Pennsylvania who enroll each year in educational programs to reach new and higher goals for themselves. They have acknowledged the power of education in their lives and have enhanced the quality of their lives and those of their families and their communities through their educational achievements. Their commitment to the accomplishment of their goals, along with their hard work and perseverance, serve as examples to all of us.

Family Literacy Award Winner 2009

Carmen González

Central Susquehanna Intermediate Unit Family Literacy Program, Lewisburg



Carmen González entered the Family Literacy program at Central Susquehanna Intermediate Unit in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, in the fall of 2005. She had goals to improve her English skills, enter employment, and become more involved in her children's education. Having recently moved from Puerto Rico, language was Carmen's biggest barrier: she tested at the beginning literacy ESL level. In spite of Carmen's low level of English, she showed determination in choosing to communicate as best she could in the community. Whether at the County Assistance office, drugstore, post office, grocery store, or her children's school, Carmen refused the assistance of a translator, saying, "How will I ever go forward if I do not try for myself?" Carmen worked hard to learn English in order to gain employment and become self-sufficient.

Carmen's first place of employment was the Dollar General store. She was soon sought out by her children's elementary school as a volunteer translator for parent/teacher conferences, which led to a full-time position as a classroom aide in the Milton Area School District.

Carmen's intense determination helped her as she entered employment and prepared for the GED® Tests. At work, she proved to be hardworking, dependable, and trustworthy. At school, Carmen completed homework assignments, maintained regular attendance, and achieved her educational goals. She advanced quickly from beginning ESL to high adult secondary and obtained her GED® credential in December of 2006.

By accomplishing the goals Carmen set for herself, she has been able to provide more for her family and rely less on supplemental assistance. Carmen has set a positive example for her four young children by obtaining her Commonwealth Secondary School Diploma and entering employment. Carmen is described as an example of professionalism at work, creating an atmosphere of acceptance and open communication. She encourages other ESL students to face their fears and immerse themselves in the everyday events of the community

Family Literacy Award Winners 2008

Donna Imes
Tuscarora Intermediate Unit 11/Even Start



Donna Imes enrolled in the Even Start program at Tuscarora Intermediate Unit 11 for three reasons: to help her children achieve academic, social and emotional success in school; to learn strategies to improve her children's behavior; and to improve her own basic employability skills so she could enter the workforce once her children were in school. Donna had not participated in an educational environment since graduating from high school 20 years earlier. She was quiet and lacked self-confidence. Her children's shyness and uncertainty about the early childhood classroom made attendance in class difficult. What's more, Donna had to travel a considerable distance to attend classes-without family support when her husband was working away from home for extended periods of time. Despite the obstacles, Donna saw the Even Start program as an opportunity and made regular attendance a priority for her and her children. Through reading more with her children and communicating with the early childhood educators, she achieved her goal of helping her children transition successfully to school. After improving her basic skills, Donna entered a distance-learning course to acquire her Child Development Associate (CDA) credential. Donna obtained her CDA and became a resource for staff and participants who also wanted to obtain a certificate. As Donna increased her leadership role at the Even Start program, she impressed staff, increased her self-confidence, and became a role model for other parents. In the area where Donna lives, there is a need for

highly qualified early childhood and childcare workers. Because she holds a CDA, Donna was able to enter employment with Head Start, a known and respected Federal program. Donna was first hired as a substitute for the local Head Start program. She is now permanently employed as a program aide for the county Head Start program. Donna's success has been a great benefit to her family because of her knowledge of early childhood education and higher earning potential. Her children are doing well in school, and Donna is proud of their accomplishments. Her improved confidence helped her support her older daughter in completing training as a registered nurse. She is proud of her skills as a parent, worker, and community member.

Jocelyne Noun Alleyne
Allegheny Intermediate Unit/Family Literacy



Jocelyne Noun Alleyne, originally from Haiti, enrolled in Allegheny Intermediate Unit's Family Literacy program to improve her basic literacy in her second language of English. Her native-language literacy was low because she had been forced to leave school in Haiti at the age of 8 to assist her family. Jocelyne's goals were to obtain U.S. citizenship, increase her literacy skills to enhance her employment potential, and gain educational support for her children. Jocelyne faced many challenges. She was employed full time and was often working two jobs or a double shift, which made attending class difficult. As a CNA at a local hospital, she worked from 11:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m., returning home to pick up her youngest daughter and then attend Family Literacy classes at 9:00 am. Although her husband helped with childcare and housework, Jocelyne was the sole financial provider for the family. Her husband recently obtained residency status and is now employed full time. Additionally, her oldest son is deaf, has cerebral palsy, and is developmentally delayed, so Jocelyne had to learn sign language to communicate with him. Flexibility was the key to Jocelyne's success in the adult education program. The Family Literacy staff prepared take-home assignments and assigned her to the Distance Learning Project so she could learn at home. She was allowed to come to the program early in the afternoon to get some rest before class. When she stopped attending class due to her work schedule, staff kept in touch and encouraged her. Now, Jocelyne has an AmeriCorps volunteer tutor who targets her specific needs in math and language arts. Jocelyne is upbeat when facing adversity. She is always caring and willing to assist others, and she has an admirable work ethic. She successfully completed her citizenship class, and in February 2007 became a United States citizen. Jocelyne's academic skills improved, and to advance in her career, she enrolled in a phlebotomy class located two hours away. She attended class, passed the examination, completed a 100-hour internship at a local hospital, and obtained her certification. She

accomplished all this while employed full-time and attending Family Literacy classes. She now has a phlebotomy technician certification to add to her credentials. She attained her goals of citizenship and improved literacy and employability skills. Jocelyn continues to work on her next goal: to obtain her Commonwealth Secondary School Diploma.

Buffey McIntyre
Crawford County READ/Family Literacy



Buffey McIntyre struggled in school. Her rocky journey started in the early grades when she "just didn't get it." She finally dropped out of 8th grade in 1987 at the age of 16. She wanted a Commonwealth Secondary School Diploma, but after entering a local adult education program three times, she was still unable to pass the GED® tests. Then, in 1994, she began working with a tutor at Crawford County READ. In and out of the program for years, she seemed more dedicated on each try, but the time just wasn't right. In 2003, Buffey was referred to Crawford County READ's Family Literacy program, along with her three young children. She was described as being very nervous, putting her hands over her face, and not looking anyone in the eye. This new start did not look promising. She was separated from her husband and dealing with many issues from her past. Struggling with drug addiction, she left the program yet again in 2004. However, things began to change for Buffey.

A church support group encouraged her to return to the Family Literacy program, which she did in 2006. The teacher's initial reaction was that Buffey would be a challenge, but she later realized she couldn't have been more wrong. Buffey was ready for a change. She had been off drugs for almost a year. She had gained stability at home and was beginning to take charge of her life. She enthusiastically prepared to take the GED tests, coming to class morning and afternoon. Her curiosity stretched her teacher, and fellow students found her thirst for knowledge contagious. One year later, Buffey had passed the GED tests and enrolled at Clarion University pursuing a degree in Radiologic Sciences.

As amazing as these accomplishments are, Buffey's academic success is only part of this success story. With the help of the Family Literacy program, she put together a stable, safe home environment for her children. She engaged them in a positive, uplifting, spiritual setting at church and focused on showing them love. She became an active participant in their learning and demonstrated the importance of education. Buffey continues to be involved in the Family Literacy program and has created a weekly self-esteem workshop for other participants, put the

office in order, and volunteers as a tutor. She also has become an advocate, inspiring community leaders and educators. She spoke at a local legislative luncheon and was the keynote speaker at a GED graduation ceremony. A community member almost cried with joy when she ran into Buffey and her family at a restaurant. Buffey was well dressed, her children were well behaved, and the family was talking and laughing around the table. The chaos was gone.

Family Literacy Award Winners 2007

Gyuldzhan Osman

Luzerne County Community College, ALTA Family Literacy



When Gyuldzhan Osman arrived from Bulgaria, she was mainly thinking about opportunities for her son: a pre-school where her son could learn English, find new friends, and experience a new start. A bright future for him was all she really had in mind. When she discovered that she too could learn by enrolling in the Family Literacy program through Luzerne County Community College's Adult Learners' Training and Assistance (ALTA) program, she was pleasantly surprised. Later she said, "This was the best thing that ever happened to me." Although Gyuldzhan had a Bulgarian high school diploma, she wanted to obtain a Commonwealth Secondary Diploma and become a U.S. citizen. She also needed a full-time job. Gyuldzhan worked diligently to learn English and acquire the other knowledge she needed. Two years after entering the program, Gyuldzhan wrote in her journal: "When I look back two years ago, I was hopeless! I never thought I could learn English — forget writing! I was afraid to open a book because I couldn't read; I couldn't write. I was ashamed. I was mad at myself ... Now when I write this essay, I can't stop my tears. I cry not because I am sad, but because I am so, so happy! I say to others, come to our program and after a couple of months you will feel the difference in your heart!" Gyuldzhan volunteered in her son's Head Start class and accompanied the class on field trips. She reads to her son daily and often takes him to the library. She received her Commonwealth Secondary Diploma in 2005. In 2006, she obtained full-time employment at the General Mills Corporation. Gyuldzhan is now U.S. citizen and has even bought a house. She is a true success story.

Carmela Ciccone Trotta
Altoona Area School District Family Literacy Program



Carmela Ciccone Trotta was born in Italy and helped run a family business in Brazil, where she received a high school diploma. Carmela decided to move with her daughter to the United States. Her first goals were to enroll her daughter in a Head Start program similar to the one she had found in Brazil, and begin learning English, so Altoona Area School District's Family Literacy Program was a perfect fit for her. Carmela participated in the ESL program. She was a model student, taking advantage of every educational opportunity. Her commitment to education included taking IRS, Home Health Aide, and substitute teacher courses. Carmela participated in parent-child activities with the Family Literacy program, and even did presentations for the parents on "The Art of Making Cheese" and "Making Homemade Pasta." Within three years, Carmela mastered enough English to enter higher education. After passing the GED and TOEFL tests in 2004, she immediately began her studies in higher education. She is now a junior pursuing a B.S. in International Business at Penn State Altoona. She accomplished another great milestone by becoming a citizen in 2006. Carmela came to a new country with a four-year-old daughter, but did not let obstacles stand in her way. She is a true lifelong learner, taking classes, visiting the library, and attending Astronomy Club events, Penn State Gardener Library presentations, and Penn State Altoona's lecture series. Through participation in campus organizations and programs, she has taken advantage of all the college experience has to offer. Carmela has inspired many. She was the guest speaker for the Altoona Area School District's GED graduation in 2005. She inspired a Korean mother with young children to pursue and pass the GED tests. Most recently, she inspired Family Literacy students and teachers across the country when she spoke at the National Conference on Family Literacy in Orlando, Florida.

Family Literacy Award Winners 2006

Sandra Varner
Tuscarora Intermediate Unit 11/Even Start



Sandy Varner withdrew from school in 11th grade. She heard about the Even Start program from her stepsister and enrolled with her son, Alan. She was 19 years old at the time, working as a waitress in a diner and, with family help, able to get by without cash assistance. Her short-term goal was to retain employment or get a better job. Her long-term goal was to earn her GED. Sandy began classes at Tuscarora Intermediate Unit in 2002 and had excellent attendance. By October of 2003, she took a GED practice test and was showing great improvement. However, one month later her score plummeted when she took the actual test. She knew she needed to make earning her GED a priority, so when she was hired as a dietary aide at a nursing home, she asked that her work schedule work around her GED classes.

Showing great determination, Sandy continued to study and retest. She and her son were recognized as the TIU 11 Students of the Month in June 2003. She successfully passed the GED in February 2004. Sandy's determination motivated others. She was a familiar, comfortable participant and always respected the purpose of the program. Sandy was an active participant in her son's education. She became involved in many of the programs offered through the TIU adult education center. She became an advocate for her son's literacy and language development. Sandy enrolled and successfully graduated from a parent-child home visiting program. When she first entered the program, she was unsure how to introduce books and activities to Alan. They now have books everywhere in their home. Sandy delights in watching her son play and develop new vocabulary words. She has created picture albums and a baby book to save their favorite mementos.

Good things are now happening to Sandy and Alan. They both graduated from the TIU program in the summer of 2005. Sandy was accepted into Central Pennsylvania Institute of Science and Technology and completed 14 weeks of course requirements in the phlebotomy program. She has been an outstanding student who has worked hard in every component to ensure her family's success.

Tonya Kirk
Community Action Southwest Even Start



Tonya Kirk dropped out of school after she finished 11th grade. At 19, she was pregnant. Tonya wanted to provide a better life for her child, so she became motivated to complete her education. This was difficult because she had no driver's license and her boyfriend was often at work. Tonya earned money by babysitting her nieces and nephews, making it difficult to attend GED. Nancy discovered that the Southwest Corner Even Start, sponsored by Community Action Southwest, offered home-based services. This was the perfect solution for Tonya because she could study for the GED and also receive parenting and childhood development information. In January 2004, Tonya joined the program while maintaining her babysitting schedule and keeping up with her daughter Hayley. She soon found out that she was pregnant with her son, Hunter.

With two toddlers at home, Tonya purchased a desk and computer and set up her own office at home. Each night when her children went to bed, she would go to her office and work on her assignments. Tonya began with a goal of improving her reading comprehension and writing skills. She also wanted to work on algebra and geometry. Tonya demonstrated significant improvement, and in one year she was ready to take the GED test. She passed the GED with a total score of 2380 and an average of 476 per test. Her high scores encouraged her to apply for a scholarship through the Community Foundation. She now attends the Westmoreland Community College.

Tonya was involved in every childhood and parenting class that was available to her. She enrolled her children in Early Head Start, Early Intervention, and Parent and Child Home Program. This required four additional appointments each week. She was able to keep this schedule, babysit her sister's children, and join a play group with other parents and children. In August 2005, Tonya enrolled Hayley in Head Start. Tonya joined the Parent Council and was elected Secretary for the 2005–06 program year. Tonya has become an inspiration to her children, her boyfriend Jimmy and other family members who have decided to continue their education. She serves as a role model and a spokesperson for the Even Start program.