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LITERACY CONNECTS RECEIVES LIBRARY OF CONGRESS LITERACY AWARD

Literacy Connects is excited to announce that it is a 2021 recipient of a Library of Congress Literacy Award as a Best Practice Honoree -- and the first Arizona-based organization to receive this prestigious international award.

The award celebrates the work of Stories that Soar, Literacy Connects' literacy and arts program, and is especially meaningful as the organization celebrates its tenth year.

"We are thrilled to receive this recognition from the Library of Congress," says Matt Tarver-Wahlquist, Executive Director of Literacy Connects. "The award highlights the impactful nature of the work we do in our communities, and the multitude of ways in which literacy can be shared."

Library of Congress Literacy Awards Program honors organizations that have made outstanding contributions to increasing literacy in the United States or abroad. The awards are intended to draw public attention to the importance of literacy and the need to promote literacy and encourage reading. Each year up to 15 organizations are recognized as Best Practice Honorees for their successful implementation of a specific literacy practice.

This year, Stories that Soar! (STS!) celebrates 20 years of inspiring students across Southern Arizona to develop a love of writing and creative expression. Each year thousands of students at participating schools write to feed the story-hungry Magic Box, the STS! mascot that visits to announce the program. A selection of their submissions are then turned into original stage plays, or, in the case of the past two pandemic years, videos. Although STS! operates through schools, student participation is voluntary. There are no writing prompts and submissions are not graded. STS! simply encourages children to tell stories – real or imagined, funny or fantastical, sad or hopeful. When writing becomes a choice, children are ready and excited to share their ideas. 100% of teachers who are involved with the program say that their students are "excited" or "very excited" to write for the program.

"With Stories that Soar!, all children are invited to share their stories, regardless of where they are on the continuum of learning," says Sharon O'Brien, Artistic Director of STS!. "We receive the stories without judgement and care for them and share them back with creativity and respect. When young

people experience the impact their stories can have on their community, they see the power of writing and learn that developing literacy allows them to more fully participate in society.”

The award brings with it a \$5,000 monetary prize, which will be used to continue to bring STS! to students and inspire the next generation of writers, readers, and creatives.

Stories from last year, as well as the full Best of Stories that Soar! 2021 program, can be viewed on Literacy Connects' YouTube channel at <https://www.youtube.com/c/LiteracyConnects/videos>

About Literacy Connects

Literacy Connects is the premier literacy hub in Southern Arizona, providing transformational learning through joyous student-centered relationships and a strength-based approach. Now in our tenth year, we serve learners across five programs: English Language Acquisition for Adults, Adult Basic Literacy, Reading Seed, Stories that Soar!, and Reach out and Read Southern Arizona. Our commitment to access and equity drives us to connect individuals across the community to work together for long-term social impact. We firmly believe that everyone deserves access to literacy and learning, and our classes are open to all, regardless of background or immigration status.