

# LITERACY BI-MONTHLY

McLit, Marathon County Literacy Council, Inc.

Issue 6, July 2021



*A Message*

## From the Executive Director

### **McLit Information Spewed by the Director:**

Most of us are mask-free and enjoying fresh air and trips to see family. It feels great to get out, BUT, the new school year is sneaking up on us. If you are a little rusty after nothing but virtual learning, or find yourself in need of a little help (or just a brush-up on skills), please stop by for a couple free tutoring sessions at McLit. We are ready to help all ages catch up and/or pick up where they left off. If you were having troubles before, be sure to check us out and find out how we can help. Anything to do with

math, reading, writing, and computers - we will do our best to improve your life skills. Also check out our new reading program for parents and children ages two to five. Share-a-Story has a leader with the expertise to improve your child's reading skills.

In addition, our summer health interns added nutritional and mental health information to the McLit website at [mclitofwausau.org](http://mclitofwausau.org). Please check it out!

**Connie Heidemann, Executive Director, McLit**  
Phone: 715-679-6170, email: [mclitofwausau@gmail.com](mailto:mclitofwausau@gmail.com)

## Introduction

Welcome to our July newsletter! In the following pages, we share updates from McLit, local literacy news, and feature profiles of our hardworking interns and team members.

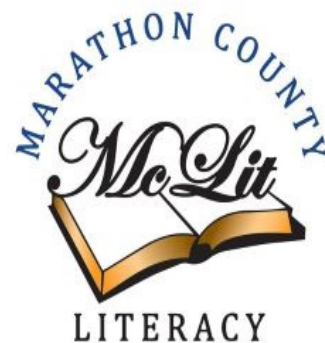
As always, McLit has continued to support local literacy through its education center, outreach, and partnerships.

June and July were busy months for McLit, which celebrated its open house and ribbon cutting, helped mentor another class of Joseph Project participants, took part in the Wausau School District's summer programming, and welcomed many new learners, volunteers, and tutors. Whew, that's a lot!

We invite you to read even more about all these activities inside this month's edition of our newsletter.

In the weeks ahead, we look forward to tabling at the Wisconsin Valley Fair in Wausau, August 3-8, as well as the 47th annual Children's Festival, August 28. Both will be held in Wausau's Marathon Park.

If anyone is interested in volunteering at either of these events, please contact McLit at 715-679-6170, email: [mclitofwausau@gmail.com](mailto:mclitofwausau@gmail.com). **McLit**



## Who we are

Our mission: *Improve quality of life through literacy.*

We are a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to the students who enter our program(s). We provide free tutoring services to Marathon County and surrounding areas.

We support and promote literacy at all ages. Areas of instruction include reading, writing, math, finance, health, workforce, computers, ESL/ELL.



## AHEC interns cultivate health outreach program at McLit

By Johanna Nelson

COVID-19 vaccines, mental health, and nutrition education are front-and-center for McLit this summer with the help of college interns through Wisconsin Area Health Education Centers' community, public, and population health program.

Known as the Community Health Internship Program, students across the state have the opportunity to partner with local health departments, tribal and community health centers, and community service organizations for an eight-week internship.

Each summer, North Central AHEC Executive Director Nicole Thill, Susan Wurzer, and Sheng Khang (both Education and Outreach Coordinators), manage the North Central region of the CHIP program.

"The CHIP program is a win-win-win for the interns, host sites, and AHEC centers. The experiences prepare students for real-life work in community-based health organizations," says Khang,

noting that students are exposed to, and can serve, special populations and cultures. "They are given the opportunity to learn from the wisdom of their mentors and other experienced staff. The work experience adds to their foundation of knowledge, professional development, and marketability."

McLit is excited to have three CHIP interns in its inaugural year with the program. Throughout June and July, they have been engaged in extensive research projects to build up the literacy council's health literacy resources.

McLit's summer interns include sophomore Morgan Gibbs, a biochemistry major with an emphasis in pre-medicine at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point; junior Aerial Thao, also a biochemistry major with an emphasis in pre-medicine at UWSP; and senior Vasu Rishi, a nutritional science major pursuing a global health minor with a pre-medicine emphasis at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

"Our CHIP interns make an incredible team," says Connie Heidemann, executive director, McLit. "They have been

*See AHEC, Page 3*



*AHEC, from Page 2*

working hard to create well-researched health information that will benefit our staff, volunteers, learners, and the community.”

And when it comes to hard work, the CHIP team has not been afraid to roll up their sleeves and jump right in. They began their sojourn with McLit by surveying the Wausau community to learn more about their health interests and concerns. After responses were tallied and analyzed, the results helped determine their focus for the weeks ahead. Since survey respondents indicated mental health and nutrition were important to them, Gibbs, Thao, and Rishi decided to create two websites dedicated to these health topics. The websites cover a wide range of material including reading nutritional labels, healthy recipes, local food banks, nutritional education, different types of mental health disorders, ways to cope with stress, and healthy lifestyle choices, among others. Information was obtained from authoritative and research-backed sources, with plenty of links for those in need of more information.

This rich source of information can be found under the “News” section of McLit’s website at [mclitofwausau.org](http://mclitofwausau.org). Site visitors also can view an infographic that links to audio interviews with the National Alliance on Mental Illness, Community Corner Clubhouse, and a local resident who has struggled with mental illness and addiction issues.

“We want to help our community, especially the less fortunate, experience a better quality of life through health education,” Thao says.

Additional activities include COVID vaccination outreach to agricultural, plain clothes or Amish, and Hispanic communities; creating a flyer that provides contact information for local mental health resources; appearances on local TV news stations; and a final presentation that will inform the other North Central CHIP participants, staff, and locations/host sites about the health materials designed for McLit.

The interns also will be busy meeting and talking with members of the community at the upcoming Hmong Wausau Festival 2021 and the Wisconsin Valley Fair. These venues will provide further opportunity to share health information, distribute their visual and written educational materials, and engage in additional outreach for vaccine promotion.

“It’s been a lot of fun meeting new friends and interacting with a new community,” says Gibbs, an Amherst, Wis., native new to the Wausau area.

Moving forward, McLit will have an even larger pool of resources to pull from. Heidemann notes that

now more than ever, it is essential for people to keep themselves healthy, both mentally and physically. She thinks the community will benefit greatly from having easy and ready access to up-to-date and accurate health information, thanks to the CHIP program and the hard-working interns.



“Students have eager and fresh minds and are curious to question and learn, which can lead to improvements within the organization,” Khang says. “CHIP is also often a learning opportunity for staff.”

Johanna Nelson, McLit team member and CHIP mentor, knows firsthand how beneficial the program can be for host sites. She says she is learning as much as she is mentoring since the interns bring with them a wealth of knowledge, experience, and enthusiasm.

“Working with the interns has been a wonderful experience,” Nelson adds. “It has helped me with my communication and listening skills as well as reminded me that there still is plenty to learn when it comes to new ways to share information.”

The interns also have benefited from their time at McLit, taking advantage of the opportunity to meet and learn about community members from all walks of life. Nelson notes this opportunity will help shape them into medical professionals with compassion and understanding.

“CHIP is a great internship opportunity for students interested in the public and community health fields,” Rishi adds. “It gives them more experience toward what they will be doing in the future, and better insight into the communities they will serve.”

**McLit**

## Meet McLit's CHIP interns: Morgan Gibbs

### ■ What drew you to McLit as a site to complete your CHIP internship?

I was drawn to McLit for a few reasons. The main being the community-based work that they perform and the sense of family bonding they gave off. I could tell just from their website that they had a tight-knit staff and treated everyone as if it was their own family member.

### ■ What internship-related activities do you most enjoy doing, and why?

I enjoy reaching out to people in the community and creating relationships with people who have similar goals, ideas, and desires as I do.

### ■ What has been a struggle?

The biggest struggle that I think we encountered during our research was trying to get feedback from the community as well as when reaching out to people to partner with them. Most companies (or even people in general) would not respond, which made our work much more difficult.

### ■ How will this experience help you reach your academic and career goals?

This experience will help me reach my goals by allowing me to have better insight on community health and have a better understanding of the types of people in the local community. This understanding will help me work with patients better, and be more compassionate toward them.

### ■ What is your major/minor, and how far along are you in your schooling?

I am a biochemistry major with an emphasis on pre-medicine at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point. This fall I will be a sophomore, and I am also hoping to graduate a semester early (December 2023).

### ■ What made you decide to choose this career path?

That is a loaded question. It is one that is always personal and difficult to explain, but an important one, nonetheless. I could tell you that I have always wanted to be a doctor, and I have always loved science, but that would be a lie. Frankly, growing up I wanted to work for NASA and become an astronomer or an astronautical engineer. I loved space, and I thought that was my goal. But as I became older, broke more bones, and had more health issues, it became more apparent to me that I wanted to help someone the way the physicians helped me, or even more so when



they didn't help me. When I broke my first bone, I was 9. The physician reassured me the entire time and made me feel heard and safe. The physician helped me pick out a color for my cast and made me feel like I was invincible. He even let me look at the X-rays and showed me exactly where my bone was buckled and fractured. When I got my first concussion, my perspective on the physicians changed completely. The doctor disregarded me and made me feel as if I was an annoyance to him. By this point, I had had a few minor incidences with physicians with multiple misdiagnoses that should have been very clear, and various other problems. My concussion was the breaking point where I realized that I wanted to become a physician and try to prevent a patient from feeling like I did as a kid growing up. I wanted to be a physician like the one who helped me with my first broken bone. I wanted to make sure that no kid ever felt unheard and uncared for by a physician. And that is one of the reasons I decided that I wanted to become a physician.

### ■ List a few big takeaways from this internship experience

A few takeaways that I learned is that people do not really care about collaborating and focus on themselves. It is extremely difficult to find people who are willing to help better the community and help others do good things. I also learned that our community has needs that I never knew about.

### ■ What do you enjoy doing in your free time?

I enjoy hiking, kayaking, and camping in my free time. I love to travel and explore the outdoors. I also enjoy working with and showing my chickens and turkeys at local fairs in central Wisconsin.

### ■ What are your favorite things to read?

I love to read romance novels. I'm a sucker for a good love story, haha.

~MG



## Meet McLit's CHIP interns: Vasu Rishi

### ■ What drew you to McLit as a site to complete your CHIP internship?

The McLit site serves as an education center for adult and child literacy. Education is very influential in how we make decisions regarding our physical and mental health, I was drawn to the objective of McLit in providing education as I know how impactful it can be to the health of our community. I have always been interested in health education as I know that there are so many misunderstandings regarding many different issues such as mental health and obesity, and I hope through this site I can clarify these misunderstandings in our community.

### ■ What internship-related activities do you most enjoy doing, and why?

I enjoy researching more about our projects (mental health, nutrition and first aid) because I always learn something new!

### ■ What has been a struggle?

Community outreach has definitely been a struggle for our group since we did not get much affiliation with organizations due to the lack of time/resources. There were a lot of communication and feedback issues we had that resulted in our progress becoming slower.

### ■ How will this experience help you reach your academic and career goals?

This experience will allow me to better understand the healthcare needs of my community. As I progress toward my professional career, I will be better equipped to handle the local issues that arise within the healthcare setting. Academically, this experience allows me to apply my global health minor experience in the real world. My minor consists of understanding the marginalized communities and how their health is impacted by a lower socioeconomic status, less accessibility to healthcare resources, and other global issues. I was able to see all of that through this internship and learn the value of education regarding healthcare.

### ■ What is your major/minor, and how far along are you in your schooling?

I am a nutritional science major and a global health minor. I am going to be a senior in the upcoming fall at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

### ■ What made you decide to choose this career path?



I chose this career path because my experience so far in the medical field has given me satisfaction. Health should be a priority for many individuals, and I want to be able to encourage and guide others in improving their health. By attaining the role of a physician, I will be more educated and will be able to make difficult decisions that can benefit the well-being of my community.

### ■ List a few big takeaways from this internship experience

The internship experience allowed me to understand more about the Wausau community from a public health aspect. I did not know there was such an educational crisis in all the issues our community faces. I also learned a lot about the non-profit organizations that are trying to provide aid to those in need. I did not know that such a large amount of our population relies on these resources for survival.

### ■ What do you enjoy doing in your free time?

In my free time I enjoy playing with my dog and participating in sports. I also like to stay informed of the current events that are occurring nationally and internationally. I have also been working on my garden over the summer to grow fresh crops.

### ■ What are your favorite things to read?

My favorite things to read would probably be magazines/articles regarding the current stock market trends. I would like to be more financially responsible so I have developed goals for reading more literature regarding economic issues and how I can best set myself up for an economically stable future. ~VR

## Meet McLit's CHIP interns: Aerial Thao

### ■ What drew you to McLit as a site to complete your CHIP internship?

I was interested in McLit because I wanted to learn more about what McLit was and how it impacted the community.

### ■ What internship-related activities do you most enjoy doing, and why?

I really enjoyed building our website for our mental health and nutrition projects. I enjoyed thinking about what topics in mental health and nutrition would be most interesting and helpful for the Wausau community.

### ■ What has been a struggle?

I have learned more about the importance of communication. It is immensely difficult to accomplish goals when there is no support or help from others.

### ■ How will this experience help you reach your academic and career goals?

This experience has made me more aware of my community's physical and mental wellbeing. It has shown me how important communication is between physicians and other health workers. In order to provide the best medical care to an individual, a team of healthcare professionals from different areas of health must work together.

### ■ What is your major/minor, and how far along are you in your schooling?

I will be starting my third year at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point in the fall, and I am majoring in biochemistry with an emphasis in pre-med.

### ■ What made you decide to choose this career path?

I have always had an interest in helping people and working with medicine. The human body is remarkable, and I wanted to continue my education in learning more about how it functions and how to care for it.



### ■ List a few big takeaways from this internship experience

One takeaway that I learned during this experience is that there are so many resources available for the public. McLit has shown me resources in Wausau that help those who are struggling. It made me realize how connected and caring my community is. Also, this internship has allowed me to interact with a population that I do not normally interact with. I have learned how to communicate different health topics to people who have limited health literacy, and I have been able to advocate for health literacy by creating resources which explain topics like mental health and nutrition.

### ■ What do you enjoy doing in your free time?

I love being outside with my friends and family. In the summertime, I enjoy hiking and kayaking.

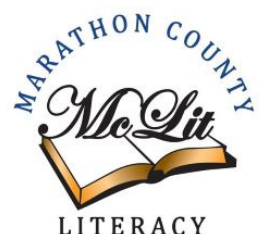
### ■ What are your favorite things to read?

I enjoy reading books or articles. I don't really have a favorite genre because I tend to read a little bit about everything.

~AT



**LEFT:** It's a battle of the interns as the CHIP-sters take on AmeriCorps volunteer Hunter in a competitive game of Uno.





# Thank you to our generous sponsors!



**ABOVE:** McLit is always appreciative of **United Way** and its support of local literacy. Thank you for the many boxes of adult and children's books!



McLit extends a heart-felt thank you to **Incredible-Bank Foundation** for its generosity. The foundation has donated books, floor mats, and funding for financial workbooks. **ABOVE:** Reece and Hunter explore an array of business books from IBF.



**RIGHT:** A big thank you to **Deluxe** for its gift of office supplies!

# AmeriCorps, McLit team up for summer education program

By Hunter Gnatz

McLit serves as a beacon for the Wausau community, where one can receive assistance with almost any problem they can face. However, McLit is a 501(c)(3), and as a result, relies upon volunteers to make up the majority of its staff. One might think that support would thus be limited, as people would need to make exceptions from their busy schedules to fit in some volunteer work, but this is not the case. Enter AmeriCorps, the employees of which serve directly with nonprofit organizations.

AmeriCorps is a civil society program supported by the federal government as well as numerous corporate backers. It employs adults in public service positions in their community. AmeriCorps is often seen as a domestic PeaceCorps, and their goals are largely the same.

It is not a conglomerate, but several smaller organizations that manage a group of volunteers and outreach in their community. For Marathon County, the North Central Community Action Program, directed by Steve Frodl, is the region's local AmeriCorps organization. Its mission is simple: "You strengthen communities and develop leaders through direct, team-based national and community service."

For McLit, Hunter Gnatz and Reece Harding are the local summer volunteers.

Gnatz is the grandson of Conradine Heidemann, McLit executive director, and has previously (although very sparsely), worked with McLit. This summer he does so officially through AmeriCorps.

On the topic of McLit, Gnatz has this to say: "I'm proud of my grandmother for her determination in revitalizing this program. McLit is a beacon of support in the community."

Harding is a sophomore at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire majoring in computer science. He recently moved to Wausau, and chose McLit as his service site because: "I've lived in Germany for the last year and was so grateful for all those who made my transition to the local culture and language seamless. I want to repay that kindness given to me by helping English language learners adapt to life in America."

Frodl adds: "The need for positive, adult male role models is significant in our greater Wausau Area community. Both Harding and Gnatz bring this perspective to the students and adult learners they serve."

The two young men are far from being the only AmeriCorps members to have served at McLit,

however. From the very first day of McLit moving to its current location at 515 North 3rd Street, AmeriCorps members have assisted McLit. AmeriCorps volunteers Olivia, Emily, and Hailey assisted in renovations last summer while Jarod assisted the literacy council two summers ago. Recently, Ligia completed a year-long term as an English language learning tutor.

Harding and Gnatz were given some idea of what to expect from McLit, but the nature of the center has proven to throw new challenges and experiences at them daily.

While they have both worked with individuals who needed some assistance with literacy, the majority of the pair's students have needed guidance in matters like apartment and job applications, learning how to use technology, and typing. Gnatz notes that some students need general assistance with life in adulthood, as familial circumstances forced them to enter into adulthood with little preparation.

Their term has certainly been quite a learning curve, as Harding expresses in the quote: "It's a bit challenging to put myself in the student's shoes," and Hunter in: "I am not a very outgoing person, so having to tutor has been a bit of a challenge."

Through McLit, the two have not only impacted their students, but have themselves been impacted by the literacy center.

"AmeriCorps volunteers have been an instrumental aspect of our literacy center; their assistance in all facets of our mission have helped us to succeed," Heidemann says.

**McLit**



**Reece and Hunter help their student, Aubrey, brush up on her computer skills.**



# Meet McLit's AmeriCorps volunteers: Hunter Gnatz

## ■ What drew you to McLit as a site to complete your AmeriCorps internship?

I have been here previously, and have always enjoyed the work assigned to me, and saw that what was being done here was making a real difference. So when the offer came up to join McLit for the summer, I took it.

## ■ What internship-related activities do you most enjoy doing, and why?

I tend to enjoy tasks like redesigning the website and working with students more so than reorganizing various portions of the site.

## ■ What has been a struggle?

I am not a very outgoing person, so having to tutor has been a bit of a learning curve, but I have found it enjoyable.

## ■ How will this experience help you reach your academic and career goals?

If I do achieve my end goals and receive my dream job, then I will more than likely be working with volunteers, and receiving donations. Both aspects of life at Marathon County Literacy.

## ■ What is your major/minor, and how far along are you in your schooling?

My major is American history, with a minor in museum studies, and I am a junior.

## ■ What made you decide to choose this career path?



It's always just been something I've had an interest in.

## ■ List a few big takeaways from this internship experience

The importance of social skills, and just how far vices can take you are two things that have impacted me while working at McLit.

## ■ What do you enjoy doing in your free time?

Biking, movies, video games, and exercise are usually what preoccupies me.

## ■ What are your favorite things to read?

Definitely books, but I've always loved a good magazine article.

~HG



# Meet McLit's AmeriCorps volunteers: Reece Harding

## ■ What drew you to McLit as a site to complete your AmeriCorps internship?

I was greatly drawn in by the allure of helping English language learners transition to life in America. I lived in Germany for the last year and was immensely grateful for all those who made my transition to the local culture and language seamless. I want to repay that kindness given to me by helping English language learners adapt to life in America.

## ■ What internship-related activities do you most enjoy doing, and why?

My favorite activities have been working with our language learners to help them acclimate to life in America. In particular, I love talking with one of our students named Sam about her favorite memories from her childhood in Mexico. Just the simple act of telling a story to me in English helped her get out of her shell and allowed me to view another world.

## ■ What has been a struggle?

Sometimes it can be a bit challenging to put myself in the student's shoes and understand where the communication gap is between us. For some things that seem so obvious to me, like the word 'adult,' sometimes it can be a whole process trying to conjure another term for adult and then explaining the concept.

## ■ How will this experience help you reach your academic and career goals?

I really have found it insightful to talk to people from all different backgrounds and discussing with them how they got to where they are today. This will be quite insightful in future years when empathizing with everyone we come across in life.

## ■ What is your major/minor, and how far along are you in your schooling?

I am currently a computer science major, yet my true goal is just to make the world a better place than it was when I got here - so if another opportunity arises I will greatly consider transitioning into that field. I'll be a sophomore at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire next year.

## ■ What made you decide to choose this career path?

My goal in life is to improve the world around me in the greatest way possible, irrespective of the method. It seems clear to me that the scalability of software is the most effective method by leaps and bounds, therefore



that's why I'm following a career in computer programming and development.

## ■ List a few big takeaways from this internship experience

By far, my greatest takeaway is my experience viewing the living experience of our clients at McLit. All of them have a "war story" of one sort or another of their time on the streets.

## ■ What do you enjoy doing in your free time?

I love to improve myself, in whatever form that takes at the time. Right now, for example, I'm working on programming in Python in hopes of building an app for soccer referees. Typically, though, I try to work-out as much as possible (calisthenics and running for the most part) as well as reading from history's great minds.

## ■ What are your favorite things to read?

I love to read instructive books from the greatest minds of recent times. Right now I'm reading *Shoe Dog* by Phil Knight, which speaks on how Knight started up Nike and built it to what it is today.

## ■ Any additional comments?

"A reader lives a thousand lives before he dies, said Jojen. "The man who never reads lives only one."

— George R.R. Martin, *A Dance with Dragons*

Reading really is magical, it allows you to live entire lives of others in a fraction of the time. :-)

~RH



# G2M (Growing Great Minds) Community Connection

By Judy Staszak

G2M Community Connection, separate from the Wausau School District's formal summer school activities, was an afternoon program for students in grades K-4. Throughout June and July, various community organizations such as 4-H and Monk Gardens, offered fun activities for children at various elementary schools in the district. Julie Bollman, the Out-of-School Learning Coordinator for the district, headed up the program, and McLit was happy to have volunteer Judy Staszak represent us in this educational opportunity.

Bollman notes this summer saw about 260 students participate across sites. She was very pleased with this number in light of the pandemic.

"Many of you may not know, but several of our students were 100 percent virtual prior to this summer," Bollman says. "This summer brought a reintroduction to school life as well as an opportunity for new learning."

McLit chose to read *The Peace Book*, by Todd Parker, and do an art project related to world peace and diversity. Our executive director, Connie Heidemann, reached out to Mayor Katie Rosenberg about the book and our plan, and she was happy to assist by reading to the children before each breakout session led by McLit.

After her reading, Mayor Rosenberg held a brief question-and-answer session, where children could ask her about her job, or anything that came to mind. Staszak noted that questions ranged from where Mayor Rosenberg was from, if she was considering a run for president, to "what exactly she does all day." She handled all

these questions like a pro.

Following Mayor Rosenberg's visit, the students were split into three groups for projects led by community organizations. McLit led breakaway sessions at four of the elementary schools included in the program: GD Jones Elementary, Hawthorn Hills Elementary, Lincoln Elementary, and Riverview Elementary.

Staszak directed McLit's art project, which involved making outfits and adding faces and hair to paper cutouts of people with a variety of skin tones. Participants then taped the finished "people" to a world map. She enjoyed the opportunity to work with several different populations, noting the students at each school were unique in their approach to the art project.

Some tried to make images of themselves, or a teacher, while others were more imaginative. A few of their creations included a ship's captain, a cyclops, a person with robotic limbs, a cat, and a skydiver. Another young artist cut a second person out of paper so his first could have a friend.

When the cut-outs were finished, each student put their masterpiece on the map in any location of their choice. Staszak provided help based on requests such as coldest place, specific city, or country. At the end of the session, participants got to take their creations with them, if they wanted to. One boy even taped his paper person to his arm to take home.

With help from Heidemann; McLit's summer AmeriCorps interns, Reece and Hunter; and McLit team member Jodi, the children had a lot of fun, and Staszak was happy to report she stayed sane. **McLit**





# Events Calendar

## August 2021

**Monday, August 9, 5:30 P.M. McLit Board meeting.** In person at the McLit Education Center at 515 North 3rd Street, Wausau, or online on Zoom.

**Wednesday, August 25, 11:00 A.M. The Landing Literacy Book Club,** The Landing, Woodson YMCA, 707 North 3rd Street, Wausau. The book club will discuss *Surviving The Forest* by Adiba Geffen. Join us for an interesting discussion!

## September 2021

**Monday, September 13, 5:30 P.M. McLit Board meeting.** In person at the McLit Education Center at 515 North 3rd Street, Wausau, or online on Zoom.

**Friday, September 17-Sunday, September 26. Central Wisconsin Book Festival.** Authors and schedule to be determined. As the event approaches, check [www.mcpl.us/cwbf](http://www.mcpl.us/cwbf) for more information.

**Wednesday, September 22, 11:00 A.M. The Landing Literacy Book Club,** The Landing, Woodson YMCA, 707 North 3rd Street, Wausau. Book to be determined.

McLit held its official ribbon cutting and grand opening in June. Thank you to the Greater Wausau Chamber of Commerce Ambassadors, Woody Woodchuck, Adam Sikora (our Eagle Scout-to-be), and all of our friends who came to celebrate McLit's special day!





## In Memory of Jonas Valdez

By Ligia Pineda and Jodi Schreier

Jonas came to us on a September morning a few days before his birthday. He arrived with a ninth-grade education and the goal of studying with us for his HSED through North Central Technical College.

He would usually arrive for tutoring at 10 a.m., and often would ask for a snack first. Sweets were what he liked best, and Pepsi and cookies were his favorite. Jonas really enjoyed working one-on-one, and logged many hours with us doing geometry and pre-algebra.

Our volunteer, Judy, recalls that Jonas was super polite and always sought her attention by saying "ma'am." His favorite tutor, Ligia, agrees that he was a very respectful student.

His determination and good attitude pushed him forward to complete his HSED in spring of 2021. A pizza-party celebration at McLit with staff, friends, and family followed.

Even after graduation, Jonas continued to frequent McLit as a comfortable place to work on his art. He loved to draw, and had just started painting with watercolors.

His next dream was to work toward an art minor at UW-Stevens Point. Intro to Global Art History and Drawing and Visualization were on his class wish list.

Because Jonas died so suddenly, we were unable to locate the art projects he had recently completed. He was a very generous person and loved giving his drawings away to friends. We have a feeling that these treasured works of art are scattered amongst those who loved him.

If anyone has examples to share with us here at McLit, we would love to document them in a photo. Please call 715-679-6170 or email [mcclitofwau-sau@gmail.com](mailto:mcclitofwau-sau@gmail.com).

**McLit**

**Thank you, Jonas, for coloring  
our world!**



# Brightness: A reflection on a typical day at McLit

By Jodi Schreier

The brightness of this warm July day fills us with optimism and strength. The sun's rays reach out to us like a toddler's arms. This brightness is easy to see and easy to label. What other types of brightness can we find on an average day here at McLit?

A faithful student, whom we see every Monday and Wednesday sits at her favorite spot. A birthday milestone has been reached over the weekend and our front desk volunteer, Barb, asks our student how she celebrated her special day. A soft "nothing" is the answer. Little does our student know, we have been planning a surprise of vanilla sparkly cupcakes and a melodious Happy Birthday song. In this moment, we see a spark of brightness and a smile spreads across the face of our Nancy.

The death of a student is never news that we want to hear. Even the word "death" makes us cringe with despair. Months and months of working with our very creative and happy-go-lucky student, Jonas, made him an almost permanent fixture here at McLit. Even after Jonas earned his GED, he continued to visit us to work on his art. Whether it was a cheery, yellow Tweety Bird drawing or his latest watercolor landscape, complete with a motorcycle, we cannot help but feel the corners of our mouths lighten with fond remembrance. Brightness is what Jonas was.

A colorful shelf of cardboard children's books sits

playfully on our light blue bookcase. Each child has a unique personality, and we have collected a wide selection of reads for our new Share a Story parent/child program. Whether it is a raccoon in a sailboat, a red truck in a daisy field, or a wild kite in flight, these vibrant story pages encourage children to speak and create tales for us to hear. The brightness of children surely gives us light on a sad or gloomy day.

A bookmark with a yellow tinted window passes over the sentences of a historical novel. With a slightly sunny hew, the words become a little clearer to our Dyslexic students like Diane. The truth and structure of words can be difficult for those with learning disabilities, and we gladly work one-on-one with those who view the written language differently than us. Through repetition, practice, and the artificial brightness of a blue and starry bookmark, hours of learning become days and years of smooth skills paving the road to an easier way of life. Brightness overcomes disability every time.

Sometimes brightness is youth and education like we see in our summer interns and AmeriCorps workers. Sometimes it is the invisible warmth that we give a homeless learner by offering him/her shelter on a rainy day. And sometimes, brightness is being a welcoming nonprofit that sees nothing other than a fellow human with a need. Strap on your glitter heels or your mud waders, be just who you are, and join us in creating a Wausau community of BRIGHTNESS.

**McLit**



**Congratulations to the June 2021 Joseph Project graduates!** The local chapter of the statewide program is coordinated by Pastor Yauo Yang of The Cross Church and Maggie Cronin, district scheduler for Congressman Tom Tiffany. McLit, Marathon County Republican Women, and volunteers from our community help provide support to JP participants during and after the week-long program for professional development and job procurement.



## Feature Profile: Peter King

### *Meet the newest addition to the McLit Team*



#### ■ What drew you to McLit as an organization to work for?

I've always been passionate about education and its power to build stronger, healthier communities, and I felt that working with McLit would be an exceptional way to contribute to this mission. Acknowledging that improving literacy is a valuable part of all our lives, regardless of background, I was drawn to McLit's approach in empowering individuals to accomplish their personal goals while reaching as many people as possible.

#### ■ How long have you been with McLit?

I began working with McLit at the end of May.

#### ■ What are your main roles and responsibilities?

While I will often help with tutoring, I mostly work on development and fundraising projects, program organization, and data management.

#### ■ What unique talents/insights do you bring?

I've worn many hats in many different places, from policy analyst to political organizer to development officer to seminarian. Each role has given me the opportunity to learn from a variety of people from diverse backgrounds. As a result, I tend to approach new situations with a

broad perspective and an open mind, and I hope to bring a creative approach to working with McLit.

#### ■ What are some of your favorite memories with McLit thus far?

Our Open House on June 9 was a remarkable way to begin my time with McLit! The community showed such amazing support and it was a reminder of our powerful impact.

#### ■ What do you enjoy doing in your free time?

I enjoy cooking for friends and family, playing the piano, biking, kayaking, hiking, playing tennis, and building obscure LEGO sets.

#### ■ What do you like to read?

I read literary fiction, philosophy, theology, politics, travel writing, the Sunday New York Times, The Atlantic, and The New Yorker.

#### ■ Any additional comments?

It is a privilege to be a part of the McLit team. Our staff, volunteers, and learners all make our community a better place to live through their commitment to learning and self-improvement, leaving an indelible impression on a great many lives.

~PK



# McLit in Pictures: June-July 2021



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