

It's not just all about numbers

By LINDA NEAL

For the past three years, my role as Every 1 Reads volunteer tutor recruiter has kept me very busy from early in the morning to late in the evening.

There are phone calls to return, e-mails to answer, trainings to schedule, presentations to make, a website to maintain, and just generally keeping the "buzz" alive about the opportunities to volunteer one-on-one with a struggling reader. Networking and community contacts have been instrumental in actually helping to recruit more than 7,400 volunteers.



LINDA NEAL

Numbers, numbers, numbers. There is not a day that goes by that someone doesn't ask, "Linda, how many volunteers do we have today?" I gladly quote the number (which I usually know down to the person) and that is often the end of the conversation.

Reaching the goal of 10,000 volunteer tutors by 2008 is always in my mind; however, that is not what makes this opportunity so special to me. I am in the unique position to put a real face on those numbers—and I love what I see. Everyday I see one more caring, compassionate person who is one of those "numbers."

One retired volunteer who has participated for the past three years

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Gerry Woods, left, and Lela Randle Watson display Art of Reading quilt. Children at the Louisville Central Community Center had to read five books to help work on it.

Literacy gets a boost

Even arts programs include reading and writing for Louisville Central Community Center children

By STAN SLUSHER

The Every 1 Reads program at Louisville Central Community Center (LCCC) may be small, serving only five elementary-age boys, but the center's efforts to promote literacy are large.

Talk to Geraldine (Gerry) Woods, manager of education and fine arts, and she'll tell you that every children's artistic program at the center includes an educational component that involves reading, writing, and learning.

Woods, a former kindergarten teacher, has been with the center nine years. She's passionate about what she does, and she exudes energy and enthusiasm when she discusses the importance of literacy.

In an interview, she talked about taking the center's younger children to the St. James Art Festival, which would be opening the next day. "We start out telling them what to

expect," she said. "We talk about them being safe, of staying together, and then, when we meet the artists, I'll allow them to ask questions."

When they return to the center, she said, they will write about who they saw, what they did, how they liked the experience, and the impact it had on their lives.

"They need to think about everything they learned as an opportunity to grow," said Woods.

Louisville Central Community Center, located on Muhammad Ali at 13th Street, two blocks from Central High School and Coleridge-Taylor Elementary School, serves adults and children living mostly in the Russell neighborhood. Every day, year round, LCCC provides programs in both the

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VISTA literacy efforts target those in need

By STAN SLUSHER

They come from seven states, including Kentucky, and many of them are from Louisville. They're working as Volunteers in Service to America, better known as AmeriCorps*VISTA, who spend at least one year in full-time service addressing the needs of low-income populations.

In Louisville, the 16 VISTA volunteers are sponsored by the Jefferson County Public Schools to help support literacy efforts, including Every 1 Reads.

Their team leader, Ty Leitner, is an actor by training, a 2005 graduate of the University of Kentucky in theater, who is in his second year with the program. Last year, he performed his VISTA service with the Louisville Urban League. Today he works closely with Mildred LeMaster, the local program supervisor, as an advocate, mentor, and administrator.

Leitner's sister, Jennifer, a Western Kentucky University graduate, is working as a VISTA volunteer in Seattle. They have family ties in JCPS, where their mother, Janet Leitner, is elementary school liaison.

IN AN INTERVIEW at the Volunteer Talent Center offices at Waggener Traditional High School, Ty Leitner talked about the literacy programs that the volunteers support along with their partners in the schools, nonprofit organizations, and Metro Louisville government.

For example, three of the VISTA slots are assigned to schools – one at Doss High School, one at Thomas Jefferson Middle School, and a third, a resource position to serve all schools.

All of the VISTAs work with Every 1 Reads in some capacity, he said. They do volunteer recruitment, develop book rooms, help organize fund-raising activities, volunteer recognition, and parent involvement, working with PTAs, he said.

THERE IS a community engagement position, he said, which works to provide continuity between school and after-school. Volunteers talk with organizations such as community centers that already have after-school programs for children to see if they want to become endorsed Every 1 Reads sites.

"If they say yes, they complete an application," Leitner said. "Then they get into the database of sites that teachers can access to know where to refer students needing help, and then the Volunteer Talent Center provides resources and training for the sites. That way, when the students come in, the site will have the resources to allow the kids to continue reading – not just when they're at school, but after as well."

VISTA volunteers also work with refugee and immigration populations. Leitner said this includes the English as a Second Lan-



VISTA team leader Ty Leitner talks with Mildred LeMaster, program supervisor.

guage (ESL) program in the schools; the Kentucky Refugee Ministries (KRM), and Lac Viet Academy, an after-school program for Vietnamese children that helps them with their English and their homework.

Probably the most unique, Leitner said, is a VISTA site that focuses on adult literacy.

"That's a program we like to talk about because it's on the backside of Churchill Downs," he said. "It was founded to give those trackside employees some education and resources so they can move up career-wise into more skilled positions, more money. These are people who are walking horses and cleaning the stalls."

FOR THE VISTA volunteers, it's a labor of love. They're definitely not in it for the money. Most of them, are recent college graduates who have not embarked on career paths yet.

The volunteers, their hometowns, and their assignments are:

Meredith Amshoff, Shepherdsville, Ky., JCPS ESL; Daniel Babb, Iowa City, Iowa, Kids Voting; Shaina Board, Louisville, Salvation Army; Rachel Brokaw, Louisville, Klein Family Learning Center; Shelley Dewig, Evansville, Ind., Kentucky Refugee Ministries; Ellen Henry, Michigan City, Ind., Thomas Jefferson Middle School; Melissa Horak-Hern, Kansas City, Mo., JCPS Resource; Chelsie Laughlin, Louisville, Doss High School; Lisa Nguyen, Los Angeles, Kentucky Refugee Ministries; Elizabeth Ortiz, Passaic, N.J., Klein center; Rachel Secretto, Louisville, JCPS ESL; Abdul Sharif, Louisville, Urban League; Daniel Solzman, Louisville, Greater Louisville Inc.; Rebecca Sterbenz, Houston, Tex., Office of Youth Development, and Rachel Wallace, Pikeville, Ky., Lac Viet Academy.



VISTA volunteer Melissa Horak-Hern, left, works with Kalai Annadurai, a computer clerk, at the Volunteer Talent Center at Waggener High School.

Every 1 Reads needs trained tutors for 10 on waiting list

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visual and performing arts, such as Suzuki violin, dance, and poetry, as well as teen leadership and tutoring services, such as Every 1 Reads, for the estimated 90 to 120 children it serves.

Every 1 Reads, for example, has a waiting list of 10 children because of the lack of trained volunteers. But it's not because of a lack of effort on Woods' part. "If you walk through the door, I'll get you," she said. "I recruit at my church. I recruited a (LCCC) board member. Anywhere and everywhere I always mention the need."

She also wants to encourage her staff to go through Every 1 Reads training "because I want them to volunteer. They might not be able to meet with a child once a week, but maybe they could do it once or twice a month. Even that would help."

SHE HAS all her present Every 1 Reads tutors back from last year except for one. They include Dan Crutcher, publisher of Louisville Magazine; Brenda Gunn, an LCCC board member and retired manager of external affairs for the University of Louisville; Abdul Sharif, an AmeriCorps Vista workers assigned to the Louisville Urban League; Katie Grant, of PetFirst Healthcare, and Tiffany Ford, an Englehard Elementary School teacher.

The volunteers work with their assigned children in late afternoon or evening when school is in session and during the day in the summer when school is out. The sessions last 30 minutes.

In selecting books, Woods gets help from Every 1 Reads and the main Louisville Free Public Library, which provides a collection of books by grade level. "And every month I have a specific theme," she said. "For September, it was 'Let's Get Wild.' So the books were about wild animals, safaris, just anything that you would consider wild. For October, it's harvest – books about pumpkins,



Gerry Woods greets an Every 1 Reads student.

leaves, and fall for grades 1-5."

But the Every 1 Reads sessions aren't solely about reading. Woods said she's heard the volunteers and children talk about each other's day. "They get to know each other," she said, "and I like that."

One of the children told a volunteer "today that he didn't have a bad day," said Woods. "He didn't get to go to recess, but it wasn't such a bad day. That was a new twist."

Woods said the boy chose the books to read and brought them with him. His tutor told Woods that the boy was doing a lot better reading, in connecting the words, attacking them by breaking them down and sounding them out. After he reads, the tutor asks him questions about what he did.

WOODS SAID she lets the Every 1 Reads volunteers adapt what they learned in training to the child. Every volunteer approaches this different, she said.

For example, she said, another volunteer used words in a story and created a list of every word the child had difficulty reading. When the two get-together next week, the boy has to know these words. Later, the tutor planned to ask the child to make sentences

out of those words.

As part of Woods' goal of incorporating reading into every program offered for the center's youth, she came up with the Art of Reading Quilt project that combined creativity and literacy. Every child in grades 1-4 who wanted to participate in working on the quilt was required to read five books, beginning at the end of February through the second week of March. Those who finished the five books worked on the quilt for five weeks. The unveiling was April 22 at LCC.

Lest we forget what those youngsters accomplished, their names are inscribed on a white patch on the back of the quilt. Recognized are Alexis Cannon, Staechelle Brown, Gy'Andra Seabrooks, Brean Speight, Dakota O'Bannon, Zamara Cates, Eric Austin, Jalon Brown, DoJuante McCauley, Mekhi Jordan, Jazmin Hobbs, Makaya Williams, Jodaia Bishop, and Lakiaya Fisher.

WOODS LAMENTS the cuts in fine arts programs in the schools.

"We look at the skills learned in the arts as ones that can be apply in the classroom because in the arts students learn to be more focused," she said. "They learn to listen and follow directions – skills that you need in the classroom as well. Violin students, for example, have the highest skills in math and science. There is a connection, I think, with the data behind that – a connection between music and math."

But, first and foremost, reading promotes learning, and Every 1 Reads is a solution searching for volunteers, and Gerry Woods will put you to work when you walk through the door.

The writer is a retired Courier-Journal editor and news ombudsman.

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Supt. Sheldon Berman, left, thanked representatives of the 40-some Every 1 Reads programs attending the October Community Engagement meeting for their efforts in organizing and recruiting volunteers to tutor students.

Recruiting for Every 1 Reads

Wanted: 10,000 trained volunteers by Sept. 2008



By CONNIE CAMERON

Yup, it's that time again! It's a new Every 1 Reads year, and volunteer coordinators in the schools and at community sites are working hard to recruit the necessary tutors to staff their school day and after-school reading programs.

And the sights are high: Every 1 Reads is looking to have trained 10,000 volunteer tutors by September 2008, 2,500 more volunteers than the initiative has today.

How to do this? Probably start by calling on your regular volunteer base, and then spreading your wings: try businesses and church groups in your neighborhood, try involving high school student volunteers, and seek out parents and grandparents of the children and youth you are serving.

And don't forget to call on the professional recruiter associated with E1R: Linda Neal, JCPS/GLI coordinator at 625-0004.

And call on Rufus. Rufus who, you ask? Rufus the Recruiter who has compiled all the best practices of volunteer coordination and put it in a small handbook with easy-to-follow strategies for recruiting, retaining and recognizing those caring adults and students who serve others. Rufus is at home at the JCPS Volunteer Talent Center and will be available in mid-October. Call 485-3710.

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says, "Being involved in the Every 1 Reads program allows me to give back to the community and help those who need a little support from the community. It has blessed my heart to be a part of this program and I can't wait for another year to begin."

Another great volunteer who happens to be a plant manager in the Riverport area often quips, "Whether you're making peanut butter or you're a heart surgeon, you need to be able to read." And he continues: "Seeing me volunteer sends a message to my daughter, who is 5, that reading is important."

Another volunteer I often talk with, who actually volunteers at four sites, says "I am lucky to be able to help a child. I never take this for granted and always consider it a blessing."

As the volunteers go back to their school and community sites this fall, I eagerly await hearing more inspirational, heart-warming stories about how wonderful it is to help a child.