

# Partners in Reading



San José Public Library | Adult Literacy Program



## Program Highlights March 2022—October 2022

- 185 Adult Learners
- 27 Family Literacy Families
- 148 Career Online High School Graduates
- 1,195 San José Aspires Students
- 105 PAR Volunteers
- 3,501 Volunteer Hours

## Inside This Issue

<b>PAR Learner: Robert B.</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>PAR Volunteer: Marsha G.</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>COHS Graduate: David P.</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>SJ Aspires Student: Jorge R.</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>ESL Program &amp; Meet Our New Staff</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Upcoming Events</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Manager's Statement</b>	<b>8</b>

## Who We Are

Partners in Reading (PAR) provides free instruction and support to adult learners and volunteer tutors to work on basic literacy skills. PAR believes that adult learners will gain confidence and deepen their engagement in different aspects of their lives upon improving their literacy skills. We began our work in San José in 1989 and we use a variety of strategies to help learners achieve their basic literacy goals.

The cornerstone of PAR is our 1-on-1 tutoring program. This program is staffed by volunteers who meet at least twice a week with an assigned learner. At these meetings, learners decide what they want to learn – such as reading a book, creating a resume, or writing an email to their child's teacher – and the tutor helps them achieve those goals. Some goals are completed quickly, and others may take much longer or need to be broken down into smaller steps.

Our learner-centered approach to tutoring helps adults take charge of their learning experience and focus on goals that they wish to accomplish. Throughout their tutoring relationship, adult learners bring their own experiences, skills, and interests. The tutors are there to provide a boost to their learning. As the pairs work to develop skills that are most important to the learners, PAR keeps services relevant to learners, changing as their needs change.

Over the years, PAR has expanded beyond 1-on-1 tutoring in adult basic education. We currently offer access to a computer lab and technology assistance, small classes online, and lend hotspots and laptops out to PAR learners. We also publish an annual book of learner writings, help adults earn an accelerated high school diploma and a career certificate through the Career Online High School (COHS) program, and offer English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction to non-native speakers through the library and community partners. Another program we work closely with is San José Aspires, a scholarship program for high school students pursuing post-secondary education.

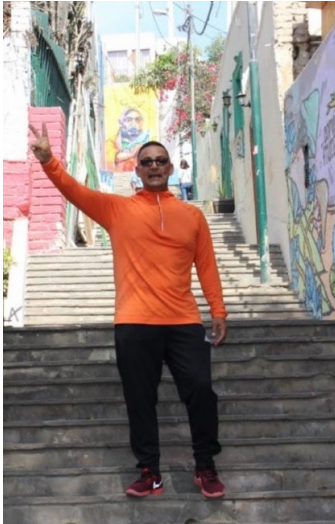
This newsletter brings you stories about the individuals involved in the PAR community. We hope you'll enjoy reading their stories and consider supporting the PAR programs.

You can learn more about PAR programs by visiting:

[www.sjpl.org/par](http://www.sjpl.org/par)  
[www.sjpl.org/cohs](http://www.sjpl.org/cohs)  
[www.sjpl.org/sjaspires](http://www.sjpl.org/sjaspires)



## PAR Learner: Robert B.



**Robert B.**

*PAR Learner*

Robert joined Partners in Reading (PAR) about five years ago. He was successful at work, but he always felt that something was missing. School had been difficult, and he wanted to be able to read unknown words.

Robert was placed in the Wilson Reading System so that he could build a foundation. He was matched with PAR volunteer tutor Jonathan. Together they have made tremendous progress. Robert's boss at the time saw something in him, and offered him a change from working in the field to working in the office. He explained that he was studying and wasn't confident in his reading and writing, but his boss offered to help when he needed it. His confidence grew as he learned to use the two computer systems in the office and to do the accounting for the business.

When the business closed and Robert retired, he has had a lot of time to travel around the U.S. and in Peru. For someone with limited reading skills, travel is difficult, and often adults stay close to home because it is familiar. Not Robert! He is much more comfortable navigating his way around new cities, airports, and he is able to read materials that he is given during his travels.

Robert also is proud of his increased financial literacy. He is able to read bills and statements, and make decisions about credit card interest rates. He reports that he is much better off financially since he joined this program.

During lockdown Robert and Jonathan were not able to meet in person, so Robert learned and took advantage of new technology. They meet on Zoom now and Robert uses the resources in the PAR computer lab. Robert notes that the best thing about being in the program is that he knows now that there is nothing wrong with him.

It has been so exciting to see Robert gain confidence and spread his wings over the last several years. We are excited to see what new adventures Robert will take on as his skills and confidence continue to grow.



## PAR Volunteer: Marsha G.



**Marsha G.**

*PAR Volunteer,  
Small-Class Instructor*

Marsha G. volunteers in Partners in Reading (PAR) as a Small-Class Instructor.

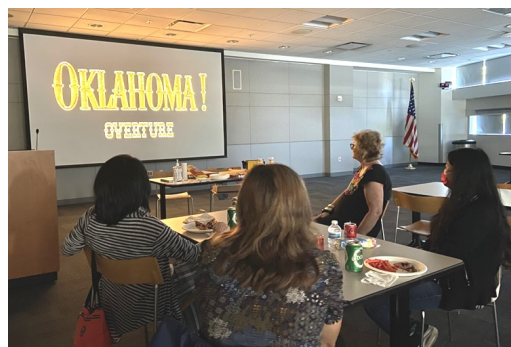
Marsha joined PAR in February 2022 because she had always wanted to help someone learn how to read. After retiring from her career with Hewlett Packard, Marsha wanted to find a new purpose in life. Prior to her career in tech, Marsha had experience working as a middle school math teacher and enjoyed being involved in the school's productions and theater projects. She knew she wanted to volunteer to teach someone to read, but it wasn't until attending the PAR Orientation that she saw how all her interests would come together.

Every Tuesday evening, Marsha leads an online class, *Let's Go to Broadway!*, which consists of about five learners. The eight-week class focuses on a popular American musical, where they learn and discuss the musical's themes, songs, characters, and influences. While studying the musicals, PAR learners practice conversation, listening and reading comprehension, learn new vocabulary and idioms, and also learn about American history and culture.

The first cycle of her class focused on *West Side Story*, which was coincidentally in production at the San José Opera! At the end of class, Marsha coordinated an opportunity for her learners to watch the live performances at a discounted student rate. It was the first time some of the learners had seen this musical live! Marsha found it truly rewarding to hear the class enthusiastically discuss their experiences and favorite songs after attending the *West Side Story* production.

This latest cycle, the class studied *Oklahoma!* At the conclusion, PAR hosted an in-person movie screening of *Oklahoma!* for the class at King Library. Marsha and the learners were able to discuss the movie scenes and songs in real time over some soda and snacks. It was a big highlight for all, as most of them had not met each other in person! The next *Let's Go to Broadway!* class will return in January and learners can look forward to studying *The Music Man*.

Marsha's advice to those who are interested in volunteering as an instructor is to relax and enjoy the process. "The reward you get is worth the work you put in. It helps if you choose a topic that you really enjoy, because your passion will come through and rub off on the class. Teaching is a team effort between you, the learners, and PAR staff, so be patient and use the resources you have!"





## Career Online High School (COHS) Graduate: David P.

David P. graduated from COHS in September 2022 with a career certificate in Office Management.

### Why did you join COHS?

The main reason why I joined was because I really wanted to get a high school diploma. I didn't want to get a GED. Everyone, from friends, to family to coworkers, asked me, "Why do you want to go through the whole 18 months? Just take the GED test and get it over with." But I'm an old-school person. I wanted an actual high school diploma because I always regretted not getting one and not being able to walk the stage with my friends. I didn't want to take the easy way out.

I wanted to show everyone that even someone like me could get a high school diploma. I knew once I got a high school diploma, I would go on to pursue an associate degree, a bachelor's degree, and then a master's degree. Most of the jobs out there require a GED or a high school diploma, so now that I have one, I can be confident and put down, "Yes, I have a high school diploma."

### What are you most proud of during your time in COHS?

During my time in COHS, I was most proud of my time management and prioritization skills. I was always a procrastinator; I would leave everything to the last minute because I work better under pressure. However, I realized that it's not healthy. Why put myself in that stress? Instead of doing the whole thing at once, why not take one step at a time? I told myself, "Don't stress out. Don't try to be perfect. Just take baby steps and do one lesson at a time."

Another thing I learned was that I could say, "No." I needed to look out for and dedicate time for myself. Before I knew it, I would be getting older, having other priorities, or starting a family. If I let this opportunity pass, I would regret it when I'm 40 or 50 years old. It was always about managing my time and being disciplined.

### How has graduating from COHS impacted your life?

Graduating from COHS has impacted my life in a positive way. I was recovering from COVID-19, work was slowing down, and I had many family members pass away during that time. It's been a hard three years for me. When those bad things happened, I didn't do anything for a month.

Then, I started to change my mindset. Instead of, "I gotta do it," I told myself, "I get to do it." That was a big impact in my life. Back then, I would always be like, "I gotta do it. I gotta go to work. I gotta eat healthy." But now, I feel blessed because I get to do all those things. I know right now it's a bit too late to apply for fall semester classes, but I will go to Evergreen Valley College to sign up for spring semester classes. I will only take one or two classes at a time because I work full time. It might take me years to get a college degree, but I know I will get it. I know this effort will all be worth it in the end.

**Special Recognition:** David put in 448 hours of study time!

careeronline  
HIGH SCHOOL

Find out more about COHS by visiting  
[www.sjpl.org/cohs](http://www.sjpl.org/cohs)

If you'd like to support the COHS program, please scan the QR code.

1. Use the QR Code to open the **Gift Form**
2. Under **Where to Give**, select **Other**
3. Write **COHS** in the space provided.



 SCAN ME

## What is San José Aspires?

SJ Aspires is a scholarship program that provides nearly 1,200 select students from Overfelt and San José High School the opportunity to claim up to \$5,000 in Scholar Dollars while they are in high school to use on whatever education they pursue after high school. Students receive Scholar Dollars by completing milestones that support them getting to post-secondary education and succeeding when they get there.

## SJ Aspires Student: Jorge R.

This summer, IBM, one of SJ Aspires' corporate partners, graciously opened their campus to students from East San José, including SJ Aspires students, for their annual IBM AI Technology Camp.

One of the SJ Aspires students who attended the camp, was Jorge R., a rising sophomore from San José High School. When asked about his involvement with SJ Aspires and why he decided to attend the IBM camp, Jorge said, "I was first introduced to the SJ Aspires program in my freshman year of high school, and since then I've attended a couple of events that the program held where I actually got to talk to a couple 'IBMers'. I made the jump to attend [the camp] because I felt like this was an opportunity for me to learn."

At the camp, students had the opportunity to meet IBM executives and staff, and spend three days on their south San José campus, getting a feel for what it is like to be a part of the IBM community. Throughout the three-day camp, students participated in team building activities, explored different STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) curricula, and got a taste for some of the real-world technology solutions that IBM is working towards.

When reflecting on his experience, Jorge said, "It would be really useful to get more people interested in these subjects because from what I know, these quantum computing, learning about how machines can learn and develop algorithms can be very beneficial to research and advancing our knowledge as human beings...Machine learning makes things a lot more efficient...[and] quantum computing may allow us to answer questions that we've never been able to answer. That is why I feel like for progressing humanity forward, it would be really beneficial to have more students associating with this stuff."

We are grateful for students like Jorge and partners like IBM as they look towards the future, creating a better world!



Jorge R.

*Class of 2024 at San José High School*



Find out more about SJ Aspires by  
visiting [www.sjpl.org/sj-aspires](http://www.sjpl.org/sj-aspires)

## English as a Second Language (ESL) Program

Partners in Reading (PAR) now offers a 1-on-1 English as a Second Language (ESL) tutoring program for learners who have limited English-speaking skills.

Similar to the PAR Adult Basic Education (ABE) program, the PAR ESL program is learner-centered and matches learners with a volunteer tutor to work on the learner's goals. ESL tutors will also receive free training, materials, and ongoing PAR staff support to help them with their tutoring.

PAR will start recruiting for ESL volunteer tutors in January 2023. Please let us know if you're interested in joining!

## Meet Our New Staff



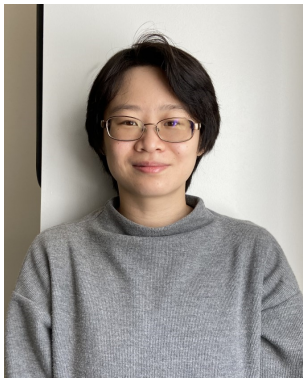
**Kristen Vehling**

***Literacy Program Specialist***

Kristen Vehling joined PAR as our new part-time ESL Literacy Program Specialist. Kristen first volunteered with PAR almost 20 years ago, then returned to volunteer again in 2018 as a 1-on-1 tutor. In 2020, she took on another volunteer role as a small-class instructor. Working with PAR was something she had thought about doing for years and we couldn't be more thrilled to have her!

With 30 years of experience as an ESL teacher and a Master's degree in Linguistics, Kristen has always found the language learning process fascinating. She is constantly trying to hone her teaching skills by experimenting with different teaching methods and enjoys working with people of various languages. Kristen is most excited about working with beginning ESL learners and creating a quality program that serves a population who may not have previously qualified for PAR.

Some advice Kristen has for ESL tutors is to have patience. "The language learning process can take several years. So adults who aren't using [the language] all the time can take a longer time. Remember that everything you teach a student today is something they didn't know yesterday." For Kristen, language learning is an exciting lifelong process, and she considers it an honor to help people on their journey.



**Karen Liou**

***ESL Instructional Intern***

Karen Liou joined PAR in May 2022 as an ESL Instructional Intern to help expand our new ESL Program. Karen is a San José local and a current graduate student at SJSU, pursuing her second Master's Degree in English Literature.

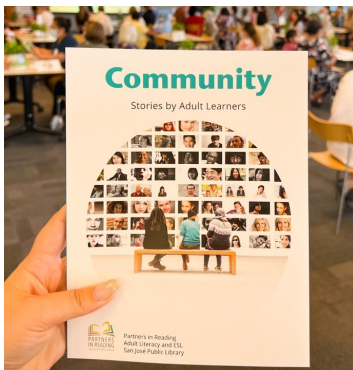
In the summer, Karen led an online ESL class in collaboration with the Alum Rock branch library. She is now leading an in-person ESL class at Sacred Heart twice a week with about 20 students. Her learners mostly consist of Spanish-speaking women with school-age children.

On her experience leading these programs, she said, "It feels awesome to help empower learners to achieve their goals," and hopes her students enjoy the learning process. Her goal is to help her students become what she calls, "autonomous learners".

Karen is interested in working with ESL adults and hopes to earn her PhD in a field that allows her to design her own ESL curriculum. She is looking forward to seeing the PAR ESL program grow.

## Upcoming Events

- **November 2022**
  - Volunteer Orientations and Trainings
  - Tutor Support Meetings
- **December 2022**
  - Holiday Party
  - New Learner Orientation
- **January 2023**
  - Volunteer Orientations and Trainings
  - New Learner Orientation
  - Smart Habits Workshop
- **February 2023**
  - Tutor Support Meetings
  - New Learner Orientation
  - PAR Learner Book Writing Workshop
- **March 2023**
  - Volunteer Orientations and Trainings
  - New Learner Orientation
- **April 2023**
  - Volunteer Appreciation Event
  - Tutor Support Meetings
  - New Learner Orientation



If you are interested in volunteering with PAR or if you could use any of the PAR services, please contact us!

If you are contacting us on behalf of a friend or family member, please know that we will need to speak with them directly in order to enroll them in one of our programs.

Event dates are subject to change. Contact PAR staff for more information regarding PAR events.

(408) 808-2361 | [par.sjpl@sjlibrary.org](mailto:par.sjpl@sjlibrary.org) | [www.sjpl.org/par](http://www.sjpl.org/par)

## Support PAR Programs

If you would like to make a gift to support PAR programs, please visit the San José Public Library Foundation (SJPLF) website and complete the gift form. You can also scan the QR code on this page with your smartphone camera to access the gift form.



San José Public Library  
Foundation

SJPLF Gift Form: [www.sjplf.org/donate/](http://www.sjplf.org/donate/)

If you d like to support any of our programs, please scan the QR code.

1. Use the QR Code to open the **Gift Form**
2. Under **Where to Give**, select **Other**
3. Write **PAR** or **COHS** in the space provided.



SCAN ME

Partners in Reading  
San José Public Library, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor  
150 E. San Fernando Street  
San José, CA 95112



Phone: (408) 808 2361  
Email: [par.sjpl@sjlibrary.org](mailto:par.sjpl@sjlibrary.org)  
Website: [www.sjpl.org/par](http://www.sjpl.org/par)

### PAR Office Hours

Monday-Friday	10 am - 6 pm
Saturday	10 am - 1 pm
Sunday	Closed

## Mission

Partners in Reading (PAR) is dedicated to working with adults to improve their lives by supporting them in basic reading, writing, language, technology, and life skills to engage with greater confidence in needed areas of their lives.

## Adult and Family Literacy

Trained volunteer tutors customize individual instruction for adults who read or write below the high school level. Instruction is based on life goals determined by each adult learner.

## Together We Read

A family literacy program that encourages parents to take part in school activities and events, and model storytime to help children practice and build confidence in reading.

## Career Online High School (COHS)

COHS offers scholarships for adults to earn an accredited high school diploma online and earn a career certificate.

## Manager's Statement



Adrian McBride

Program Manager

International Literacy Day is celebrated each year on September 8<sup>th</sup>, and we at Partners in Reading (PAR) use this day to launch our annual learner anthology.

In 2022, the title and theme of the anthology was *Community*. Learners wrote about the different ways they get involved and find support – from churches and community gardens to non-profits, support groups, friends, family, and pets. Each learner has found (or created) their own community, and we are happy that they – along with our volunteers, tutors, and supporters – are part of the PAR community.

This summer, PAR grew as well and has welcomed two new employees: Karen Liou is our ESL Instructional Intern and leads formal ESL classes at a partner organization; Kristen Vehling is a Literacy Program Specialist and is building out a one-on-one tutoring program for adults who speak limited or no English. Both Karen and Kristen's work will allow PAR to deepen our reach within San José and bring our services to more individuals.

PAR would like to thank the organizations that have made this new programming possible, including the California State Library, the San José Public Library, and the San José Public Library Foundation.

You can learn more about joining the PAR community as a tutor, learner, or supporter by visiting our website at [www.sjpl.org/par](http://www.sjpl.org/par). If you have any questions, you can also reach PAR at (408) 808-2361 or call me directly at (408) 808-2363.