

# LEARN

## LITERACY PARTNERS

**AUTUMN 2017**

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# READING CHANGES EVERYTHING



Dear Friends,

I don't know about you, but I find my news feed overwhelming these days. It can be difficult to remain hopeful with the dizzying array of disasters swirling around us—especially those that are man-made and expose the deeper injustices in our society. Indeed, it is hard to watch the nastiness of those in power who act with such entitlement and disregard for others.

But, personally, I don't feel discouraged for too long, because I have contact with our students and I get to hear their stories on a daily basis. I view the work of Literacy Partners as part of a long-term struggle for liberation. In this country, adult literacy began with the Freedom Schools and the emancipation movement. Our organization was born out of the civil rights movement and the War on Poverty. And today we stand with immigrants.

**And you are a part of this journey.** When you give the gift of literacy by supporting this organization, you are changing lives—enabling progress to happen on an individual level and empowering marginalized communities to move forward.

As you know, our students are mostly parents who are taking a huge step towards creating a better future for their families. Despite overwhelming odds and challenges, they come to class and persist. And daily, they make progress. Not just little progress. BIG progress. And so do their children.

**You make progress possible.** Guadalupe improved her English while her daughter Emily's report card went from "below standards" to "exceeds standards"—in every category! **You** are there, behind the scenes, when Leo studied so hard to pass the high school equivalency exam and his second-grade son turned things around in school to such an extent that his teacher called Leo to know what changed.

What changed? **The answer is you.** You and your support of Literacy Partners students gives them the opportunity to make progress—to change their lives in ways big and small. Every day.

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

Anthony Tassi  
CEO

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## LITERACY PARTNERS

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



## STUDENT STORY

# LEOBARDO NOVA: Closing the Achievement Gap

**L**ife forced Leo to drop out of high school in his final semester—heartbreakingly close to the finish line. At the time, he was living with a cousin, working part-time and attending high school. With just 3 days' notice, his cousin informed him that he was moving out of state for work. Leo went from being a high school student with a part-time job to a drop-out, working two jobs in order to make ends meet.

Ever since then, Leo, 35, has wanted to go back to school to finish. He was determined to build the best life he could for his two children, 4-year-old Hallie and 7-year-old Jonathan.

When Leo started attending high school equivalency (HSE) classes in Staten Island, his son Jonathan was one of the poorest readers in his class and was well behind the class average. Leo started reading with Jonathan every night for 20 minutes. Based on what he learned with our teachers, he didn't force the reading, but adopted a fun and engaging approach. Jonathan made rapid progress, finishing the school year by **jumping up three reading levels!** He is excelling in school, confident and having fun. He was even recognized as Student of the Month. Best of all, after a couple months

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“My son and daughter will not be statistics...the achievement gap is closed.”

of Leo reading with Jonathan, Jonathan started reading to his younger sister, Hallie—passing on the love of reading.

In his class, Leo made progress in math and essay writing with the guidance and support of Phil Cameron, his teacher. When the time came to take the TASC exam (formerly the GED), Leo awoke with a migraine, and was given a calculator that did not function. Despite these unexpected circumstances, Leo dug into the test—and passed, earning his high school degree.

As is the case with so many Literacy Partners students, what Leo learned in class has had a direct and immediate impact on his children. In Jonathan’s case, the impact was tremendous. Not only did Jonathan see Leo working hard on his own studies, but our Books of Their Own program helped them make family reading a daily habit.

Like Leo, many of our high school equivalency students face numerous challenges to earning their diplomas. A high school diploma is a necessary credential that opens doors to higher education, better-paying jobs, and a life of greater stability. And like Leo, our students have the intelligence and perseverance to overcome life’s challenges.

After passing his TASC, Leo would like to enroll in college and pursue work in radiology. He is also saving up to buy a home for his family. We are so proud of Leo, Jonathan and Hallie, and look forward to what they will accomplish next. ■

# JAKE DESTER: Musician, Composer, Donor, Volunteer



**JAKE DESTER**

**J**ake Dester and his partner, Sydney McNulty, first donated to Literacy Partners after moving to New York City in 2016 to pursue their music careers. Their love of reading and commitment to philanthropy (donating 5% of their income to charity) drove them to seek out literacy non-profits. And they found us.



**FAREED ZAKARIA**

Jake quickly went beyond financial support to become a volunteer. When we needed music to accompany a new organizational video created with Fareed Zakaria, we turned to Jake. Not only is he a great musician (performing as Sydney & Jake at a myriad of New York City events and venues), but also a passionate composer. The spot, which was produced in partnership with American Airlines for their in-flight programming, required us to provide a score within three days—over a weekend!

Inspired by the video, Jake says, *“Not only do I really believe in the work, the video showed me that it is not a belief—it’s a factual understanding—what Literacy Partners does really works and changes lives.”* He immediately began composing, loving the idea of putting his talent and passion to work for a cause he believed in.

Jake is also a voracious reader with (at least) 8 books currently in progress. He reads to learn how to build his business as an independent musician, artist and composer and to understand the world around him. Jake says, *“Illiteracy most often impacts the most marginalized—voices we don’t hear—and people who are often misrepresented. If you don’t speak English in this country, you have few choices, and no opportunity to share your experience or make the most of your life. Literacy gets us closer to a just society—more information leads to more choices and a more even playing field.”* We couldn’t agree more.

You can check out Jake’s composing work at [JakeDester.com](http://JakeDester.com), [Dester Music](#) on Facebook and [@DesterMusic](#) on Instagram. You can also follow [Sydney & Jake](#) on Facebook to find out about their latest gigs, how to book them, and where to see them live. ■

*To see our new video with Fareed Zakaria, look for it on American Airlines flights in December and January, or visit our website at [www.literacypartners.org](http://www.literacypartners.org).*

# 5 Ways to Take a Stand in 2018

You can be the difference in the lives of families like Leo's. Take a stand with Leo and our students by getting involved today:

1

**Give the gift of reading** to a family in need. No contribution is too small (or too big)!

2

**Become an advocate** by joining Friends of Literacy Partners. Share your time, talent, and treasure.

3

**Claim your voice** to amplify our mission and share the stories of success on social media.

4

**Join together** with other people who share your passion at a Literacy Partners happy hour.

5

**Meet Junot Díaz** at our gala in March 2018 by purchasing a ticket.



## STAND WITH OUR STUDENTS— JOIN TEAM LITERACY PARTNERS

**Literacy Partners has the chance to win \$150,000 in the Newman's Own Foundation holiday challenge.**

It's easy—all you have to do is set up a profile on our Crowdrise campaign, share your support of our work, and inspire your friends to give. Every donation—no matter the size—makes a huge difference to our students, and increases our chances of winning the grand prize. For more information on joining our team, email Emily at: [emilyh@literacypartners.org](mailto:emilyh@literacypartners.org).

**SAVE THE DATE**  
**LITERACY PARTNERS**  
**EVENING OF READINGS & GALA DINNER DANCE**

Wednesday, March 14, 2018 • Cipriani Wall Street

Randy Falco • Joni Evans • Junot Díaz

## Friends of Literacy Partners

If you can imagine a world where all New York City parents can read to their children, speak for themselves at doctor's appointments, and understand subway signs, then we need you.

We invite you to join Friends of Literacy Partners, our associate leadership board who advocates for our mission to support NYC families and the next generation of readers. Friends of Literacy Partners brings together an inspiring mix of emerging to mid-career professionals whose career experience ranges from marketing and finance to graphic design, event planning and nonprofit consulting.

As a member you'll work closely with Literacy Partners staff to assist in implementing our fundraising and program goals, host cocktail receptions, small cultivation events and networking special events.

To join, contact Allison Sciplin at [allisons@literacypartners.org](mailto:allisons@literacypartners.org) or **646-237-0161** and we'll contact you to schedule an informational Q & A. We'll meet with you by phone or in person. Let us know what works for you. ■

## 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.*