

LEARN

LITERACY
PARTNERS

FALL 2016

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Macmillan Provides
Children with First
Books of Their Own



READING CHANGES EVERYTHING



Dear Friends,

Lorena Quiroga is an amazing woman. A mother of two, she is smart, courageous, poised, and deeply dedicated to her family and her community. She is just the kind of parent we serve at Literacy Partners: always striving to make the world a better place for her family and ready to run with whatever assistance we can provide.

Like most of our students, Lorena knows that education is the key to her children's success in the United States. And, it's not just their learning that counts but hers as well. Lorena took a leap of faith when she enrolled in our classes, but she has conquered her initial fears and begun making remarkable progress on the long journey to English proficiency. I've been struck by how quickly she has replaced the fear of living in a new land and not knowing the language with a steady confidence that her children have a bright future ahead of them.

Lourdes de la Cruz is another amazing mother of two, who created her own small business bringing some of the health and wellness traditions of her home country to other women in the Bronx. A powerful advocate for her community and a leader in her child's school, Lourdes never thought she'd have time to go back to school for herself. But today, she is continuing her education and bringing all that Literacy Partners has to offer to her children, who are becoming avid readers themselves.

Our classes attract a lot of parents like Lorena and Lourdes. One thing they learn quickly is that no matter how talented and dedicated their children's teachers are, parents will always be the most important influence on their children's learning.

Every day, I am blown away by the parents who come back to school at Literacy Partners. I hope you will be, too. Drop me a line at anthonyt@literacypartners.org to let me know what you think of their stories. And, please get in touch if you would like to be more involved with a donation of books, money, or your time and talent.

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Anthony Tassi". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Anthony Tassi

We strengthen families by empowering parents through education. Together, we can close the achievement gap before children even begin school.

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LORENA'S STORY

When Lorena Quiroga moved from Argentina to New York City with her husband, Alfredo, and their two sons, Facundo, 13, and Mateo, 4, she didn't know a word of English. When people spoke, it was just noise that mixed with the cacophony of the new city. To avoid thinking about feeling out of place in her new home, Lorena focused on her family and how her sons were coping with the transition. She made sure they started school right away.



*Lorena speaks at the Literacy Partners gala this year.
Photo: Sam Deitch*

During her first week in New York City, while she was driving to pick up her children from school, Lorena got lost. She was not only unfamiliar with the streets, but she couldn't read any of the street signs. They looked like jumbled letters and strange symbols.

She drove around in circles. A couple of hours passed. Finally, a friendly taxi driver gave Lorena directions. She managed to pick up her children, but the trip had taken her four hours. She vowed never to repeat that afternoon.

Four months later, while at Mateo's preschool, Malcolm X Early Childhood Education Center, in Queens, Lorena learned about free English classes with Literacy Partners, and she signed up. She and her teacher, Sandra Cespedes, connected instantly.

Lorena says (still mostly in Spanish, with Sandra translating), "Sandra helped me to understand English; our class is a big family of parents. We speak, read, write, and listen. Now I can read a little. I can write a little."

(continued on next page)

A BIG THANKS TO THE DOROTHY STRELSIN FOUNDATION

Literacy Partners is deeply grateful for the Dorothy Strelsin Foundation's generous gift to establish the Dorothy Strelsin Foundation Endowment for the students of Literacy Partners. The Endowment will continue to bring the joy of reading to families across New York City.



Left (from left): Mateo, Alfredo, Lorena, Facundo.
Right: Mateo with *Where The Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak.
Photos: Marc Goldberg

After only four months of classes, Lorena’s fears of navigating her new life are giving way to optimism. “Now that I’m here, I want to learn English to help my children,” she says. “English is their future, so I want to learn it too.”

In class, Lorena has learned about the importance of reading to children and is committed to reading books to her sons, who are learning English alongside her. Through our Books of Their Own program, Literacy Partners has provided 10 age-appropriate books to Facundo and Mateo. Some nights, Lorena spends hours translating Facundo’s schoolwork using an app on her phone so that she can understand it and help him out.

“English is their future, so I want to learn it too.”

Amazed at Lorena’s determination and energy, Sandra proposed that Lorena speak at the June 2016 Literacy Partners gala. Before a 400-person audience, she bravely delivered an emotional address causing nearly everyone to share in her tears.

In her speech, Lorena described the shame she felt in her first months in New York. “I feel powerless, useless. For me, life in New York is difficult. I am happy but also afraid. Afraid of English. My only consolation is to know I can wake up in the morning and see my family,” she said.

While Lorena rehearsed her speech for the gala, she inspired some of the Spanish-speaking waitstaff working at the ballroom that night. Their encouragement helped her overcome her fears and face the crowd.

“The classes helped me to be less afraid,” she says. “I feel courageous.” ■

CAFÉ LITERACY: AN UNWAVERING VOLUNTEER COMMITMENT

New York City can be hectic and unpredictable, especially for people who are not confident English speakers. But since 2008, our volunteer Frederica Sigel has been helping a close-knit group of immigrant students live with greater ease. Every Tuesday morning, she generously meets with up to eight students at Café 28 in Manhattan, helping them master the English they need to make their way in the city.

Frederica began volunteering after completing Literacy Partners' former teacher-training program. When the class she was teaching ended in 2013, her students wanted more. Most had mastered basic English but still struggled with vocabulary and grammar, so she offered to keep meeting with them weekly at a nearby cafe.

Frederica also supports her students through real-world challenges, including parenting. When one student found his son's pre-k enrollment paperwork overwhelming, she coached him through the process. She has even introduced the group to young-adult novels, and some of their older children have joined in reading the books at the same time.

What motivates her the most are the strong bonds the students have formed. Immigrants from Argentina, Burma, China, and Japan, they support one another in and outside of class—and take every opportunity to have a party, she says.

Frederica explains, "I'm enabling them to step out of the comfort zones of their communities, where they may speak their native languages, and opening New York to them so they can appreciate living here more." **Literacy Partners salutes Frederica—our amazing volunteer!** ■

Frederica (third from right) and her students practiced conversation on an outing to the High Line and Chelsea Market.



“I never read in English before I got these books,” says Lourdes de la Cruz, a student in Literacy Partners’ English for Parents class. An immigrant from the Dominican Republic, Lourdes joined our class in the Bronx in April 2016. She wanted to improve her English to keep up with her children, Alejandro, 7, and Isabel, 12, who gently correct her as she goes along.

Every day when Alejandro comes home, he and his mother read one of 20 new books donated to the de la Cruz children through our [Books of Their Own program](#). *The Boy Who Loved Math*, published by Macmillan, is his favorite.

The book is among 1,200 donated this year to our student families by Macmillan. The publisher joins Simon & Schuster and HarperCollins in supporting Books of Their Own, one of our most important strategies to encourage family reading and school readiness among young children.

Jonathan Yaged, president of the Macmillan Children’s Publishing Group, recently learned about Literacy Partners’ focus on parents of young children.

“It was a no-brainer to contribute books,” Yaged says. “It’s so well established that having books at home is probably the single most important thing you can do to make sure that kids read at grade level and that they love learning.”

He adds that one of the great things about being a children’s publisher is watching children delight in what they read. But it’s not just children who benefit. Reading

to her children is helping Lourdes practice her English.

“I feel like a child, myself,” she says. “It’s fun! It’s a wonderful way to communicate with my children. It feels very good, and I understand more.” ■

Isabel and Alejandro, with their mother, Lourdes de la Cruz, read the books they received through a generous donation from Macmillan.



Photo: Robert Winn

WHAT KIDS READ WHEN THEIR PARENTS CAN'T

Earlier this year, we teamed up with The&Partnership, a leading creative agency, to build a campaign that exposes the devastating effects of adult illiteracy on families.

Together, we made a video that conveys the undue burdens placed on children whose parents cannot read in English. It's a unique snapshot of everyday life that brings private family struggles into the public eye. The bottom line of the campaign: *When parents can't read, kids can't be kids.*



The video is featured on our website and on WhatKidsRead.org, a new website created for the campaign. The website features beautifully illustrated children's stories by well-known authors. But, to give people a sense of what some kids are actually reading at home, we replaced the real stories with serious messages intended only for their parents. The first book provides instructions for taking medication; the second shows an electricity shut-off notice: two types of material that are not unusual for children to decode for their parents who can't read. The hard fact is that our students' children—and many others like them—end up reading messages like these, meant for adults. Relieving them of this burden is an important part of our mission.

We want to thank The&Partnership for their help in raising awareness of the consequences for children when their parents can't read, and for supporting our efforts to change the story for hundreds of families.

Go to WhatKidsRead.org to watch the video. ■

SAVE THE DATE!

Literacy Partners Evening of Readings & Gala Dinner Dance

MAY 24, 2017 • CIPRIANI 42ND STREET