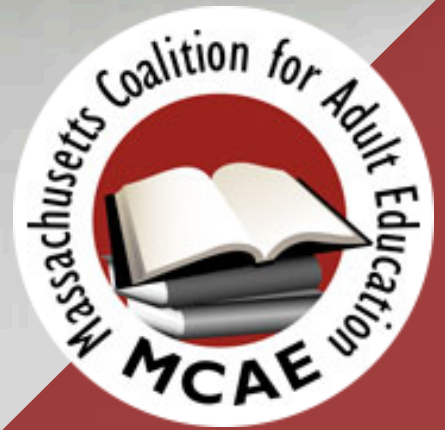


HONORING THE AWESOME



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=====	2024

MAY 1, 2024

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NETWORK 2024 is a day for rejoicing and finding inspiration from those around you, especially this year's awesome award honorees.

Today, we celebrate them and the extraordinary things that ordinary people can do.

Congratulations to the 2024 Award Winners!

OUTSTANDING EDUCATOR
CHERIE MCCOMB

OUTSTANDING STUDENT
DAMARIS CIPRIANO

RUTH E. DERFLER SCHOLARSHIP AWARD
ERIKA CECILIA DOMINGUEZ MEJIA

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CONTRIBUTOR	  <i>Boston Area Education & Career Planning Center</i>

OUTSTANDING EDUCATOR

CHERI MCCOMB

Literacy Volunteers of the Montachusett Area - Fitchburg

Cherie is a long-time educator who's active in her church and has made a deep commitment to her community. During her career, she operated a pre-school from her home, taught second grade for twenty years, and served as an elementary school principal. After retiring from full-time employment, she continued to be a dedicated educator.

Cherie became a part-time supervisor of student teachers for Fitchburg State University and a volunteer tutor with Literacy Volunteers of the Montachusett Area (LVMont) in Fitchburg. After completing LVMont's Basic Literacy Tutor Training, she tutored adults with limited literacy skills to read and write.

During the recent refugee influx in Massachusetts, LVMont was overwhelmed with many requests to help groups of immigrants in nearby communities, including Gardner. LVMont put out a call for help, and Cherie swiftly answered that call. Working with LVMont, Cherie not only offered to help but took the lead to start an initiative without funds, enough volunteers, or an established plan.

Cherie is well known and well-loved in the community. Her kind nature, dedication and enthusiasm allowed her to recruit volunteers and raise the needed funds. She actively reached out to potential donors and raised \$1500 within a day and a half for this initiative. She reached out to the retired teacher community, instantly recruiting volunteers. Once the word spread that she was looking for volunteers, she started receiving many phone calls from people asking to volunteer or help in other ways.

She spent hours planning and preparing the lessons, coordinating all the volunteers, and communicating with LVMont and other community partners. As a result of her standout efforts, LVMont set up weekly two-hour English classes with 17 volunteers to teach 41 new immigrants and their children under five years of age.

But Cherie didn't just stop at providing English language instruction. This refugees arrived before winter and had no warm clothing, so Cherie and her team of volunteers mobilized to collect snow boots, warm clothes, hats, and gloves for them. The adults had to walk with their laundry to another building but had no laundry baskets



OUTSTANDING EDUCATOR

CHERI MCCOMB

Literacy Volunteers of the Montachusett Area - Fitchburg

to carry their clothes, quarters needed for the laundry machines, or laundry detergent. Once again, Cherie and her team collected money to gift all families a laundry basket, detergent, rolls of quarters, toiletries, and toys for the children.

Her efforts did not go unnoticed and are a great example for other volunteers setting up similar services in different towns. The Gardner press wrote an article about the English classes, and volunteers from neighboring Westminster asked for advice and guidance to set up the same initiative in their town.

One of the community partner organizations that works with the immigrants reported "The students attending the Monday sessions are VERY happy with how the sessions are going and they report that they are learning so much with the volunteers. So, I hope you know that there is a really good thing happening because of your organization and volunteers! A massive thank you to them."

Without Cherie's dedication and compassion, this initiative would not have been the huge success that it has and these adults would be without desperately needed services. Clearly, Cherie is an empathetic powerhouse, a dedicated leader, and an outstanding educator.

OUTSTANDING STUDENT

DAMARIS CIPRIANO

Notre Dame Education Center - Lawrence

Damaris Cipriano came to the US two and a half years ago from Brazil with her husband Filipe as part of a church mission. Her search for an ESOL class led her to Notre Dame Education Center in Lawrence (NDEC-L), which has benefited from her empathy, compassion, and activism ever since.



Damaris is a pillar of emotional support, a humble and effective leader in various environments. With grace and care, she helps everyone in her community, family and church members, students and staff at NDEC-L.

At her church, Damaris organizes and teaches English as a second language, directs community plays, and helps her husband with pastoral duties. At NDEC-L, Damaris organizes social gatherings among students, provides translation and resource support for Portuguese speaking students, tutors two students daily, is an active member of both our leadership and ADEI teams, advises NDEC-L administration, and is currently taking an ambassador training course through COABE. She also volunteers for the American Red Cross as a Disaster Action Team Member, which entails responding to emergency situations to provide translation, food, shelter, clothing, and comfort- and sometimes working through the night to help those in need. Even after such an evening, Damaris will come to tutor students at our center the next day!

Damaris works with her instructor and advisor to check in with her classmates continuously to be sure they have what they need to succeed in whatever they are doing at the time. Here are some examples of how Damaris helps individuals:

On one occasion, a fellow student learned that her mother passed away just moments before class was scheduled to start. Damaris forfeited the class and accompanied the student to her home, to comfort her and to help her classmate cope with making the necessary arrangements surrounding her mother's death.

On a separate occasion, when it became clear that another classmate was coming to school hungry, Damaris began to bring extra snacks to school for all to share, so that her classmate could eat, but not be singled out.

On still another occasion, Damaris heard about an NDEC-L student who had been living in a single room with her husband and 10 year old son. When this family was finally able to rent a larger

OUTSTANDING STUDENT

DAMARIS CIPRIANO

Notre Dame Education Center - Lawrence

apartment, they did not have the money or resources to furnish their new space. Damaris rallied her church community to donate furnishings for every single room in the student's new home.

Damaris says, "I am an ambassador of Notre Dame Center Education, because I desire that other immigrants learn English, and receive the same friendly reception that I had. Not only to study here but that they also feel part of a diverse cultural community that accepts them how they are, and celebrates the achievements of each student. As an ambassador, I try to motivate the other students, help them with the difficulties in language, indicate other places to help them, give hope and love, and show them everything is possible when you have Faith."

Damaris's heart has no limits and she is willing to help everyone, regardless of their language or culture. When asked what brings her joy, she responded, "When I can put a smile on someone else's face and encourage them to keep going." She also enjoys going on hikes with her husband and traveling to new places whenever she has the opportunity. She loves Brazilian barbeque, having company at her home, and sharing meals together. Damaris is a treasure to Notre Dame Education Center, a force for love, and we are privileged to work with her.

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RUTH E. DERFLER MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP

ERIKA CECILIA DOMINGUEZ MEJIA

Intergenerational Literacy Program - Chelsea

My name is Erika Dominguez. I am from El Salvador. I came to the US in 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic affected everyone. I was 20 years old. I could not complete my higher education. I had the opportunity to be reunited with my father after many years.

I grew up with my mother, who had to leave everything behind in our native country because living there was so dangerous and difficult.

I decided to study English to improve my opportunities as an immigrant. I found the Intergenerational Literacy Program in Chelsea, where they opened their doors and gave me ESL classes, and later on, I took the HISET test. They offered me so many resources to succeed and pursue higher education. It has always been my dream to be able to go to college and help my family. It was difficult for me because I could not work for months. They connected me to a program where they helped me to work in a local nursing home. Working with seniors is a rewarding job. I am so lucky to have grown up with my grandmother. I know the elderly years could be difficult, but being able to help them with compassion, respect, and empathy makes me appreciate it.

I feel passionate about working in health care. My goal is to be a Licensed Practical Nurse. I know it will not be easy, but I am committed to doing my best and do not give up. Success is the result of perseverance and dedication. I want to help others, giving back to the community through my service as exceptional care, in a grateful way for everything that I have received from my community.



RUTH E. DERFLER MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP

ERIKA CECILIA DOMINGUEZ MEJIA

Intergenerational Literacy Program - Chelsea

My community is made of immigrants with different backgrounds and nationalities, and representing them in health care will be a pleasure. Therefore, I am applying for this certificate program at North Shore Community College, which I plan to attend for Fall 2024. It is a 10-month certificate that prepares students with knowledge and experience to compete for standard nursing practice in different settings.

I will always be grateful to those who helped me pursue my goals. They helped me by sharing resources, training, knowledge, time, and advice. I know the pathway is long, but I am taking it step by step and engaging with my goal and the person I want to become.

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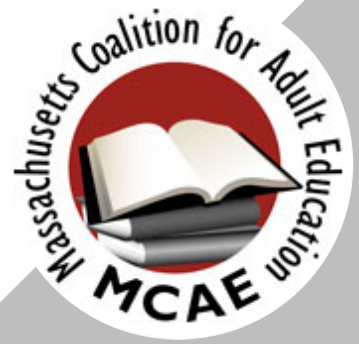
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2 **Serve under-served communities**

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With our partners, MCAE has also supported the Fair Share Amendment, the Safe Communities Act and, most recently, affordable and accessible high quality early education and care.

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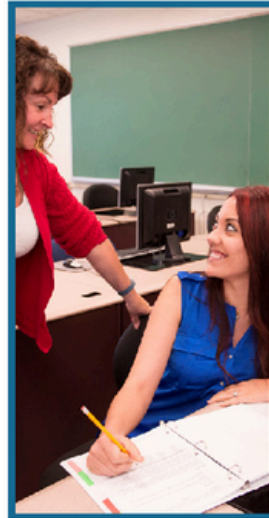
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COMMITTEE MEMBERS AND BOARD OF DIRECTORS

for managing all the details that made the day successful

AWARD RECIPIENTS

for inspiring all of us to do more and to do better

ALL THE PEOPLE WHO ATTENDED

for joining us for a day of learning, celebration and camaraderie