

Inside . . .

2 Spring Greetings
By Spencer Haworth

3 Family Literacy Days
celebrate literacy and
healthy living

Volunteers recognized
during National
Volunteer Appreciation
Week

4 Partner Spotlight:
Kalamazoo Public Library

Congratulations tutors!

Tutor Spotlight:
Jane Rooks Ross

5 WMU student
filmmakers create
video series featuring
the KLC

6 Calendar

**"There is no better
exercise for your
heart than reaching
down and helping to
lift someone up."**

~Bernard Meltzer



Motivational speaker and TikTok star Oliver James visits Kalamazoo

Oliver James is an adult learner who has received national attention and accolades for teaching himself to read in front of millions of people on social media. Oliver, who started his literacy journey in 2020 at age 33, started with a simple introduction video: "What's up, I can't read," he said. He began making content showing him as a struggling reader and quickly gained hundreds of thousands of followers who cheered him on. With that encouragement, he accomplished his goal of reading 100 books in a year. Since then, he has appeared on widespread media outlets, spoken at schools and organizations across the country, and received the Barbara Bush National Literacy Honors Award. He recently visited the KLC for an intimate conversation with adult learners who eagerly listened to his story of overcoming poverty, incarceration, mental health struggles, and illiteracy. They shared their own experiences and enjoyed his reading of "The Giving Tree." As part of his Kalamazoo visit, Oliver also delivered a keynote speech at the Michigan Adult, Community, and



Photo credit: Jeri Love

Oliver James and Yun Shin Huang share a signed copy of *The Giving Tree* at the Adult Learner Advisor meeting at Goodwill Industries.

Alternative Education Association's (MACAE) Spring Institute and gave a community-wide presentation held at Mt. Zion Baptist Church. We are thrilled to have had such a wonderful experience with a national literacy ambassador who has inspired so many to keep striving toward their goals. Find and follow him on TikTok at @oliverspeaks1.



Photo credit: Jeri Love

Adult learners and team members celebrate the moment with Oliver James at Goodwill Industries.

President's Message: Spring Greetings

By Spencer Haworth



Spencer Haworth

Greetings!

As the flowers bloom and the days grow longer, we're thrilled to share some exciting updates from our community!

This spring, we welcomed nine new tutors into our volunteer program. Their dedication and passion for learning will

undoubtedly make a profound impact on the lives of those we serve. Additionally, from April 21st to 27th, we'll be celebrating Volunteer Appreciation Week. We will be using this week to intentionally express our gratitude to our incredible volunteers.

We're excited to share our partnership with the Kalamazoo Public Library to welcome Oliver James, adult learner and TikTok star, to Kalamazoo for special appearances celebrating literacy for all.

Our annual meeting is scheduled for Thursday, May 30, from 5:30 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. at Honor Credit Union. This year, we'll gather in person to share

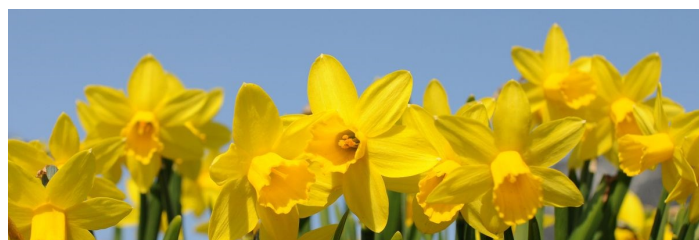
agency highlights and updates on our 50th anniversary celebration. We hope you will join us!

Get ready to kick off Family Literacy Days on May 15, right in the heart of the Read and Seed Community Garden. It's a perfect opportunity to cultivate a love for reading and nature with your loved ones.

Spring is a time for growth, celebration, and community, and we're grateful for your continued support!

Thank you!

Spencer Haworth
2023—2024 Board President
Kalamazoo Literacy Council



kalamazooliteracycouncil
#EveryoneNeedsToRead

Help us achieve a
fully literate community.

Volunteer | Give | Advocate

www.kalamazooliteracy.org

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2023-2024**

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Family Literacy Days celebrate literacy and healthy living

We're back! Join us for our monthly Family Literacy Day events which are held May—November in the beautiful Read and Seed Community Garden. These monthly events are a wonderful celebration of literacy and healthy living, offering fun multigenerational activities for parents and children to enjoy together.

Featuring storytelling sessions, gardening education, harvesting, and free books, our Family Literacy Day events are designed to promote a love for reading and learning while also encouraging healthy habits. Parents and children can bond over interactive activities that spark creativity and imagination. Mark your calendars for Family Literacy Days and come out to the garden for fun, learning, and quality time with your family. Hope to see you there!

3rd Wednesdays, 5:00-7:00 p.m. at 420 E. Alcott St.

- **May 15:** Spring Fest
- **June 19:** The importance of pollinators
- **July 17:** I spy
- **August 21:** Let's plant a pencil
- **September 18:** Party in Kalamazoo
- **October 16:** Fire safety
- **November 20:** Harvest Fest



Farmer Mike and Farmer Dylan look forward to another great growing season in the Read and Seed Community Garden. Join us during Family Literacy Day!

Family Literacy Days are presented in partnership with Goodwill Industries of Southwestern Michigan, Kalamazoo Public Library, Talking is Teaching, Kalamazoo County Great Start Collaborative, Western Michigan University, and The Kalamazoo Promise.

For additional details, contact Kamaria at (269) 382-0490 ext. 263 or knichols@kalamazooliteracy.org.

Volunteers recognized during National Volunteer Appreciation Week



Abbey Weathers

As the new Volunteer and Internship Coordinator at the Kalamazoo Literacy Council, I would like to extend a huge thank you to all of the volunteers who serve this community! Transitioning into this role has been so rewarding and I have enjoyed getting to know many of you in this process. I have heard numerous stories from tearful, moved volunteers, which shows me your involvement is not just educational, but emotional and personal as well. Seeing your investment in our learners gives me so much hope for the future of adult literacy in Kalamazoo. With volunteers as dedicated as you, we are changing lives and the community as a whole! Your passion is infectious, you are at the core of what we do and we appreciate and value your work.

Sincerely,

Abbey Weathers, Volunteer and Internship Coordinator
(269) 382-0490 ext. 219
aweathers@kalamazooliteracy.org



Doris Ravotas, Vicki Konzen, Judy Rayman, and Marlene Denenfeld enjoy refreshments and conversation at the KLC Volunteer Appreciation Breakfast.

Partner Spotlight: Kalamazoo Public Library



Kalamazoo Public Library

We are thrilled to continue to share good news about the wonderful partnership between the Kalamazoo Public Library and the Kalamazoo Literacy Council. This collaboration has been instrumental in promoting literacy and fostering a love for reading in our community. Because of this and more, we were honored to recognize KPL with the 2023 Literacy Advocate of the Year award, specifically, Bill Caskey, who is also a volunteer tutor, and Angela Fortin and Derek Johnson who operate the Mobile Library. The Kalamazoo Public Library has long been a hub for learning and exploration, offering a wide range of resources and programs for individuals of all ages. The library's commitment to literacy and education aligns perfectly with the mission of the Kalamazoo Literacy Council, which works tirelessly to improve adult literacy in the region.



Everyone needs to read! The Mobile Library is always ready to spread the joy of reading to all.

The KPL Mobile Library is a consistent presence at Family Literacy Days, offering free books for parents and children that tie into the monthly event theme. Library branches serve as tutoring sites where volunteers and adults can study in a learning-rich environment. We joined forces to promote the Oliver James Reading Challenge where we invited the community to enjoy one of five specially selected stories. We also welcomed Oliver to Kalamazoo for a series of speaking engagements where he shared his powerful story of teaching himself to read as an adult and inspired others to never stop learning. And on May 22, we are excited to once again participate in the

annual Party in the Park where KLC Executive Director Michael Evans has a blast reading beloved stories to Little Scholars and their families.

Our partnership serves as an example of what can be achieved when organizations come together to make a difference in the lives of community members. Together, we offer programs for everyone from young readers to adult learners to encourage literacy at any age, and services that empower them to keep striving toward their academic and life goals.

Welcome and congratulations new tutors!

The Kalamazoo Literacy Council is pleased to welcome 20 new tutors who successfully completed Tutor Training in November and January. Special thanks to Kym Hollars for leading the trainings with support from Michael Evans, Nora Evers, Kym Hollars, and Abbey Weathers.

Janice Ahrens
Jordan Anstead
Aimee Beehler
Charity Ben
Walter Biber
Tiffany Brown
Sven Cerulus
Gracie Coston
Beth Dalian
Debora Gant

Russell Hammond
Synthia Hardy
Blake Palar
Kathryn Racette
Barbara Sagara
Robin Simpson
Pat Stromsta
Jeanne Swander
Renee Szostek
Diane Wenger

Volunteer Spotlight: Jane Rooks Ross



Tutor Jane Rooks Ross sat down to share her experience volunteering with the Kalamazoo Literacy Council, emphasizing the importance of adult literacy in opening up opportunities and maximizing an individual's talents. She praises her learner's diligence and progress in improving communication skills, and encourages others to get involved in tutoring and enjoy the rewarding experience of helping someone learn a new language. She also reminds tutors that the KLC staff is always ready to help with resources and ongoing support. Watch it on our YouTube channel at <https://www.youtube.com/@KalamazooLiteracy/videos>.

WMU student filmmakers create video series featuring the KLC

Students from Western Michigan University’s School of Communications selected the Kalamazoo Literacy Council as the featured agency for their Spring semester class project. The class is designed to teach the fundamentals of digital video production as well as how to use compelling storytelling techniques for community-engaged work. Groups of five students worked on four short videos that will help promote our mission, programs, and internships. Teams conducted one on one interviews with staff, learners, partners, and former interns, and captured various bits of footage of programming in action. The videos will be used in marketing communications and recruitment activities to drive awareness, help attract learners, engage volunteers, and deepen donor stewardship efforts.

The community-engaged project, funded by the Experience-Driven Learning Venture Grants by the Office of the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, is a collaboration between students, faculty, instructional designers, the Office of Service Learning, and two community partners: KLC and Public Media Network. It aims to recognize local agency of communities, their resilience, and locally established support systems, community organizations, and networks. The project uses non-extractive and non-intrusive approaches in documenting community stories in collaboration with community partners in Kalamazoo County.

Class professor Dr. Lusike Mukhongo says, “WMU students participating in this community-engaged learning initiative have had the privilege of gaining hands-on experience working alongside KLC, witnessing firsthand the transformative work they



Dr. Mukhongo and students at work in the halls of Goodwill Industries of Southwestern Michigan for the KLC video shoot

undertake within the community. This community-engaged learning experience has fostered experiential growth for WMU students while documenting the invaluable contributions of organizations like KLC to the community.”

She further adds, “The KLC has had an impressive impact on the community, and we were glad when they agreed to collaborate on this project to document and digitize stories of the work they are doing in the community. They are a key community partner to Western Michigan University, and this is evident in their commitment to empowering adults through free literacy services, extensive collaboration with various organizations, and their role as the sole provider of basic literacy instruction to adults in Kalamazoo County. As the KLC celebrates 50 years of its commitment to empowering adults through free literacy services and extensive collaboration within Kalamazoo County, we are thankful that they allowed us to partner with them and celebrate them as they mark this great milestone. Thank you, KLC, for the very meaningful, enriching, and impactful collaboration!”

“Having stories told about the people who are making a difference for adult literacy is a necessary part of raising awareness about our cause,” said Executive Director Michael Evans. “These talented students did a wonderful job of bring our stories to life.”



The final videos debuted at a screening on April 19 at Public Media Network in downtown Kalamazoo. Check them out for yourself on our YouTube channel at <https://www.youtube.com/@Kalamazooliteracy/>



Photo credit: Yun Shin Huang

Yun Shin Huang, Kamaria Snell, Abbey Weathers, and Vicki Konzen all starred in the videos.

420 E. Alcott Street, Suite 400
Kalamazoo, MI 49001



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MISSION:

The Kalamazoo Literacy Council is committed to enhancing the lives of adults by improving their reading, writing and spelling skills.

*Serving
Kalamazoo County
since 1974.*



CALENDAR

- Board Meetings**
May 14, June 11, & July 9 11:30 a.m. — 1:00 p.m.
- Adult Literacy Collaborative Meetings**
May 27, June 24, & July 22 12:00 p.m. — 1:30 p.m.
- Tutor Forums and Workshops**
- New Tutor Orientation** May 2 6:00 — 7:30 p.m.
- Tutor Training** Mar. 6, 9, 13, & 16 6:00 — 7:30 p.m.
- ESL Tutor Forum**
May 28, June 25, & July 23 2:30 p.m.— 3:30 p.m.
- Parent Literacy Forum**
May 26, June 24, & July 28 11:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.
- Workforce Literacy Forum**
May 10, June 14, & July 12 11:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.
- All above meetings are virtual. ↑*
- Annual Meeting** May 30 5:30 p.m.— 7:00 p.m.

Visit www.kalamazooliteracy.org for details.

KLC 2024 ANNUAL MEETING



**THURSDAY
MAY 30
5:30 p.m.—7:00 p.m.**

Honor Credit Union
4400 Stadium Drive
Kalamazoo, MI 49008

RSVP to kjumanne-marshall@kalamazooliteracy.org