



A Message From The Director

Happy Holidays to All!

I hope that all of you who have been observing Hanukkah had warm celebrations. For those of you who celebrate Christmas and Kwanzaa, I hope you have happiness and warmth. Our office will be closed December 19, 2023 and will reopen January 2, 2024!

To all of you – Happy New Year! The next newsletter will come out after that holiday.

As I write this letter to all of you, I am thinking about the letter I wrote about my gratitude for all of you and Palmetto Literacy Council. The end of the year brings us a record number of volunteers and students paired for tutoring! We have lots of work ahead to break even more records.

We love our community! The more students and adults who can read, write, and do math the stronger our community! Our tagline “Building a stronger community through literacy” appears to be holding true!

Our Board of Directors have been busy! We have a new Chair of the Board of Directors, Dr. Preston McKeever-Floyd. Preston has been with us since we opened our doors on August 1, 2019. Our other Board of Director members have really been kicking it into gear. Special thanks to Polly Putorti, Vice Chair (Also Tutor of 3 students); Kim Reischling, Secretary (Tutor also); Luisa Soto, Treasurer (Facebook, Instagram also); Bonnie Kelley, Member-At-Large (Also Tutor of 2 students), Tonya Robinson, Member-At-Large (New and Events Coordinator); Etta Carter, Member-At-Large; Adrianna Edwards, Student Representative (graduated from PLC); Susan Walters, Member-At-Large (Fundraiser Coordinator and Tutor); Veronica DeCicco, Member-At-Large, (Volunteer Liaison-Chapin Library and Screening Coordinator).

The talent and get-up-and-go of these folks is amazing. When they ask for volunteers to help them, they are great to volunteer with because they are organized and knowledgeable.

Then there are the volunteers “behind the curtain” that keep us all running smoothly. Special thanks to Cheryl Burns, Laces Coordinator; Lana Miller, Laces Data Entry; Mike Murzyn, Accountant; Bobbie Lipman, Grant Writer, Anne Reiter, our first volunteer and in charge of Binders, Vernell Singleton, and the community service workers. Joanne Cherry our Administrative Assistant has the office running at a fast and efficient pace we have not seen before. Thank you to Bill Woodward, our Newsletter Coordinator and Kim Reischling, Newsletter Editor, you do an amazing job sharing our news and our students’ successes!

I’d also like to thank those Volunteer Liaisons who keep in contact with our Tutors, students/parents, and librarians they work with on behalf of Palmetto Literacy Council. These are the folks administering the Dibels formative assessments and now the Universal Screening for Number Sense (USNS) formative assessments. The USNS tests are new and we are all learning. These volunteers have stepped up for training and are implementing these new tests. Thank you Veronica DeCicco, Chapin Library; Donna Gaynor, Carolina Forest Library; Tracye Watson, Socastee Library (if you know someone who might be willing to help Tracye - please contact Dodi); JoAnne Murray, Surfside Beach Library.

Thanks to Lois Berlin who was our Volunteer Liaison at Conway Library until an accident laid her up for a while. We look forward to her return. Thanks to Becky Robertson, Volunteer Liaison at our Adult Literacy Program, Patrick’s Mobile Home Park.

We are looking for Volunteer Liaisons at the Conway Library, the Loris Library, the North Myrtle Beach and Little River Libraries, and a co-Volunteer Liaison at Socastee Library. We prefer someone with a background in education, but it is not required.

This upcoming year brings lots of changes and that brings challenges. We are well equipped to meet and move forward in a positive direction. We are growing and we can’t wait to see what 2024 brings!

Stay safe and healthy,

Dodi

"The man who does not read has no advantage over the man who cannot read."
- Mark Twain

Carson Nichols
completed a section in her
binder. Her tutor is Donna Martin



Johanna Baca
completed a section of
her binder. Her tutor is
Alesa Morales.

PLC Volunteer Samih Baalbaki

By Kim Reischling

'Rewards I gain as volunteer are priceless'

Author Herman Melville once said, *"We cannot live only for ourselves. A thousand fibers connect us with our fellow men."*

Hundreds of those fibers connect the volunteers, students, and parents of the Palmetto Literacy Council. The fibers are strong, joining like-minded people that share a common desire: Helping students reach their goals in reading and math, the building blocks of their future. That is no small task. It takes the united efforts of everyone involved with the Palmetto Literacy Council. And those efforts are the fiber, the reason for our existence.

That's why this and subsequent articles will highlight the people that have joined to share those goals: Volunteers, parents, and of course, our students.



"Books are the plane, and the train, and the road. They are the destination and the journey. They are home." That quote, by journalist, Anna Quindlen, seems to exemplify the journey of volunteer **Samih Baalbaki**, who has found his home at the Palmetto Literacy Council. Samih is dedicated: He also volunteers with Freedom Readers.

Samih, born in Lebanon, is a lawyer by training. But his much-loved homeland was torn apart by the Lebanese Civil War, a multifaceted armed conflict that took place from 1975-1990. The war resulted in an estimated 150,000 fatalities, and also led to the exodus of almost one million people from Lebanon. Living in a home he no longer recognized, Samih left Lebanon, his "beautiful, lovely native country," and except for short visits to family and friends, never lived there again.

His path to the United States – and volunteerism – was a years-long journey. After leaving Lebanon, Samih lived in Europe, (Belgium and Greece) and Saudi Arabia, and legally immigrated to the United States in 1986. With a son and daughter, also displaced from Lebanon, Samih returned to the Middle East, where he lived in Dubai for 17 years.

Upon returning to the U.S., Samih volunteered immediately, first for the Freedom Readers since 2013, then for PLC where he has been since 2019, when the organization was founded.

Shortly after Samih retired to the U.S, he decided to learn Spanish, and took classes at Coastal Carolina University. "I wanted to take Greek (he lived there for seven years) but felt Spanish would be more useful," he said. Spanish classes added to Samih's repertoire of spoken languages: Arabic, French and English.

With Freedom Readers and PLC, Samih primarily works with Spanish speaking people. "Many of the young students speak only Spanish at home, so that makes it very difficult in school. I learned from the beginning that you must adjust your tutoring to their needs." That adjustment also prompted Samih to volunteer at their schools to make it easier for both parent and child. During the COVID-19 epidemic, Samih continued tutoring via Zoom.

Samih said he has no secret "recipes" when it comes to tutoring both children and adults, other than ensuring the student does not see him as an authoritarian figure. "Ypu know, it's not what you tell kids. It's what you show them.

"Kids are bombarded all week with grammar, math and other subjects at school. I like to tell them about a story I've read, and then they do the same for me. My reward is when you come into the room and they want to hug you. You learn so much from your students."

Samih has been tutoring at PLC for four years now. "I've been here from the beginning. I first met Dodi at Chapin Memorial Library when she was operating out of the trunk of her car. There were four or five of us back then," (Dr. Dodi Hodges is the executive director of the Palmetto Literacy Council.)

At PLC, Samih tutors Hispanic housewives at Patrick's Mobile Park in Myrtle Beach. "Life is not easy for them, but they are very willing. One student Samih mentions is named Zoyla. "We'll pick words from the cards from PLC, and I'll ask her to write four or five sentences from them. It really makes me happy when she does that. It also makes a huge difference when a child sees their parent working so hard, sometimes even struggling with the material. That makes the child want to work hard, too."

The desire to volunteer – and continue to volunteer – has been an easy choice for Samih. "When you realize how blessed you are and how much life has given you, it's a natural decision."

Samih is quick to thank the generous people he's met along the way – the group at CCU that donated numerous books, the people at Patrick's Mobile Home Park, who allow him to use an office for tutoring. And when he was asked if there was anything else he wanted to mention for this article, his reply was "Dodi Hodges.

"She's just wonderful – a miracle worker. You must have her kind of heart to make this work."

For Samih, leaving his beloved homeland because of a devastating civil war, was just the path he needed to take on his journey as a volunteer.

"There is a reason I had to leave. It's not for nothing. Maybe it's destiny, maybe it's chance, but the rewards I gain as a volunteer are priceless."

Samih is just one of the fibers that connect those associated with PLC, but it's a fiber made of finely wrought steel, a fiber that weaves itself throughout our organization. PLC is, and always will be, a sum of all its parts.

"Frederick Douglass taught that literacy is the path from slavery to freedom. There are many kinds of slavery and many kinds of freedom, but reading is still the path."
- Carl Sagan



Milania Singh
and tutor Christi Bessinger
after she completed
section 2 in her binder.



Tutoring Tips

How To Read With A Beginning Reader:

- Complete a picture walk BEFORE reading.
- Predict what may happen in the book.
- Model and encourage your child to track print.
- Read a word or sentence and have your child repeat it.
- Take turns reading each page.
- Talk about the story as you read.
- What do you think will happen next? What does this story remind you of?
- Read the story again! Repeated readings build fluency and confidence!

How your students should respond to short answer questions

For example:

Question: What are the three major predators of kangaroos?

Correctly stated answer: The three major predators of kangaroos are people, dingoes, and crocodiles.

Incorrectly stated answer: People, dingoes, and crocodiles

Here's a checklist for your students:

1. Read the entire question carefully.
2. Think about what the question is asking you and where that information is in the passage.
3. Write your answer.
 - Write in complete sentences
 - Use part of the question stem in your answer
 - Include evidence (details and examples) from the passage to support your answer.
4. Reread the question. Then reread your answer.
 - Make sure you answered the question (or questions) completely.
 - Make sure your answer makes sense.

Paulina Alvarez-Pintado
completed a section in her
binder. Her tutor is Nancy Glynn.



"All that mankind has done, thought, gained or been; it is lying as in magic preservation in the pages of books."

- Thomas Carlyle

Mutual Respect

By Kim Reischling

Mutual respect abounds at Palmetto Literacy Council.

Every December (and not just in December), I think about the Christmas carol that hopes for "peace on earth, good will to men." Unfortunately, that thought always brings with it a certain melancholy.

We all know that peace does not exist in our world – the news headlines are proof of that. War-torn countries where thousands are maimed and killed; mass shootings in the United States; and the rise of intolerance and hate for those of other races, religions and creeds are becoming more and more prevalent.

Each year about this time, Christians celebrate Christmas; the African-American community celebrates Kwanzaa; the Jewish race celebrates Hanukkah and Hindus celebrate Pancha Ganapat. And in the spring each year, Muslims mark Ramadan, a period of fasting and spiritual growth. My deepest apologies for having left some groups out. It's not intentional, there's just too many to mention in what is a limited amount of space. The point is, that among the millions of people on this earth, we are not the same, but we are all human. We celebrate our holidays, both religious and cultural, in as many ways as my mind can imagine.

When I was a child, my mother taught me the Golden Rule: Do to others as you would have them do to you. Mom made it very clear that this was not a Christian rule. Rather it was – and is – another way of saying that all people deserve mutual respect. It doesn't matter your religion, your color, or the God you worship. Mom also asked me why I would ever, ever think that my way was the only way.

I took that lesson to heart, and in turn, I taught my children the same lesson: Learning mutual respect for others. Don't all our children deserve that? And if we all lived our lives with tolerance for all, wouldn't "peace on earth, good will to men," be much more than a clever song lyric?

When I joined Palmetto Literacy Council, it was because I wanted to give back to children some of the gifts I've been given. But I chose PLC because of the core values which are listed on the web site at palmettoliteracy.org: Trust, Excellence, Accountability, Collaboration, Honesty and Integrity.

I know there's no room at PLC for anything less than those key values – and the core of those key values is mutual respect. Mutual respect and tolerance for our students (who learn by example) other volunteers, parents and those we meet within our community.

I'm so grateful to be part of this organization. Since becoming a volunteer in June of 23, I feel in many ways, my mother's lesson to me when I was just a child, has come full circle. It's almost like being a kid again.

So I guess, in the future, when I hear that song, I'll try to be less melancholy. I know that values, tolerance and mutual respect are the foundations of PLC. In a way, it's almost like coming home.

"Whenever you read a good book, somewhere in the world a door opens to allow in more light."

- Vera Nazarian



PLC Now Has 50 Active Students!
Jodi-Ann Ferrigan (Tutor), Karla Monday-Armstrong (Mom), Dad, Adrain Armstrong (Student). This is a milestone for PLC, Jodi-Ann and Adrain are our first time to hit 50 students actively being tutored/ paired. We still have 25 students on the waitlist.

The **Family Literacy Camp-Out** was put on by Waccamaw Elementary in Conway. PLC volunteers were Mike Murzyn, Sis Ramsey, Polly Putorti, and Sue Walters. The purpose was to raise literacy resources for families.



"Art is literacy of the heart."

- Elliott Eisner

Coming Events

Volunteer Orientation and Training

- Monday, December 18, 2023, 3:00 pm, PLC Office
- Wednesday, January 10, 2024, 3:00 pm, PLC Office
- Tuesday, January 23, 2024, 5:30 pm, PLC Office

Tutor Talk – Friday January 24, 2024, 10 am, PLC Office

Volunteer Liaison Meeting – Wednesday, January 24, 10 am, PLC Office

Golf Scramble Committee Meeting - Volunteers, Parents, or anyone interested in helping are welcome to attend this meeting.

- Wednesday, January 24, 11 am, PLC Office
- Check out <https://palmettoliteracy.org/events/golfevent2024>

4th Annual Golf Charity Scramble Supporting Palmetto Literacy Council

Saturday, June 8, 2024, Burning Ridge Golf Course, 500 Burning Ridge Rd, Conway SC.

- 8:30 shotgun start.
- Welcome bag
- Cash prizes for the top 3 teams
- 50/50 drawing
- Closest to the pin & Longest drive awards
- Breakfast & lunch included
- > See photos from the last tournament - [Click Here](#)

Adult Team Spelling Bee – Look for more information in upcoming newsletters!

Our Mission:

The Palmetto Literacy Council's mission is to improve the literacy of youth and adults in our community by tutoring literacy skills for those who struggle with basic Reading, Writing and/or Math.

Donate Now!

If you've read this far, you're obviously interested in what we do. Your donation helps pay for student binders, office space, copy machines, paper, and much more. Please donate what you can today!

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