



Spring 2008

MassAAL Newsletter

Massachusetts Alliance for Adult Literacy

Funded by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education & Supported by SABES (System for Adult Basic Education Support)

MassAAL Hires New Project Coordinator

By Ernest Best

Jeff Herman is the newest member to join our team as the Project Coordinator, working directly with Ernest Best, MassAAL Director. He will also be working with the MassAAL Student Leadership Regional Teams in all five regions of the state. He took the long way to get here. Immediately after graduating from college at the University of California, Santa Barbara with a degree in Political Science, he left for Europe, then the Middle East, then Africa, then Asia, spending the next 22 years of his life living outside of the United States. He worked for the United Nations in several of its divisions for 17 years, nine of which were spent working in refugee camps in Central America.

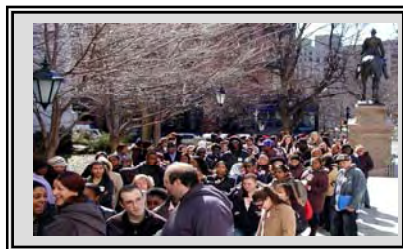
In Costa Rica he was elected chair of Democrats Abroad and was a member of the Board of Advisors to the Salvation Army. While there, he hosted

radio programs and wrote for both national and international newspapers.

Twelve years ago he traded his life in the tropics for the cement covered city of Boston. Most of all, he misses his horses and the monkeys he could hear when he woke up in the morning. It's a different kind of jungle here!

Adult Literacy Awareness Day 2008

By Ernest Best



One of the largest events for the field of adult literacy ever!

Once again the adult learners of Massachusetts show why they're the greatest in the nation. Not to be outdone by the enormous success of last year's State House event, current students and graduates of adult basic education, ESOL and GED programs once again

turned out in full force to show their support for the field of adult literacy which does so much to change lives.

The turnout was impressive! There were in the neighborhood of a thousand students in attendance. This year's student speaker, Donna Pomponio, was electrifying with a moving story that typifies our students' perseverance in the face of adversity to reach their goals.

We are thankful to all of the organizations that again showed their support for MassAAL. In particular, the Massachusetts Coalition for Adult Education (MCAE) collaborated with MassAAL to conduct trainings that helped students speak effectively with elected officials, and tell the stories of the positive impact that adult education has had on their lives.

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We were fortunate that on Adult Literacy Awareness Day, Thursday, March 13, 2008, most of the members of the Massachusetts House of Representatives and State Senate were present at the State House because of important votes being taken that day. Elected officials were obviously impressed with a thousand students in the State House. There was no doubt that this year's event made a significant impact and raised the level of awareness of the great work done by the field of adult literacy and the need for capacity building in this area.



I Dared to Dream Because of GED

By Donna Pomponio

Recently I was presented with the MassAAL Special Recognition Award at the MassAAL Student Leadership Conference, which took place on May 16th in Holyoke, MA. I received the award for what MassAAL calls my "ability to overcome overwhelming obstacles and still achieve my educational goals."

In a speech that I'd given at this year's MassAAL Adult Literacy Awareness Day at the Massachusetts State House where I was invited to be one of the main speakers, I talked about my journey starting back in the early 70's when, unable to continue my education in a traditional high school setting, I took full advantage of earning a GED. I shared the feeling of hope and the dreams I dared to dream because of that GED; it gave me the courage to look ahead, and it also gave me a way out. With a GED, I no longer felt behind my traditional classmates but I actually felt as though I had an equal footing with them. I began to have a sense of belonging and I began to feel that I could fit in and compete. I also shared with you my dream of post-secondary

education and how that dream was never forgotten, only deterred by life's twist and turns. And my greatest joy is that I did finally receive my college degree in May 2007.

You spoke back to me at the conference in Holyoke. You shared your own journey with me and I was so moved by your dedication, courage, and enthusiasm. I was moved and reminded by the fact that we are all in this journey together. The names and the faces change from year to year, but the fight never stops. As we continue to fight for funding to keep adult basic education programs alive, we must remember where we would be without alternative education programs. I know I would not be here today without that GED.

My work as teacher, mentor, case manager and soon to be program coordinator for the High School Diploma Program at Notre Dame Education Center are all due to the basic fundamental tools offered to me through an alternative education program.

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I Dared to Dream

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It is important to let our voices be heard on this issue throughout the year with fellow students so that again next spring, when we are asked to join together in solidarity during Adult Literacy Awareness Day at the State House, we can collectively let our voices be heard where it matters – with our legislators. Please continue to spread the word to your fellow classmates and let your voices be heard even louder and stronger next year when we all come together again for this worthy cause. Remember, our demand for educational funding is a basic human right that we all deserve.

Let's make it an annual gathering with past and present students doing what we do best, *one dream, one person, one diploma at a time*. I hope to see all of you again and hear about all of your successes at that time.

And remember that wonderful African concept Archbishop Desmond Tutu reminds us to think of "ubuntu", recognizing our interdependence and connectedness as human beings, as you work together.

Join MassAAL

MassAAL 2008 Student Leadership Conference

By Ernest Best

For the first time, this year's Student Leadership Conference took place in the western region of the state at Holyoke Community College.

Along with everyone in attendance, I was impressed by the college's state of the art facilities. Adult learners deserve the best, and I'm sure they feel privileged to attend their classes in this brand new building.

We were fortunate to have the proceedings opened by the inspirational words of Jeff Hayden, Vice President for Business and Community Affairs at Holyoke Community College.

By popular demand, Anne Serino of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE/formerly called the Department of Education), returned as keynote speaker. Ever since she made her first appearance speaking at the MassAAL Student Leadership Conference, students have asked for her to come back to speak each year. Her speech once again expressed her respect for adult learners, which is so important to us as current students and graduates of adult education programs.



Students and practitioners were pleased with the various workshops that were offered and conducted by students. They were just the best!

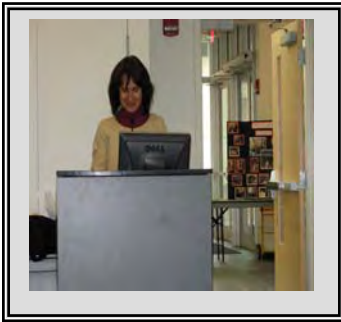
I was particularly impressed with the workshop, "Dancing to Relieve Stress." That workshop gave great information on how dancing had many health benefits, but what we enjoyed most of all was how the dance instructor had everyone who completed the workshop ready to audition for *Dancing with the Stars!*

The Special Recognition Award went to Donna Pomponio, a former student who has faced unbelievable barriers to her education and yet overcame all those obstacles. She is soon to be named program coordinator of the Notre Dame Education Center in Boston. I encourage all to read her story that exemplifies her triumph over tragedy. You can find it in this edition on page 2.



**Announcing the
MassAAL
Stephen Hanley
Award**

Stephen Hanley, Director of Waitt House, has been a tireless advocate of student leadership and long-time friend of MassAAL. In honor of Steve's dedicated service to adult learners, MassAAL is pleased to announce a new award in his name, to be given each year to the person who best exemplifies MassAAL's commitment to student leaders and adult learners.



This year, the *Stephen Hanley Award* was given for the first time to a program director who has involved her learners in student leadership activities, in MassAAL events, and demonstrated making student leadership a part of the program culture. No other program has shown that more than the Haitian Multi Service Center, so we are proud to honor Sara Jorgensen, this year's *Stephen Hanley Award for the Program Director of the Year*.



Announcement

The **MassAAL ALERT** is the A d u l t L e a r n e r E d u c a t i o n g & R e g i s t r a t i o n g T r a i n i n g. It doubles as a civic engagement/political empowerment and leadership development project where adult learners take charge of this initiative within their classrooms, their entire programs, and out into their various communities.

The MassAAL ALERT gives power to adult learners by having them become registered voters around the issue of Adult Basic Education (ABE). Through this registration campaign, a "voting block" is formed to support the field of adult education.

Encourage your +students to be involved in this innovative and empowering voter registration drive that is good for the field of ABE statewide.

To involve your program in our next group of training workshops or to arrange a visit to your program, use the contact information below.

Ernest Best,
MassAAL Director



MassAAL extends a special thanks to:



*Michele Sedor
Associate Coordinator/
Resource Coordinator
SABES West*

&

*George Kohout
Regional Director
SABES West*

&

*Luanne Teller
SABES CRC Director
World Education*

&

*Carey Reid
World Education*

&

*Ruzica Banovic
World Education*

&

Everyone in the western region who worked so hard to help make the MassAAL Student Leadership Conference such a wonderful, successful event.



One dream, one person, one diploma at a time.

*If you know someone who would like to join MassAAL,
please ask to fill the form out and mail to us.*

**Join MassAAL Today:
Make Your Voice Heard**

MassAAL is the voice for the adult learner in Adult Basic Education (ABE), English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), and GED programs in Massachusetts. MassAAL assists the adult learner in developing lifelong leadership skills, creates public awareness about the need for adult literacy, and strengthens the adult learner's voice in shaping public policy for adult literacy services in Massachusetts. MassAAL empowers adult learners by helping them to have a collective voice in how their ABE programs are run.

How to Join MassAAL

- Fill out the form below and mail it to the address provided.
- Pay \$1.00 dues if you are an adult learner or former adult learner.
- Pay \$5.00 dues if you are a teacher or other ABE supporter.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____

Zip _____ Phone () _____

Date _____ Program attending _____

Email Address _____

Event where recruited _____

Recruited by _____

Mail the above form to:

Ernest Best, Executive Director
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For more information please contact:

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