

# LEARN

LITERACY  
PARTNERS

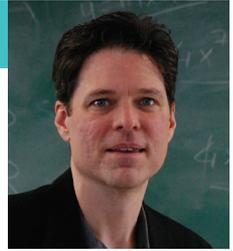
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# READING CHANGES EVERYTHING



Dear Friends,

One of the things I love about my job is listening to students talk about how their lives have changed since they decided to go back to school. Some of the things I've heard include:

*"Now I can read my mail. I don't need to ask anyone for help."*

*"I never used to be able to help my daughters with their homework, and now I can. They are proud of me. I'm proud of myself."*

*"There were so many things I wanted to know, but I never knew how to ask."*

Soon, our students will also be able to say that all their children have home libraries, thanks to a new campaign that Literacy Partners has launched. Most students come to our program without any children's books at home—a huge detriment to early reading. Can you imagine growing up without owning a single book? We aim to turn this situation around by giving each student a home library with at least 10 books for each of their children and a few for themselves.

Providing low-income and immigrant parents with books for their children is obviously a good idea. But, it's also backed by evidence: children who grow up in homes with more books have greater reading proficiency at every age. Helping parents get comfortable with reading these books is where our classes come in. And, for many of our parents who are immigrants, we're helping them do all this in a foreign language: English.

We can't do this work alone, so we hope you'll get involved. Do you have gently used children's books you'd like to donate? Want to volunteer to help organize the campaign? Tweet us @LitPartners; find us on Facebook; email me at [anthonyt@literacypartners.org](mailto:anthonyt@literacypartners.org); or, if you want to really go old-school, send me a letter. I love to read.

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

Anthony Tassi, Executive Director

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

## LITERACY PARTNERS

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# ROSA'S STORY: LEARNING TO READ ALONGSIDE HER DAUGHTER

## “How do you feel today?”

That is the first question tackled by Rosa Roman’s English for Parents class on a rainy Tuesday morning in mid-January 2016. Rosa and her classmates—13 women who have been meeting for a scant four weeks at the Malcolm X Day Care Center in Corona, Queens—search for the right words to express themselves. “I feel happy.” “Sleepy.” “Good.” “Worried.” are some of their answers.

“How do you say ‘con ganas?’” asks Rosa of her teacher, Sandra Cespedes. Another student rephrases: “Motivada,” she says. “Ah, you feel motivated,” Sandra responds. Indeed, sitting at attention and absorbing new words by the handful, Rosa is as dedicated as any student her teacher has known.



Rosa arrived in New York City in 2012 from Morelia, Michoacan, Mexico. Her daughter, Evelyn, was born shortly after. Since then, “everything has been a challenge,” she says, with Sandra translating. “Going to the doctor; going to the grocery store.” Her frustration shows on her face, but so does a growing determination to work through new phrases until she gets them right. Prior to the class, Rosa had spoken no English words. Now, she is starting to understand signs on the street announcing “food market” and “school.”

Evelyn’s imminent enrollment in kindergarten is what brought Rosa to Literacy Partners. “Soon my daughter will be in school, and I want to help her with homework.” As a mother, she wants nothing more than to read to her energetic, princess-obsessed daughter, who is at a critical moment in her own process of learning to read. *(continued on next page)*

**A BIG  
THANK  
YOU!**

**THE & PARTNERSHIP**

*Two years ago, when we began to shift our program to serve parents and their young children, we wanted a new look and feel that would better reflect this change. The&Partnership generously offered us their extraordinary talent and expertise in developing a new visual identity that communicates confidence and optimism in keeping with our new mission. We are enjoying the new burst of color and are grateful to our creative partners.*

*Helping students instill a family culture of reading is a bedrock component of all Literacy Partners classes.*

Just two weeks into the English class, a visit to the Langston Hughes library with her classmates brought Rosa a big step toward her goal: She emerged smiling with her first library card and a handful of English books.

Rosa was excited to learn from the librarian how to choose age-appropriate books, says Sandra, and the self-service book-checkout system lets the students—even those who are self-conscious about their English skills—come and go without

assistance. “It gave Rosa a lot of freedom and power,” says Sandra, adding that Rosa has returned several times to borrow more books.

Helping students instill a family culture of reading is a bedrock component of all our classes. Most parents who come to Literacy Partners don’t have a library card and rarely visit the library with their families. Our teachers make sure everyone gets a library card and encourage parents to take their children to the library on a regular basis, starting with a class trip for parents to familiarize themselves with the local library.

A survey in December 2015 found that by the end of the semester, 100% of the students enrolled in our English classes for parents had taken their children to the library at least once during the previous month and 50% had gone twice or more. “I’ve been trying to recognize the sounds of the letters in the book,” Rosa says in Spanish. “It’s an easy book so it’s good for me and my daughter. And, when I can’t read, I pretend to make it up. It feels good to read in English.”



*With her first library card, Rosa checks out books for herself and her daughter, Evelyn, at the Langston Hughes Community Library in Queens.*



The Brooklyn Book Club pooled their resources to donate to Literacy Partners. Standing from left: Carol Cohen and Betty Bartoloma; seated from left: Alice Walsh, Anna Pascal, Selma Wiener, and Carole Chimera.

## BROOKLYN BOOK CLUB: 10 WOMEN, 400 BOOKS, AND THE GIFT OF READING

**T**hey came together in 1972 out of their love of reading. As New York City school librarians and English teachers, these 10 women have been fighting illiteracy in New York City since before Literacy Partners was born.

Like any good book club in Brooklyn they meet—where else?—in a Chinese restaurant. And they actually talk about the books! Their remarkable book club has devoured some 400 books over 44 years, with selections that range from the classics found in every high school classroom to random picks off the bookstore shelf.

“It means I read things I never would have picked up before. It’s absolutely wonderful!” says Carole Chimera, a longstanding member. Currently on their docket is *The Mockingbird Next Door* by Marja Mills, to commemorate the recent passing of the novelist Harper Lee.

Several book club members had donated to Literacy Partners in the past. In December 2015, one participant, Selma Wiener, suggested that instead of giving one another holiday presents, they pool their resources and share the gift of reading that has meant so much to each of them individually and together.

Of all the organizations they could have supported, Literacy Partners was the top choice because, Selma says, “As a former reading teacher, my heart is in books and papers, and without reading, you’re at a great loss. Everyone should be able to read.”

## PUBLISHER'S DONATION HELPS LEVEL THE PLAYING FIELD

The cozy image of parents reading to their children—sometimes for hours on end—is taken for granted by many middle-class families. It's widely known that having books at home directly fuels children's reading habits and school readiness. Yet an alarming 61% of families living in poverty do not have a single book in their homes, compared to dozens, if not hundreds, of books owned by the typical elementary school student with college-educated parents.

To level the playing field, Literacy Partners has provided each of our students with a small library of books for their children. For many of the families, the books are the first they have owned.

We began this pilot project with a generous book donation from **Simon & Schuster**. In December 2015, the publisher ran a campaign called Give the Gift of Reading. Every time a book lover posted a photo taken at an independent bookstore, the publisher contributed a book to our families—a total of 600 donations.

"The families were so moved by this simple gesture, and we think it is incredibly important for the children," says Anthony Tassi, Literacy Partners executive director.

### DID YOU KNOW?

61%

Percentage of families living in poverty who have no books at home

50%

Increase in the percentage of parents who read to their children >3 times a week after one semester at Literacy Partners

19%

Increase in the likelihood of children attending college if they grow up in a home with books

Research shows that having a large number of books at home strongly benefits students' academic performance, regardless of parents' educational attainment. "Our goal is for low-income and immigrant children to have the same advantage in reading that middle-class children have in this city," says Tassi. "If we want children to read more, we need to make sure they have books to read."

The Books of Their Own project dovetails with our dual-generation approach: Because parents with low literacy skills often were not read to as children, they are less likely to read to their own children. In Literacy Partners' language classes, adult students practice reading aloud, gaining the confidence they need to read to their children. The newest English learners are encouraged to read or make up stories using picture books in their native languages.

"Establishing a culture of reading together is paramount, in any language," Tassi says. "There are many things parents can do to promote their children's literacy growth, but reading together is the gold standard."

Literacy Partners plans to expand the Books of Their Own project, providing at least 10 language-rich books that are both culturally and age appropriate to every one of our students' children.

*There are many things parents can do to promote their children's literacy growth, but reading together is the gold standard.*

SAVE THE DATE **JUNE 7, 2016**

## EVENING OF READINGS GALA

*Literacy Partners proudly announces our thirtieth annual Evening of Readings Gala on June 7, 2016. The black-tie event, to be held at New York's Cipriani 42nd Street, will honor **Norman Pearlstine**, executive vice president and chief content officer of Time, Inc., for his unwavering dedication to promoting literacy and philanthropy. The evening will include a reading by world-renowned fashion designer **Tommy Hilfiger** from his upcoming book. **Liz Smith** and the Board of Directors are thrilled to share this wonderful evening with our many friends dedicated to improving the lives of those who are learning to read and write.*

