

# With Literacy and Justice for All

--Guest Column by Jill A. Oglesby, Director of Valencia County Literacy Council  
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## Gratitude

I am blessed. Ask the employees and volunteers of the Valencia County Literacy Council (VCLC), though—do I always remember that? When I need to write checks for the bills, to get out the next grant, and go to a meeting all at the same time, it's very easy to forget it. Then there's traffic and getting behind a large piece of farm equipment on Highway 47—which reminds me of the bumper sticker I saw at Isleta once: "If you're putting down the farmer, don't talk with your mouth full."

Sometimes the expectations seem enormous. Then, I remember that most of those expectations come from me to myself. How easy is it to forget in the daily rush that relationships are what are really important? And me—I'm such a city person. I forget to wave on the road, to say hello, to slow down. My grandparents never locked their doors and were up and dressed by 7:00 a.m. in case anyone in their small town stopped by to visit. I struggle to get out of the house by 8:30 a.m. with my teeth brushed.

When I think about learning to read, relationships were crucial. Mom, who was a

school teacher, read a lot to us. There's a favorite family story about my brother sleep walking. My mom had just read him Dr. Seuss' *The Cat in the Hat Comes Back* earlier that evening. Dead asleep, he came into the kitchen, sucking his thumb, sat in Mom's lap, and said insistently, "But what happened to Little Cat B?" We remember the books, and we also remember Mom's warmth.

Not every parent knows about the importance of reading to his or her child. If people haven't been read to as children themselves, how would they know? In one disturbing statistic, research has shown that middle- and upper-income children in the U.S. know an average of 20,000 words when they start first grade, while lower-income children on average know about 5,000. Researchers believe this has a lot to do with reading at home, and we know that lower literacy levels in families tend to coincide with poverty.

So, I am truly grateful to VCLC's BOOK Readers. BOOK Readers read in low-income medical clinics in Valencia County. BOOK Readers are a warm and present example to children of reading. They build a relationship of reading, of being read to, with our youngest Valencia County residents. They enter clinics where children are waiting, probably bored, for their appointments and create around them a magical world with the help of a book, a world where anything could happen, where a cat could talk, where a boy or girl could sail away to the land of the Wild Things, where Super Cilantro Girl could save us all.

It's easy to become a BOOK Reader. Just call our BOOK Coordinator, TC Storey, at 565-0433 ([tcstorey@valencialiteracy.org](mailto:tcstorey@valencialiteracy.org)). All it takes is about a 30 minute training session, and then TC will even go with you the first time to get you started as a

BOOK Reader. Imagine opening a child's eyes to the world of books—those eyes will never envision the same limits to life again.

And, while speaking of gratitude, I am grateful for VCLC's Volunteer Tutors, who help adults learn to read and speak English, and for our office volunteers. I am grateful to the staff, Susan Howard, TC Storey, Martha Oros, and Nereida Gonzalez, and for our Board of Directors, all of whom do so much for Literacy in Valencia County. We live in a beautiful part of the world, rich in history and culture, and all of these folks are making it a better place for all of us.

I am blessed.