

achieving dreams

GROWING up Paula Recess struggled with reading, often finding it difficult to complete simple tasks that required basic reading comprehension. She also missed school a lot as she suffered from scoliosis, which in turn compounded her reading difficulties. Somehow, she always progressed to the next grade even though she barely could read.

"AS long as I acted sweet and was a cute little girl, I could get my teachers to pass me," said Recess.

BUT by ninth grade the act ended as Paula got pregnant and dropped out of school to find a job.

AS her son got older, Paula got involved with his education by volunteering on the PTA, but she found it increasingly difficult to help him with his school work because of her low reading skills. Over the years, she also struggled to find employment because of her reading difficulties.

"I **REMEMBER** telling people I was illiterate and they would say 'oh no you're not'; people think illiteracy is such a bad word," said Recess, who is now 44.

ONE day, Paula finally decided she wanted to achieve her dreams and the only way to do so was to learn to read. So she signed up for free literacy tutoring through Tulsa City-County Library's Ruth G. Hardman Adult Literacy Service. When the literacy staff assessed her reading level, they discovered that part of Paula's reading trouble was because she has Visual Stress Syndrome. For people with VSS, words often swirl, disappear, move or stack on top of one another then separate, or they can only focus on one word at a time, making fluent reading difficult and reading for meaning difficult too. Color filters – color overlays or tinted eyeglass lenses – can correct the problem.

"I **ALWAYS** thought my reading problem was just a mental thing," said Recess. "When they did the eye exam and had me read with color overlays, I could see the words so clearly and it just brought me to tears!"

IN addition to signing up for tutoring, Paula also enrolled at Tulsa Community College to get her GED. She is less than five credits from achieving this goal. Next, she wants to continue her education by taking more classes at TCC and eventually enrolling at the University of Tulsa to major in sign language.

HER literacy tutor, Michael Conley, helps her with her homework for TCC as they use her assignments for their tutoring sessions. In the past two years, Paula's reading level has increased dramatically from a sixth-grade level to a 10th-grade.

ULTIMATELY, Paula aspires to be a literacy tutor as she said "there are so many people out there who are illiterate and don't want people to know. They're just slipping through the cracks."

PAULA wants other adults with reading difficulties to know that the library's literacy service is very helpful, encouraging and supportive.

"**EVERYONE** in the literacy office is so friendly and upbeat," she said. "They're just so happy that they make you want to come back again and again. It's just like a family. They have a lot of compassion."

PERHAPS, the greatest achievement Paula has made is that she now is able to read bedtime stories to her grandsons.

"I **ALWAYS** tell my grandsons how proud I am of them," she said. "Sometimes they tell me they're proud of me too and it makes me cry."

Ruth G. Hardman Adult Literacy Service

Changes Lives



Paula Recess



giving back

NEARING retirement, Michael Conley was looking for a good organization to get involved with. That's when he thought about the library's literacy service as he often heard so many wonderful things about it from a former colleague, Rebecca Howard, who at the time was the coordinator of the literacy service.

THE literacy service paired Michael with student Paula Recess about a year ago. Since working with Michael, Paula has progressed four reading grade levels – which is a phenomenal achievement in such a short time.

"**IT'S** just the little steps that are so rewarding," said Conley, who formerly worked for Tulsa Cares, a social service agency for people affected with HIV/AIDS. "When I complete a lesson with Paula and see the lightbulb come on for her then for me that's a big reward."

MICHAEL hopes that more people will sign up to tutor as he said working with a student can be the most thoroughly satisfying work.

"I **DON'T** think a lot of people understand the great need there is for tutors," he said. "There are so many students out there who don't have tutors yet. If a student can't get a tutor then eventually that student will go away because he loses interest. It takes a lot of courage for a student to walk into this office for help as illiteracy carries a very negative stigma. A lot of people go through their whole lives hiding the fact that they can't read."

MICHAEL wants people to know that you don't need a teaching background to be a tutor – you just need compassion and a desire to help someone improve his or her life.



getting involved

YOU can help the literacy effort by referring any adult with reading difficulties to the literacy service, tutoring an adult literacy student or an English language learner, working with students in the literacy computer labs, volunteering in the literacy office or making a donation to the literacy service. Call 549-7400 or visit www.tulsalibrary.org/literacy for more details.

leading the way

IN JULY, the literacy service got a new leader. Cassie Tudyk, former children's literacy specialist, took the helm as coordinator, replacing Rebecca Howard who is now a librarian in Central Library's Readers' Library department. Many people know Cassie as the face of the Reading Roadshow, as she created this successful family literacy outreach service, which partners with area day cares and other community groups to engage children in joyful interaction around books and reading. Cassie is assisted by Kathy Horne, family literacy specialist; Holly Coats, learning disabilities specialist; Lindee Johnson, English as a second language specialist; Alisa Brooks, computer specialist; and Sarah Thrower, administrative assistant.



Cassie Tudyk

