

With Literacy and Justice for All

--by Jill A. Oglesby, Director, Valencia County Literacy Council
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Team Literacy Has a Great Year

At Valencia County Literacy Council (VCLC), we have a tremendous staff. This is my 7th year as Director, and the team we have right now just can't be beat. It gives me great pride to tell you of a few of their accomplishments in 2009.

Lori Griego is our BOOK Coordinator. When we established BOOK Readers in 1999 with the help of Nan Windle, we modeled it after the national Reach Out and Read (RoR) program.

For years, we've wanted to officially join RoR, and now we have with First Choice Community Health Care in Los Lunas. It's all thanks to Lori, Pediatrician Dr. Catherine Fresquez, and Health Care Manager Christine Robison.

RoR supplies matching funds for books and training for medical providers in how to help parents read to their children. We are thrilled to bring this to Valencia County.

Lori also brought in \$500 in book grants each from the Smith's Neighbor to Neighbor fund and the ABEC Business Collaborative last year and another \$500 ABEC grant this year.

With \$3,809 for books from New Mexico Educators Federal Credit Union and \$100 from Valencia County Chamber of Commerce member Fred Carabajal, BOOK is currently well positioned to supply books to Valencia

County children at First Choice and local Department of Health offices for this year.

We have an immediate need for more BOOK Readers, though, and gently used books for the waiting room. Call Lori at 865-1878 for more information (lgriego@valencialiteracy.org).

Susan Howard is our Volunteer Tutoring Coordinator. Many of you know Susan as President of Business Women of Valencia County as she had 19 years of experience in the financial services sector prior to working with VCLC. Some of you may not know that Susan also traveled and taught in many other countries of the world before that.

In 2008, Susan and I studied a resource from our national affiliate, ProLiteracy Worldwide, on reducing waiting lists. This led to a number of program improvements.

For one thing, Susan worked with the Belen and Los Lunas School Districts to set up English Conversation Groups for parents at locations throughout Valencia and northern Socorro counties. We currently have groups at Jaramillo and Rio Grande Elementary Schools, two in El Cerro Mission, and two at UNM-Valencia Campus.

Susan also started and taught our GED Reading Prep group at campus for students who need reading assistance. It's now headed by two volunteer reading specialists, Julie Camm and Patty Sais-Pederson.

Susan's own ESL Conversation Group grew in 2009 from just a few participants to 20, so she's now split the group between two other Tutors, one from the Adult Basic Education Department (ABE) at UNM-Valencia.

And this fall, when we had a 17% reduction in staff time due to budget cuts, Susan volunteered her time to make up the difference. Susan has the true spirit of a Literacy Volunteer and is a great leader for the Tutors she coordinates.

Martha Oros is VCLC's Preschool Coordinator, **Nereida Gonzalez** is the Preschool Assistant Coordinator, and **Lucia Acevedo** is a Child Development Specialist. This team runs a "preschool" in El Cerro Mission for children of adults attending ABE classes in English as a Second

Language and GED in Español as well as VCLC's English Conversation Group with Tutor Carlota Roth.

Thanks to Martha and her team, the “escuelita” has been full to capacity for years and maintaining a waiting list. The parents spend time reading to their children and doing other interactive literacy activities after their own classes.

One of the most amazing things Martha and her team have accomplished in the last 2 years is starting a very active Parent Teacher Council (PTC). Almost 20 parents went to visit Representative Andrew Barreras this fall, and the PTC has raised over \$1,300 this year to support the preschool.

Last year, members of the PTC attended a YDI Parenting course on their own initiative, and the PTC helps set preschool policy, brings healthy snacks, and plans workshops. Sharing the leadership makes the preschool a vibrant community effort.

VCLC has been doing more with fewer resources this year—like many folks—and we greatly appreciate the support we receive from this community. Although we're small, we bring jobs and services into Valencia County to make it a better place for all.

I'd like to give an extra special thanks to Representative Andrew Barreras (Silver Sponsor at \$500) and Senator Michael Sanchez, Bank of Albuquerque, Tina Newby, Ambercare, and Dr. Daniel Dieterichs (Bronze Sponsors at \$300). The donations we receive are crucial to making it all happen.