



Gala supports adult learners
[Page 4](#)



Siena launches food pantry
[Page 6](#)



SIENA LITERACY CENTER NEWSLETTER

CALENDAR

OCTOBER 20:

Volunteer orientation 6 pm

OCTOBER 25:

Tutor workshop 5:30 pm,
“Wilson Reading System 3”

OCTOBER 26:

Tutor workshop 1 pm,
“Wilson Reading System 3”

NOVEMBER 9:

Volunteer orientation 1 pm

NOVEMBER 17:

Volunteer orientation 6 pm

NOVEMBER 21-24:

Building closed for staff training/Thanksgiving

DECEMBER 8:

Volunteer orientation 1 pm

DECEMBER 22-

JANUARY 2:

Building closed for holiday break

Autumn is a season of transitions. As nature slows and rebuilds soil in preparation for another year of growth, at Siena Literacy Center, we find ourselves in our own season of change. I step intentionally into this role with gratitude towards all who have welcomed me in and an eagerness to connect with those I have yet to meet. Siena’s soil is already blessed with deep roots, thanks to the years of leadership from founders, advisors, board members, and directors – as well as the dedication of staff, donors, volunteers and participants – past and present.



For many, this season also brings a recommitment to educational pursuits: children go back to school, college students return to campus, and many adult learners give themselves a second chance in education by enrolling at Siena to improve reading, math, English language, and digital literacy skills. You may be one of those learners, reading this now! Perhaps you just started, or maybe you have been here for months, years even. We are grateful for your presence and inspired by your determination.

Lastly, on behalf of Siena Literacy Center, I wish to extend our gratitude to Sr. Janice Brown, O.P. and Sr. Janet Stankowski, O.P. for their years of service to the organization. Sr. Janice served on our Board of Directors at the beginning of 2020 before stepping into the Executive Director role in October of that year. She also served as a mentor to me over the years as I began working in the field of adult education. And a very heartfelt thank you to Sr. Janet as she ends her six years of service on the Board of Directors this fall. Siena’s foundation is richer still because of your efforts.

Caitlyn Pisarski
Executive Director



SCHOOL IS IN SESSION!

The 2022-23 school year is underway, and we're off to a great start at Siena!

Learning as a Family

An education is for everyone, and we're proud to welcome siblings, spouses, and entire families to enroll as learners at Siena to improve their academics.



Above: Pauline Congo and sons Armel and Brice Boua, pictured with computer lab manager Abdul Lahawl, registered in August and have been working to improve their English.

Below: Husband and wife Keba and Khady Cisse both come in to work with their tutors, Lorraine Tyler and Kim Bagazinski, at the same time every week.



Continuing Education

Tutors discussed best tutoring practices at our Fall Skills Refresher workshop, held September 20 and 21. Here are some of their tips on what it means to be a great tutor:



Susan Yeghissian: "Follow your student's lead. Read what is interesting and relevant to them. Learn from your student because everyone has life experience to teach others."



Lorraine Tyler: "I think people who tutor are dedicated to service, and I feel students appreciate it when they feel that their tutor is truly interested in their improvement. I always try to prepare my weekly tutoring lesson plans sessions in advance--taking into consideration the personal characteristics of my student. When possible, I find current reading materials to incorporate in the tutoring session. When a lesson is well planned, the hours seem to pass too quickly!!!"



Chelsea Jones: "You have a lot of resources and support at your disposal. Use them!"



Lee Bosek: "In addition to the literacy material assigned by Siena Literacy Center, please invite and welcome outside materials from learners. This may include books, textbooks, work assignments, etc. This will allow learners to openly express their personal and professional goals that will guide the tutor toward literacy success for the learner."

Looking for more great advice? We're starting a tutor peer support group, which will meet monthly, with options for afternoon or evening. Contact Eva Shillair (eshillair@sienaliteracy.org) for more information.

SCHOOL IS IN SESSION!



Student Spotlight: FATOUMATA TOURE



The school year is off to an exciting start for learner Fatoumata Toure, who just passed her American citizenship exam on September 28. She will take her citizenship oath at a ceremony on October 17.

Fatoumata and her tutor, Derek Foster, have been working on citizenship skills since 2021. Born in Ivory Coast, Fatoumata went to religious school, but didn't have a formal education. Her biggest challenge on the citizenship exam was writing. Since her last attempt at the test in April, she and Derek have been practicing writing intensively, and working on not overthinking her responses.

"Thank you guys, thank Derek, thank school," she said. "If it was not for this school, I don't know how I would get this one," she said.

"She deserves all the credit because she put the work in," Derek said. "I know it was difficult for her sometimes."

Fatoumata is a mother of six children and has lived in the United States since she moved here to join her husband in 1993. She first came to Siena in 2005, but didn't stay long. She returned a few years ago and met then Executive Director Sister Janice Brown.

"She said, 'Fatoumata, where have you been all this time?!' So I came back," Fatoumata said.

Fatoumata first worked with her current tutor Derek while he was leading an English conversation class, a practice group for English language learners. Most of the students in the class were French speakers, and they would sometimes slip into speaking French. Fatoumata and another student helped Derek keep the class on track. "They would say, 'Hey, we're supposed to be speaking English,'" he said.

Now that she has her citizenship, Fatoumata and Derek will continue to work together.

"We want to get her to register to vote!" Derek said. Fatoumata also wants to continue improving her English language skills.

"I want to be able to read everything for myself," she said.

Students Tell Their Stories in Writing Club



In September, Siena kicked off a new writing club for students and tutors who want to become better writers. Members have been working on thinking about what stories they have to tell and how they would share them.

Writing club meets every Tuesday from 12:30-1:30, and interested tutors or students are welcome to contact Eva Shillair (eshillair@sienaliteracy.org) for more information.

Gala Brings in \$6,000 for Adult Learners

We are so grateful to all the supporters who attended our annual gala event at the Bayview Yacht Club on Thursday, September 8, as well as to event partner [Ally Financial](#).

The event was a beautiful gathering of advocates for adult education and raised more than \$6,000 to support our adult learners.

Guests enjoyed food, drink, and live music while overlooking the water. Learner-tutor teams Ali Ibrahim and Linda Taylor and Mohamad Abusalah and David Rubenstein spoke movingly about their experiences at Siena Literacy Center.

The event included a silent auction of art pieces donated by Madonna University and artists Dominic Pangborn, John Demers, and Ruth Foon, as well as acting classes and a sailing trip. Guests also purchased raffle tickets to win a bottle of champagne, a Lilly Pulitzer bag donated by Village Palm in Grosse Pointe, or a gift basket donated by Motor City Soap Company.



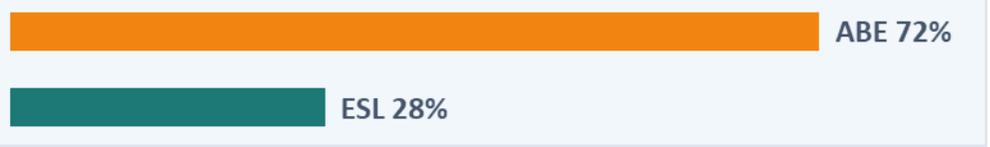
With gratitude to our event partner:

ally do it right.

Siena Snapshot: 2021-22 Year in Review

WHO WE SERVED

2021-2022 Academic Year



156

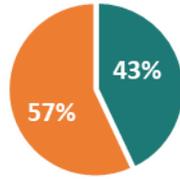
Students attended

86

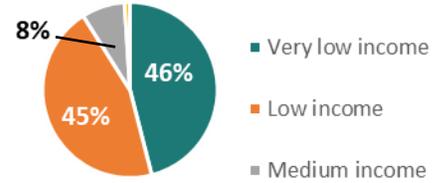
Tutors volunteered

6,574

Instructional hours earned



Male | Female



STUDENT HOME COUNTRIES:

Afghanistan • Bangladesh • Burkina Faso • Cameroon • Egypt • Gambia • Ghana • Guinea • Israel • Ivory Coast • Jamaica • Lebanon • Liberia • Libya • Mauritania • Mexico • Nigeria • Saudi Arabia • Senegal • Sierra Leone • Tanzania • United States

	Wayne County*	MI State*	National**
Adults at or Below Level 1 Literacy (PIAAC)	27%	18%	22%
Below 100% of Poverty Rate	24%	16%	14.4%
ESL Speakers	18%	16%	22%
High School/GED	30%	29%	91.1%
SNAP/Food Stamps	25%	15%	12%

*Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC)

**US. Census Bureau

Local Demographics:

1 in 3

1 in 3 adults in Wayne County have low literacy skills.

24%

24 percent of people in Wayne County live below the poverty rate.

30%

30 percent of Wayne County residents have a diploma or GED.

Students achieve real results at Siena.

Data comes from a 2021-22 survey in which 86 students participated.

100%

of ESL students felt they improved their English.

98%

of reading students felt they improved their reading.

100%

of math students felt they improved their math.

- **Two-thirds** of students in the labor force met work-related goals: got a new job, got a promotion, kept their job, or improved their job skills.
- **More than half** of students improved their computer skills.
- **Half** of students began reading more for fun!

Siena Launches Navigator Program, Food Pantry

It can be challenging for adult learners to go back to school—even more so when they're dealing with big issues like housing insecurity, childcare, legal problems, or more.

Students often go to their tutors to ask for help when they need it, but dealing with these issues can take valuable time away from academics. Through Siena's new social services navigator program, students who need help will soon be able to make appointments with trained volunteers who will help them connect to the resources they need so they can focus on their educations.

In addition, Siena is opening a small food pantry to help support our students and community members. The pantry will be set up in the room off the kitchen and will be open Monday through Thursday, 10 am to 6 pm.

Here's how you can help!

1. **Become a volunteer navigator.** If you have a social work background, or know someone who does, we're assembling a small team of volunteers we can train as social service resource navigators to assist students. Interested volunteers can contact Zoe Dixon (zdixon@sienaliteracy.org) or Eva Shillair (eshillair@sienaliteracy.org).
2. **Donate to our food pantry.** We're in need of non-perishable food items (see right) to get our food pantry off the ground, and ongoing donations to keep our shelves stocked!



Items Needed for Siena's Community Food Pantry

Pantry Staples

- Canned vegetables
- Canned beans
- Canned fruit in light syrup or juice, any variety
- Canned chicken
- Canned tuna
- Canned corned beef
- Canned soups, any variety
- Canned chili
- Dried pasta, any variety
- White and brown rice
- Dried beans, lentils, chickpeas/garbanzo beans
- Hamburger Helper, any variety
- Rice Roni / Pasta Roni, any variety
- Pasta sauce jars
- Microwaveable Spaghetti O's, any variety
- Peanut butter, any brand
- Jelly/jams, any brand
- Jiffy mixes, any variety
- Ramen noodles

Breakfast Items

- Instant powdered milk
- Condensed milk
- Small quick oats/grits/cream of wheat
- Instant oatmeal, variety packs
- Instant grits
- Fun-sized cereals, any variety
- Bisquick /pancake mix
- Instant coffee

Personal Hygiene Items

- Toothbrushes
- Toothpaste
- Travel-sized shampoos, conditioners, deodorant, lotions
- Lip balms
- Bar soaps

Other accepted items

- Umbrellas
- Winter gloves, hats, coats
- New socks

With Gratitude to Our Generous Donors

Major Funders

Adrian Dominican Sisters • City of Detroit Neighborhood Opportunity Fund
Detroit Employment Solutions Corporation (DESC) • Dollar General
Dominican Rea Literacy Corporation • DTE Energy Foundation

Donors

Adrian Dominican Generalate
Kenneth Alter
John & Dorothy Amberger
Maureen Jean Anthony
Richard & Victoria Baks
Joanne Braund
Patrick Brown
Mary Ellen Burke
Gergory Cascione
Co.act Detroit
Lyn & Michael Crowley
Ryan Dulay
Charlene Dwyer
Ronald Eady
Espíritu Santo Charitable Fund
Kimberly Fairman
Khadija Fall
Cheryl Feit
Octavia B. Foster
Charlie Fraley
Mary Francis
Charles & Diane Gallagher
Patricia Gillis
Renaë Gowen

Kerri Green
Carol Hofer
Roseanne E. Horne
Jeffrey Kenaga
John Kluka
John Kozak
Don Lang
Elizabeth R. Lepouttre
Laura Lilac-Tate
Willa Mackey
William & Edith McKnight
Joseph Mctere
Rebecca Melville
Sharon Mills
Ed & Jan Moylan
Donna McRae-Nesbitt
Nancy Newell
Bonnie & Carl Nielsen
Danny Noble
Carol Patterson
Francine Pegues
Alma Petrini
Janette Phillips
Caitlyn Pisarski

Geralayne Pisarski
Carol Plasha
Geraldine Pleva
Joan Porter
Chris & Ruth Remus
Joseph Robinson
Greg Roy
Gigi Salka
Dennis Sawinska
Stephen & Marie Selander
Lloyd Sharper
Mary Ann Smith
Janet Stankowski, OP
Cheralyn Suggs
G.M. Swanson
Dylan Tate
Christine A. Templin
Robin Tilwick
Nancy Ann Turner
Mark Weisenthal
Janet Whittington
Edward Wilke
Sue Witham
Susan Yeghissian

In Memoriam

Cara Washington

In Appreciation of Siena's Board of Directors

Sue Witham, *Chair*
Alfred Robertson, *Vice-Chair*
John Kluka, *Secretary*

Bill McKnight
Greg Cascione
Pastor Corey Kennard

Ron Eady
Steve Wasko
Mark Weisenthal

Learner Voices

Trips

By Vicki White

Siena learner Vicki White reflects on childhood trips she took with her family.

Daddy liked to drive and was a careful driver. So, a couple of times during the summer, we would go to Virginia Beach, Virginia and Memphis Tennessee to see family. We were well-behaved on these trips. Good behavior was something Daddy and Momma expected.

We took snacks: we brought along cookies, chips, and water. Sometimes as a treat, we would stop at the Cracker Barrel. On the trip we listened to music – both gospel music and the blues.

Once we arrived, we visited aunts, uncles, and cousins. Often, we would sit outdoors and talk – usually until it was dark.

Looking back on these trips, we always had a good time. The visits were good, but it was also good to be back to our own place.



SIENA LITERACY CENTER

16888 Trinity St., Detroit, MI 48219

www.sienaliteracy.org • info@sienaliteracy.org

313-532-8404



In the Works:

Behind the Scenes at Siena

- ◆ Siena has recently partnered with the Oak Park Library to host an ESL conversation group for students to practice their English-speaking skills. The group meets through November, and students can sign up here: <https://tinyurl.com/SienaOakParkESL>
- ◆ Siena is starting a monthly tutoring support group, with afternoon and evening options. Contact Eva at eshillair@sienaliteracy.org for more information.
- ◆ We were so glad to receive 10 new Chrome-books from General Motors and Human-I-T! These devices will be a big help to some of our students who lack the technology to work from home.
- ◆ Thanks to the new Wayne State University Law students who came and volunteered at Siena as part of their orientation on August 25! Best of luck in law school this year.
- ◆ Would you rather receive this newsletter digitally? Update your preferences by calling 313-532-8404 or e-mailing info@sienaliteracy.org.

FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA:

FACEBOOK

/sienalc



SCAN ME

INSTAGRAM

@sienaliteracy



SCAN ME

TWITTER

@Siena_Literacy



SCAN ME