TRANSFORMATIONAL LEARNING

Impact Report
2020–2021
Dear Literacy Connects Community,

What an honor it is to write to you as the Executive Director of Literacy Connects. I joined the organization midway through the fiscal year covered in this report: a pandemic year unprecedented in our lifetime, where we all awoke one morning to a strange new world presenting us with different norms and expectations. What did I encounter at Literacy Connects when I arrived in the midst of all this?

I found an organization with a clear vision to cut through the chaos to reach people. And under these conditions, we reached over 46,000.

As an organization devoted to transformational learning, we ourselves had to transform. And in doing so, oh, did we learn.

We learned that teaching people online is not only possible, but that it can work well. Yes, it provides people a much-needed connection to others in the isolation of the pandemic, but the instruction is effective. To take but one example, our English Language Acquisition learners showed progress similar in online classes to what they gained from in-person instruction. We also discovered that by going online we are able to reach both students and volunteers who would not otherwise be able to access our services. This is learning that we can carry forward in the future to continue to broaden our impact.

We learned we can bring children’s stories to life as compellingly on film as we do in live performances. In fact, it was my growing amazement, as I watched story after story on the Literacy Connects website, that motivated me to come work for this organization.

I personally have learned that the Literacy Connects team is made up of committed, talented individuals who have weathered the pandemic by acquiring new skills, finding creative ways to support our community, and keeping at the center of everything our mission of connecting people of all ages to a world of opportunities through literacy and creative expression. As impressive as they all are, their work—our work—would not be possible without your partnership and support. You are every bit a part of this as we are, and this Impact Report details your impact.

As we embark on this, our 10th anniversary year, as our reading tutors are poised to reenter the schools, as the need for our services is as great as it has ever been, we are excited to use what we have learned during this challenging past year to make us an even better, stronger, and more impactful organization.

Thank you for being on this journey with us, and I cannot wait to see the future we will build together.

Matt Tarver-Wahlquist
Executive Director

Dear Supporters and Friends,

Two words summarize Literacy Connects’ FY20–21: transition and opportunity. While the Covid-19 pandemic caused us to pivot from in-person to online learning, it also sparked innovation in delivery of our award-winning programs. We are proud of the way our amazing staff and volunteers—and dedicated learners of all ages—responded.

In addition to pandemic-caused changes, we also faced a leadership transition when founding Executive Director Betty Stauffer retired. Again, we triumphed by hiring Matt Tarver-Wahlquist, a Tucson native with more than 20 years’ nonprofit experience who returned “home” from the San Francisco Bay Area. We thank Betty for her passionate leadership during our first 10 years and look forward to realizing Matt’s vision in the coming decade.

As we begin our 10th anniversary year, we thank each supporter who believed in the promise of Literacy Connects and invested generously. Our next chapter has begun. Together, we'll continue to write one special story!

With gratitude,

Tim Henry
Chair, Board of Directors
FY20–21

Tim Kinney
Chair, Board of Directors
FY21–22

Cover image: STS! performers at our drive-in event. Above: Bench made in honor of Betty Stauffer. Please note: In this report, you’ll see people both with and without masks. In the case of unmasked people, the photos either were taken pre-pandemic or in compliance with all best practices as stated by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
**We Connected WITH STUDENT CONNECTORS!**

English Language Acquisition for Adults (ELAA) learners aren’t just learning English online—they’re also juggling all the aspects of day-to-day life in a language that is not their first. To help bridge that gap, ELAA launched a new Student Connectors program, engaging intermediate and advanced ELAA students as volunteers to assist learners in beginner courses with class work—and with life in general.

The first class of 12 Student Connectors launched in January, and their impact was immediate. In class, these peer supporters model activities, give sample answers, and help students feel comfortable in the online class environment. And their role extends beyond that. During the past months, they’ve also guided beginner students to learn where and how to get vaccinated, how to navigate rent assistance, and where to get help with taxes. This extra level of connection not only helps students, but also deepens the Connectors’ relationship with Literacy Connects. In a trying year, they were an additional layer of comfort and support for the ELAA community.

**YOUR IMPACT**

With all ELAA classes held online, students and volunteers both learned new technical skills. Though the program served fewer students than in a normal year due to the best practice of having smaller class sizes online, the smaller classes allowed students and volunteers to build new and deeper connections.

- **621** students who spent **36,842** hours in classes
- **93%** of students reported increased confidence to speak in English and/or an increased use of English in everyday life*
- **74** volunteers who gave **30,625** hours of time
- **95%** of students reported increased ability to communicate in English*

* Students with 12+ class hours

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**We Graduated EARNING GEDS IN A PANDEMIC YEAR**

Completing a GED can be a daunting task. Completing a GED during a pandemic adds a whole new level of difficulty. None of this stopped the Literacy Connects GED class of 2021 as 11 learners transformed the way they learned and did their GED classes and testing online.

Participating in the GED process is a bonding experience for both learners and their volunteer instructors and has inspired some of the learners to return to Literacy Connects and train as volunteers.

“Education is really important in our lives and I want to give it back to the community the way they gave it to me,” says Orlando, GED Graduate and current ABL apprentice.

In May, Literacy Connects held a small GED graduation event, a celebration attended by the graduates’ families, to recognize the accomplishments of the learners and their journeys.

**YOUR IMPACT**

Adult Basic Literacy also offered basic literacy in English and Spanish, and one-to-one tutoring. The program reached more students than ever thanks to our successful online model, which removed barriers to participation for some students. In addition to the GED graduates currently serving or training as volunteers, the program welcomed new volunteers who are former English language students.

- **326** Adult Basic Literacy students
- **54** volunteers with **4,909** hours

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“I learned a lot of things! This position allows us to make a small change in the learning of our beginning level classmates. I learned that we can be useful to others’ learning just by being there for them when they need our help. Also I learned if we give a little bit of our time, we can make a big change in our community.”

—Africa, Student Connector

“I passed through the situation that they (Literacy Connects GED students) are in right now, and I try to help them and feel so happy when they make a connection or learn something.”

—Adriana, GED Graduate and current GED volunteer

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—Africa, Student Connector

“In the final class, students sent me “thank you for your help,” and told me nice words, and say that I’m a good person.... I don’t know, I feel something with that, because I didn’t know my work was good. I feel good that I helped other people.”

—Maria, Student Connector

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Below: Graduating students pose during the May graduation celebration.

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We Soared
BY STREAMING!

There was no stopping the magic! Appropriately, that was the FY20–21 theme for Stories that Soar!

When K–5 in-class instruction pivoted to remote learning, Stories that Soar! (STS!) pivoted as well by going virtual. Instead of the traditional live performance that culminates with each participating school’s Stories that Soar! residency, students were treated to a week-long mini YouTube film festival that featured their stories performed and filmed by our troop of professional actors.

“Because Stories that Soar! doesn’t use writing prompts, this allowed us to capture what was happening in students’ lives in a very organic way,” says Artistic Director Sharon O’Brien.

Reflecting the challenging times, stories dealt with isolation, depression, fears—and also resilience, humor, and hope. STS! supporters celebrated students and their works at a special drive-in edition of the Best of Stories that Soar! in May.

We Created
BY MAKING A CREATIVE SAFE SPACE!

The 2020–2021 school year was a haze of Zoom for many middle-school aged youth. Yet for our Youth Center participants, dozens of enriching hours were spent creating and learning in this online creative safe space.

Though the Youth Center couldn’t offer in-person programming in FY20–21, the program engaged a broader audience of students than ever through online participation. Youth (ages 12–15) from across Tucson unleashed their creative energies and wrote, filmed, and created more than two dozen short films—all online. Through the process, these students also learned about collaboration, team building, and offering and receiving feedback.

In June, 19 students participated in a camp that offered both an online and a safe in-person experience (masks were required at all times, and many of the activities were outside). The four-week camp culminated in a special edition film and live production show, where students showed off their new skills for an audience of family and new friends made through the program.

Through four remote quarters and one hybrid summer camp, the Youth Center provided creative fuel for middle schoolers around Tucson.
We Roared
BY READING!

Pandemic shutdowns did not deter Reach Out and Read Southern Arizona’s (RORSA) vital work in promoting early literacy and school readiness. Though telehealth visits occasionally replaced in-clinic appointments, RORSA maintained its strong presence in the offices of our clinic partners and with participating families throughout FY20–21.

“RORSA encourages parents to read aloud to their children starting at an early age by engaging parents’ most trusted advisor, their child’s doctor, to provide books and developmental guidance which support children’s lifelong social, emotional, and academic success,” says Missy Root, RORSA Program Director. “This gives children an incredible start toward success in school and throughout life.”

As the Southern Arizona affiliate of a respected national program, RORSA offers a proven model. As more than 20 independent studies show, in participating families:

- Parents are 2.5 times more likely to read with their infants, toddlers, and preschoolers.
- Parents are twice as likely to read with their children three or more times per week.
- Families are 2.5 times more likely to enjoy reading together or to have books in the home.
- Children’s language development is improved by three to six months.

YOUR IMPACT
57 pediatric and family practice clinics in three counties (Pima, Cochise, and Santa Cruz) and the Tohono O’odham Nation were served by the program
40,576 children received 79,276 new, developmentally, and culturally appropriate books

We Re-seeded
BY PIVOTING DURING A PANDEMIC YEAR

By necessity, our Reading Seed team pivoted and grew during the 2020–2021 school year. While the traditional Reading Seed programming could not be offered in schools, the dedicated team created two new programs—Digital Reading Seed and Reading Seed Families—to continue to share a love of reading and books with the community.

Digital Reading Seed paired volunteer coaches with K–1 students who were learning online to give them a Reading Seed experience over Zoom. In addition to the weekly interactive coaching sessions, books were distributed to participating students, building home libraries to promote family literacy.

To complement Digital Reading Seed, Reading Seed Families offered parents and caregivers an opportunity to take the same in-depth training Reading Seed coaches receive, and learn to create joyful literacy experiences at home. During three five-week sessions, participants learned about wordless books, picture walks, and how to have conversations with their children through reading.

YOUR IMPACT
234 students served
33 adults served
48 volunteer coaches with 1,554 hours

“...It makes them feel loved and special when giving them a free book. We often look at it together in the exam room and engage in conversation.”
—Reach Out and Read provider

“If you are a parent that is involved, this is a great program to give reassurance that you are doing the right thing. If you’re a parent who wants to get more involved in your kids’ learning because you lack the knowledge of what needs to be done, this program will give you the ideas to get going in the right direction.”
—Reading Seed Families participant

"The connection she made with her coach was really important to her, especially at a time when she hasn’t been able to interact with a lot of the adults in her life due to Covid.”
—Digital Reading Seed parent
We are grateful to be able to partner with wonderful organizations throughout the Southern Arizona community. Thank you for supporting and collaborating with Literacy Connects!

Literacy Connects received two PPP loans totaling $560,000. This funding coupled with attentive stewardship of our resources resulted in a surplus balance. This cash reserve will help fund upcoming facility maintenance costs and increased program expenses and provide financial security for future unpredictable challenges.
We have done our best to include a complete list of our FY 20–21 donors. All of our supporters are important to us, and we are grateful for all of your support.

Thank you for your continued support.

Please contact us at 520-882-8006 to notify us of any corrections.

IN KIND—$500+


donors: $10K+ and Frank Masa

$25K–$49K donors:

Donors: $5K–$9.9K

$5K–$9.9K donors:

$2.5K–$4.9K donors:

$2K–3.4K donors:

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No answer

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46,000 learners were served in Pima County and Southern Arizona

Staff

Matt Tarver-Wahlquist Executive Director
Betty Stauffer Executive Director (through January 2021)

Edie Lantz Leppert Adult Basic Literacy Program Director
Cydne Bolton Learning Center Coordinator
Rhiannon O’Leary Program Coordinator
Manuel Padilla GED Coordinator

Jennifer Stanowski English Language Acquisition for Adults Program Director
Karen Kivel Volunteer Trainer (through December 2020)
Ersilia Loustauana Program Coordinator
Kate Van Roekel Teacher Education and Training Coordinator
Lizzy Studstill Volunteer Manager and Trainer

Missy Root Reach out and Read Southern Arizona Program Director
Lisa O’Meara Reading Seed Program Director
Cheryl Gamm Education and Training Coordinator
Jamie Keeran Program Coordinator (joined August 2021)

Violet Kennedy Library Manager
Seleana Kleparek Program Manager
Debra Winstead Library Assistant

Marti and Gayle Koff Learning Center Coordinator

Sharon O’Brien Stories that Soar! Artistic Director
Cecilia Abarca Arts Integration Coordinator (joined August 2021)
Rylee Carillo Waggoner Lead Teaching Artist (through July 2021)
Alyssa Ruiz Youth Center Coordinator (through July 2021)
Dallas Thomas Production Manager

Rebecca Werner Director of Finance, Operations, and HR
Aryn Chaput Office Manager
Chris Freeman Accountant (through June 2021)
Lupita Vazquez Receptionist
Victoria Wilson Database Manager

Robyn Carter Volunteer Director
Sabrina Lobato-Gonzales Director of Development (through August 2021)
Melisa Woodhall Grants Manager
Carina Mendoza Grants Assistant (joined August 2021)

Gina Compitello Director of Marketing and Communications
Susan Friese Community Engagement and Outreach Coordinator
Grace Litwiller Marketing and Communications Assistant (joined September 2021)

IN 2020–2021

559 volunteers gave 17,132 hours of service

93,000 books were distributed

www.literacyconnects.org  |  520-882-8006
200 E Yavapai Road, Tucson, AZ 85705

This Impact Report was generously underwritten by Patricia Brooks and Malcolm Compitello