

Had I originally been asked to appear on television or radio to promote Project Read, the answer would have been a firm “NO!” I also

As Leslie very slowly involved me in outreach and giving back to the community, my desire to do so grew and grew....I never wanted to return to my world of isolation, nor did I want to see anyone else stuck in theirs.

would have dropped out of the program, therefore, causing my life to remain the same without any growth or development. If I had dropped out, I would have been content because I would not have concerned myself with the outside

world, but my insecurities and fears would still be gnawing at me. Also, my desire to give back and my knowledge of others’ needs would not have been cultivated, nor would I have had the opportunities to touch others’ lives. Most cer-

tainly I would not have written this article because I would have had nothing to write about.

My advice to the tutors, teachers, and staff of adult education programs is to find simple and easy ways to subtly suggest to new adult learners that they get involved. Also, realize that not everyone is willing to go out and draw attention to themselves. However, do not give up, but periodically ask them to volunteer. It is easier to always rely on the same people over and over again to do outreach, but give everyone the opportunity to grow and develop as I have.

To the adult learners I say, get involved! If you cannot give a speech, then ask to do something else. Remember that you always need to push yourself a little in order to continue to grow. It is like making that first telephone call to sign up for tutoring. If you did not do it, you would not be improving your literacy skills.

Donna Jones is an adult learner at Project Read Northern San Mateo County in South San Francisco, California.

My Transition from Student to Staff

by Ailene Scott

While I was going through a divorce, my self-esteem was at an all time low. To get my focus back, I felt that I needed to do something really great for myself. I decided to obtain my high school diploma. It was a hard decision for me to make at that time; there was so much that was going on in my life. However, once I decided that it was time for me to further my education, I was determined to follow through. In the fall of 1993, I entered an adult education program at WAITT House (We’re All In this Together) in Roxbury, MA. From the beginning, I had many concerns. I felt too old to return to school and awkward being in a classroom with people a lot younger than I was. I worried wouldn’t know as much as others did.

The night before classes started, I had a really hard time getting myself ready for the first day. I psyched myself



Photo courtesy of the author.

out so much that the next morning I stopped twice to turn around and go back home. When I finally arrived at school, I began to have intense feelings of shame and fear. I was ashamed for returning to the classroom at such a late stage in my life and afraid of failing. I quickly realized, however, that this class wasn't at all what I imagined it would be.

As I entered the classroom, I noticed that there were two other women there who looked to be around my age. I settled down and began to focus on why I was there. Many times along the way it got rough and I wanted to quit. But I wanted to prove to myself, my family, and my friends that I was changing my life. I said to them, "Don't look for the old me, just keep looking for the new me."

By August of the next year, I was the first participant in my class to complete the External Diploma Program (EDP). You can't imagine the feeling of pride and self-confidence that I felt. Finally, the glorious evening of graduation came,

and I was even asked to give a speech. I was so very proud of myself for seeing the program through.

Two years after I graduated, I received a letter from WAITT House

offering me the opportunity to interview for a staff position. During the interview I learned that fourteen others were in the running for this position. Three weeks later, I received a phone call informing me that it was now down to four and I was one of them. I was then called in for another interview. I guess I said all the right things because a few days later they offered me the position. Of course you know this just made my day. It is an honor as well as a privilege to work for the same school that I graduated from.

I remember the first time I was in a staff meeting I could not believe that I was sitting at the table sharing strategies with the same people who used to be my teachers. It took a while to get used to that. For a while I felt so out of place. I wondered

how many times I had been discussed at these meetings. I was so self-conscious and afraid of saying the wrong thing, that I didn't even open my mouth. I still don't talk a lot

in these meetings, but the difference is that now I'm comfortable enough to speak when I have something to say.

Currently, I am a teacher, tutor, and testing coordinator and have been at WAITT House for six and a half years. I see my role as more than just teaching. Most of the time, I find myself listening to my students. I feel really blessed to have been on both sides of the table. Sharing my story with my students is one of the best ways I can help them. I would not trade my experience here for anything in the world.

Each time I attend one of our graduations, I have as much pride in my heart as the students who receive their diplomas. I feel so honored to have had a hand in supporting students, especially when I know the struggles that they went through to accomplish their goal.

Ailene Scott works at WAITT House in Boston, MA. In the fall, she intends to go to the University of Massachusetts in Boston for a BA in Adult Education.

The first time I was in a staff meeting I could not believe that I was sitting at the table sharing strategies with the same people who used to be my teachers. It took a while to get used to that.

I began to have intense feelings of shame and fear. I was ashamed for returning to the classroom at such a late stage in my life and afraid of failing.
