



Welcome to new staff
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Siena opens new classroom space
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SIENA LITERACY CENTER NEWSLETTER

CALENDAR

MARCH 31

Easter

APRIL 9-10

Eid al-Fitr, end of Ramadan

APRIL 18

[Volunteer Awards Ceremony](#), 6 pm

MAY 2

[St. Catherine of Siena Feast Day Open House](#), 10 am-2 pm

MAY 27

Memorial Day—building closed

JUNE 19

Juneteenth—building closed

JUNE 27

Student Awards Ceremony & Honor Society Induction, 6 pm

JUNE 30-JULY 1

2023-24 school year ends, 2024-25 school year begins

SEPTEMBER 5

Benefit Evening—save the date

We have many upcoming tutor workshops. Join us:

www.sienaliteracy.org/tutortrainings

Dear learners, tutors, and supporters:

Wishing you springtime greetings from Siena Literacy Center. We have a variety of events planned this spring and summer to celebrate our work in adult literacy, as we live out the Adrian Dominican Sisters' ministry of education. I hope to see you at one or more events this year, including our [Volunteer Awards Ceremony](#) in April, our [2nd Annual Open House](#) in May, and our Benefit Evening in September. You can learn more about each in the following pages.



I also want to reflect on a growing need that continues to arrive on Siena's doorstep. Our program has seen a 37% increase in demand for services, primarily among English language learners. The global migrant crisis continues to mount, and the basic and legal needs of those enrolling for services are at an all-time high. You can read about one such journey in our Student Spotlight on [page 5](#). Our new case management team, along with our dedicated intake staff, have met this challenge with grace and compassion. Please consider making a one-time or recurring donation at sienaliteracy.org so we can continue to meet this demand. Your dollars will help us purchase English learning software and headphones for pronunciation practice, assist learners with their asylum applications, and provide ongoing volunteer tutor support.

Thank you for joining us in this ministry of service. I would like to close by extending my deepest gratitude to the dedicated staff at Siena: Abdual, Bill, Bo, Crystal, Derek, Eva, Jermaine, Juliet, Katie, Marissa, Mary, Moni, Sr. Mary Anna, Yolanda, and Zoë. Your passion for the work makes this place a refuge for all who walk through our doors.

Caitlyn Pisarski, Executive Director

Welcome to our new staff!



You might have met **Moni Barbour** at the front desk where she works as our office assistant. Moni comes to Siena with a customer service background and has more than 10 years experience in medical billing, data entry, and building networks for medical offices. She is also an artist who draws and writes poetry.



As our community resource navigator, **Juliet Brown-Graves** has been a huge help to our students who need additional support. Juliet has 25 years of experience in the social services field and a bachelor's degree in human services from Siena Heights University. Juliet has expertise in helping to navigate students to better outcomes.



Crystal White joins us for the semester as our BSW intern from Wayne State University. Crystal is in the second year of her social work program and will continue in an MSW program. She hopes to work in child welfare or school social work and is currently working in schools as a social studies teacher.



Our former learning team resource coordinator, **Zoë Dixon**, has returned to us as an ESL instructor at our new location! Zoë is a native Detroitter who enjoyed a long career working in adult education in California. Besides education, she is interested in people, social justice issues, and fiber arts.

Volunteer Awards Ceremony

April 18, 2024 | 6-8pm

NORTH ROSEDALE PARK COMMUNITY HOUSE
18445 SCARSDALE ST | DETROIT, MI 48223

FOOD TRUCKS • MUSIC • DRINKS
TICKETS: \$10/PERSON

SIENA LITERACY CENTER

Scan for tickets!

Reflections on an internship at Siena

Our Wayne State University School of Social Work interns will wrap up their time with Siena this April. We don't know what we'll do without them! They reflect on their experiences below.

Marissa Johnston

It has been an incredible experience to be part of Siena's community for the past several months. I have been so fortunate to begin my work as a social worker in such a welcoming environment. While working here I have witnessed the determination and fortitude of the learners that come into the building, as well as the compassion and dedication of the tutors.

During my time at Siena, I have assisted with registering new people, making resources more accessible, gathering data for research projects to evaluate the work we are doing, as well as assisting with grant applications to continue to grow Siena's program.

As I transition into the next phase of my program, I will miss all of the welcoming faces of Siena. I am grateful for the mentorship and support I've received from the staff. I will use the knowledge I have gained as I continue supporting, advocating for, and learning from the people I encounter along my journey!

Crystal White

Siena Literacy Center is one of the most cultivated educational facilities in the city of Detroit. Siena holds to its integrity; it is diverse and displays a sense of community to every learner and the community it serves. Being a part of the Siena team is a great first step in my social work journey. Though I was a late start to the Siena family, I appreciate being welcomed to the team. Meeting new people during intakes, assisting where needed, and engaging in the exhilarating world of social work are some of the joys I have been afforded the opportunity to be a part of at Siena. Thank you so much Siena for welcoming me!!



Right: Marissa Johnston (left) and Crystal White (right), pictured with Juliet Brown-Graves, Siena's community resource navigator.



2nd Annual

OPEN HOUSE

celebrating the feast of St. Catherine of Siena

Thursday, May 2
10 am - 2 pm

Celebrate Siena Literacy Center, our patron, and our relationship with the Adrian Dominican Sisters. Connect with old friends or introduce someone new to the work we do at Siena!

All welcome.



New classroom space to house English classes



In February Siena Literacy Center partnered with St. Suzanne Cody Rouge Community to open new classroom space to house group classes for English language learners.

The space has opened with one beginning ESL class, which began February 5 and runs through May. The class meets Monday and Wednesday mornings and is taught by returning Siena staff member Zoë Dixon. New class options could be added in the future depending on need and interest.

The classes are open to both new and current Siena students. Students must register and take a placement test to ensure they are a good fit for the class.

New space and class options are very much needed for Siena’s growing population of English language learners. In the first half of the 2023-24 school year, enrollment of new ESL students has nearly tripled compared to the first half of 2022-23.

Top left: The new classroom space can hold as many as 20 students. Bottom left: Instructor Zoë Dixon and Siena program manager Eva Shillair welcome guests to the new classroom space at an open house.



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**ST. SUZANNE CODY ROUGE
COMMUNITY RESOURCE CENTER**

St. Suzanne Cody Rouge Community Resource Center rents classrooms and large spaces, hosts large community events, and provides services to children, youth and family alike. Learn more about their programs at www.stsuzannecodyrouge.org.

Are you called to tutor an ESL student?

We are always in need of all types of volunteer tutors, but right now, we have a particular need for ESL tutors, especially in the daytime hours.

We provide all training—no language experience necessary!

Visit www.sienaliteracy.org/tutor for more information, or [sign up now](#) for an upcoming orientation!



Student Spotlight: **SERIGNE BASSIROU LO**



Serigne Lo started studying English at Siena Literacy Center in November, only two weeks after he arrived in the United States from Senegal. Although he studied English on the computer back in Senegal, Serigne continues to challenge himself to improve.

“Learning English is not easy,” Serigne said. “I have one language in my thinking. I think in the other language, in French, or in my native language [Wolof].”

Serigne’s love of learning makes him a wonderful student, according to his tutor, Kevin Gordon. “Any unfamiliar word is neatly written down in his notebook for later study,” Kevin said. “Books we were

unable to get to during our tutoring sessions are scooped up and read at home before we meet again. Biographies about people who have made a difference in the world are his favorites.”

Serigne chose to come to the United States to stay with his uncle because he felt he would be safer and find more opportunities here. “I have freedom,” he said. “I can say what I’m feeling.” He is in the process of applying for asylum, and has been able to work with Siena’s community resource navigator to find additional resources.

As his English improves, Serigne hopes to get his GED and go to college to become a nurse practitioner. He was inspired to go into medicine after a good friend of his died of blood disease. “I always like to help people,” Serigne said.

Serigne hopes that others will continue to take advantage of the services offered at Siena. “My main challenge to new immigrants is to come here to learn,” he said.

Staff takes retreat at Dominican motherhouse



In November, Siena staff gathered for a retreat at the [Weber Retreat and Conference Center](#), on the campus of the Adrian Dominican Motherhouse in Adrian, Mich. The retreat was an opportunity for team building, goal setting, and learning more about the Dominican charism.

Left: Siena staff gathers for a family photo. Right: Siena executive director Caitlyn Pisarski meets with Sister Carleen Maly, O.P., director of the [Adrian Rea Literacy Center](#), after a tour of their facility.

Learner Voices

Many of our learners are working hard to improve their writing as well as their reading. Please enjoy the following pieces that Robbie and Lynette worked on in class with their tutors.

The Vegas Birthday

By Robbie

I went to Las Vegas with my sister and my daughter. We were celebrating my sister's birthday. The trip was a special treat for me; I had never taken a trip on an airplane before. The time with my family was great, but I did not enjoy some of the experiences on the airplane. We spent a long time going in circles on the ground – apparently waiting for other planes to take off. I was never able to see through the heavy clouds. My ears hurt for all the time we were in the air. The plane was really crowded.

The trip also provided some really good features. For example, another person who was waiting to get on the plane helped me through the details for boarding – and I really appreciated the help.

In Las Vegas, we walked a lot, and walking a lot meant walking one to two miles each day. We were able to find different places to eat each day. A favorite activity at night was enjoying the warm air and the way the buildings were lighted at night. We also liked being able to watch the planes and their lights at night. We could see them landing from our hotel room. We celebrated my sister's birthday with good food, including a birthday cake.

Finally, one of the best things was the way the trip made our close family even closer.

The Story of the Ladybug

By Lynette

While helping my mother with our garden, I came across a strange bug. It scared me! I had seen ladybugs, but never a bug like this. I screamed out to my mother, "There is a funny-looking bug in the garden." My mother was not moved by what I saw; she said, "Go out there and pick the greens I asked for." I asked her in the nicest way, "Can you please come out and look at this bug – it scares me!"

My mother got up and walked out to the garden. The bugs were piled together. She looked at the bug and said, "I've never seen one that looked like that. But I still think it is in the ladybug family." She shooed them away and told me, "Finish picking the greens."

I picked the greens. Later, when she was sorting the greens and watching television, she learned that the yellow ladybugs were brought to the US to fill in for the declining number of red ladybugs. She also reminded me of the importance of ladybugs in the garden.



Save the Date

Siena Benefit Evening
Thursday, September 5
Bayview Yacht Club

With Gratitude to Our Generous Donors

Major Funders

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In Honor of

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Johanna Jackson's father

The family and friends of Sr. Ann Ziemba, Sr. Ellen Schmitz,
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SIENA LITERACY CENTER

Student Evarn Spivey completed her program! Pictured with her math teacher, Bill Szczechowski.

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