

Update from Literacy Partners

# READING CHANGES EVERYTHING

Breaking the cycle of  
poverty for New York City  
families through  
education



FALL 2014

**“I HAVE MORE TO GAIN...  
AND I HAVE MORE TO OFFER.”**



Beverly Jenkins





Guillermina de Jesus

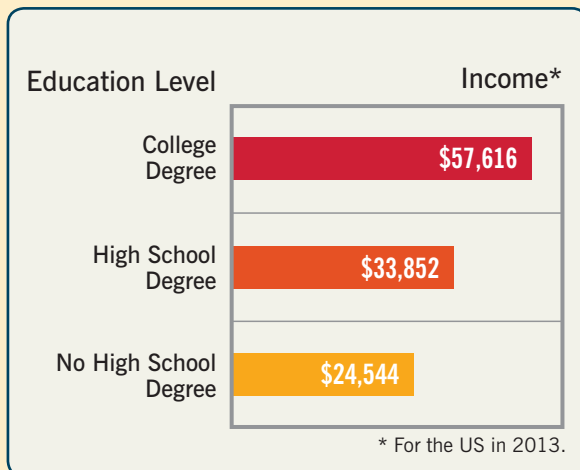
**“WE, THE PARENTS, ARE THE FIRST  
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# More to Offer: Beverly Jenkins

Wherever Beverly Jenkins goes, her books go with her: “In the doctor’s office, in the train - wherever I am, I’m studying.” It’s a habit Beverly picked up when she enrolled at Literacy Partners in 2009. At the time, she had a second grade reading level and fifth grade math skills. Now, only five years later, she’s a college student at Hostos Community College working towards a career in medicine. “I have more to gain,” Beverly declares as she unpacks her books. “And I have more to offer.”

Before coming to Literacy Partners, Beverly was one of the 1.1 million adult New Yorkers who did not have a high school diploma. Like many of these adults, life’s circumstances cut short Beverly’s education at a painfully young age. She began elementary school as a bright and eager child. But under the surface, repeated abuse at home was taking its toll: “That was what weakened my ability to function,” Beverly recalls.

Before becoming a teenager, Beverly dropped out of school and ran away from home. With no skills to draw upon, she fell into a cycle of prostitution, drug abuse, and homelessness that persisted into adulthood and nearly



**We help adults improve their literacy and focus on earning a GED and advancing to college because average annual earnings increase dramatically with education.**

ended her life: “I thought I was dead,” Beverly says matter-of-factly.

She was in her early fifties when a friend encouraged her to call Literacy Partners. “I called them up, I went in, and I took the test,” Beverly recalls. “And I never left.” Earning her GED gave her the chance to become a new person – “a chance to live,” she says.



Tucked among the books in Beverly’s bag is a copy of ‘Self-Reliance’ by Ralph Waldo Emerson. “Act singly, and what you have already done singly will justify you now,” Emerson famously wrote. Beverly would have been unable to read the essay five years ago. Now she’s analyzing it for her English class at Hostos. “Nobody can say, ‘Hey, I can’t change.’ If I can change, you can change. You have no excuse to say your life is too far gone.” •

GED classes cost \$1,800 per person at Literacy Partners. Your contributions make it possible to offer these classes for free.



Over the past year, we more than doubled the number of students earning a GED at Literacy Partners. And about half our graduates go on to college.

# Parents Are the First Teachers: Guillermina de Jesus

The sign seemed to be advertising an after-school program, one that her boys could attend at no cost. But Guillermina de Jesus just wasn't sure. "I'm seeing the word 'free' but I'm shy to ask," she recalls. "The person maybe doesn't speak Spanish, and I'm not going to understand."

Frustrating moments like these were common for the immigrant mother of four. She wanted to help her children with schoolwork and monitor their activities more closely, but it was very hard to do with so little English. Her boys, all American-born, were getting bored by school and had figured out to get mischief past their mother by speaking English. "The only thing they wanted to do was video games," Guillermina says. "I was not really happy with that."

When Guillermina came across a flyer advertising English classes for parents last fall, she quickly enrolled. What she found with Literacy Partners was an emphasis on English language learning and on encouraging closer family connections to give young children a boost in their early literacy skills. She and the other parents practiced their English while exploring activities designed to enrich their interactions with their children. "I became



**Richard Narcisse received his GED in July 2014. His son accompanied him across the stage at the graduation ceremony. It was a great moment for his family and our entire community.**

a little more conscious that I have to give them quality time – not quantity, but quality,” says Guillermina.

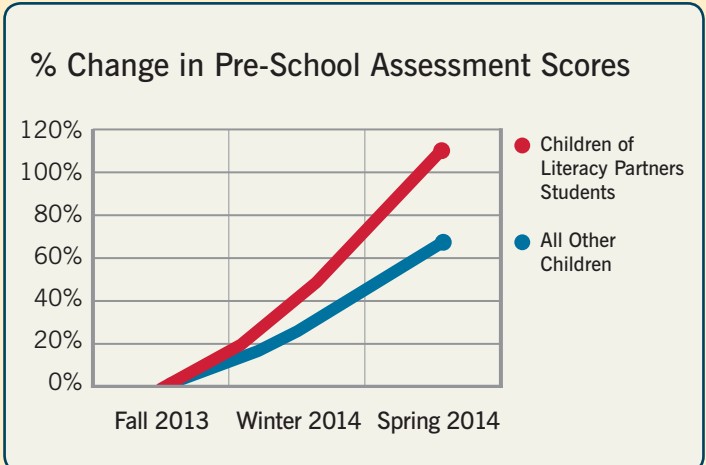
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For 26 weeks, Guillermina attended class without fail. It was tough, but she and her fellow students progressed quickly: “I felt we had a team, a group,” she remembers. She now feels confident asking questions and expressing her opinions. She is active on the parent association

at her children’s school and is in the market for a new job. Reading and studying have taken priority over television and video games in the de Jesus household, and she is keeping close track of her sons’ activities. “They know it’s not easy to lie to me,” she says. “I have a better idea of what they’re doing.”

But most gratifying of all is the example she is setting for her school-age boys. Not long ago Guillermina’ twelve-year-old came home with a note for her to sign. There was a test coming up, and each student had been instructed to explain how his mother was going to help him prepare for it. “My mother is going to inspire me,” Guillermina remembers reading in her son’s handwriting.

“We, the parents, are the first teacher in our children’s life,” Guillermina says. ●



**Children of parents who enroll with us do substantially better on pre-school assessments than their peers whose parents don't take a class with us.**



# Our Mission

We strengthen families by empowering parents through education. With our free classes, low-income parents gain the skills to create a better life for themselves while transferring important literacy skills to their children. Together, we can close the achievement gap before children even begin school.

## What People Are Saying



“On East 33rd street, courageous adult students devote time each weekday to learning beyond what is on the pages of their books and reclaiming opportunities that life had not granted them before. The transformative power of the classroom and of Literacy Partners is palpable. It is clear and it is very inspiring.”

**MARKUS DOHLE**, CEO, PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE



“Literacy Partners is one of my favorite organizations. It is so moving to think this organization gives the gift of reading to people who can't read or write. If I had to live in a world without books, I don't think that I could survive.”

**BETTE MIDLER**, ACTRESS, SINGER, AUTHOR

**Thank you for your continued support!**

## Literacy Partners

Anthony Tassi, *Executive Director*

30 East 33rd Street, 6th floor • New York, NY 10016 •  

646.237.0111 • AnthonyT@literacypartners.org • [www.literacypartners.org](http://www.literacypartners.org)