

LITERACY BI-MONTHLY

McLit, Marathon County Literacy Council, Inc.

Issue 10, March 2022

A Message From the Executive Director

Words Spewed by our Director:

I am ready to sit in the sunshine with a really good book. McLit has been very busy with many new happenings. Our new program, Share a Story is just getting off the ground and it's very exciting to have young people under five reading and telling stories in our Share a Story room. Come check out our hand-painted murals on the walls.

We have started teaching "English to Spanish" and "Spanish to English" classes. Join the fun as the class always ends up laughing!



In addition, McLit has sponsored and just watched three new Little Free Libraries sprout up over winter. Thank you to our about-to-become Eagle Scout, Adam S. McLit feels like it is really getting back to normal since COVID. You are always welcome to visit us or join us as a tutor or volunteer.

We hope you will stop by and say "hi" at the Business Expo on May 12, sponsored by the Wausau Chamber of Commerce. Enjoy the next season!

Connie Heidemann, Executive Director

Introduction

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

As always, McLit has continued to support local literacy through its education center, outreach, and partnerships. Nationally, there has also been lots to celebrate, starting with Read Across America Day on March 2. The event, which coincides with Dr. Seuss' birthday, kicked off National Reading Month. Throughout March, libraries, schools, book clubs, and communities have organized events to promote reading across the nation. March also was Women's History Month, and McLit is especially proud of all the women who are empowering themselves with literacy, and all the women who help them do it!

In this month's newsletter, we highlight our new Spanish classes for adults as well as all the fun we had at Children's Festival! Read on to find out more, and enjoy. ■

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.





McLit taps into the benefits of lifelong learning with new Spanish classes

By Johanna Nelson

They say you can't teach an old dog new tricks. Well, they're wrong. In fact, lifelong learning provides many benefits for adults - benefits that may actually increase with age. Recent studies indicate that learning something new can help adults improve their brain health and lower the risk of cognitive decline.

A review study published by researchers Blanka Klimova and Kamil Kuca has found that continuing education is an effective strategy to counteract brain decline, even for people already in the preclinical period of Alzheimer's Disease, allowing them to stay independent and improving their overall quality of life.

Signing up for a class, taking up a new hobby, or learning a new language are all great ways to give your brain a mental workout. To use technical terms, the learning process helps create new neural pathways, strengthens neuroplasticity, and increases brain agility. In her article, "The 4 Underlying Principles of Changing Your Brain," Tara Swart talks about the importance of keeping your brain flexible throughout your life. She says we need to keep our brains active, changing how we think and approach situations so we can reap the benefits as we age. In fact, research indicates that putting our brains outside of their comfort zones and developing new skills helps improve brain flexibility and resilience.

The benefits of lifelong learning also extend to our mental health. Whether we are grieving the loss of a loved one, suffering from depression, or trying to

cope with anxiety, learning something new forces the brain to refocus its attention from the internal to the external.

According to [languagetrainers.com](https://www.languagetrainers.com), learning a new language is an excellent method for combatting depression. While depression can shrink your world, studying a different language widens your world view.

And because language lessons are often conducted in a group setting, they can also reaffirm the human connection. This is especially important for those experiencing feelings of isolation or loneliness. From practicing verb conjugations to engaging in conversation, language learning provides a safe place for people to connect with one another, have a little fun, and build a social network.

Here at McLit, adults can tap into these benefits through our free drop-in Spanish lessons, held Wednesdays from 1 to 2 p.m. and Tuesdays from noon to 1 p.m. at our downtown learning center, 515 N 3rd St. (right next door to Janke Bookstore). Everyone is welcome, whether it is attending an occasional class or coming on a regular basis. Angie, a native Spanish speaker from Peru, heads the class, which is set up in an informal and fun way that combines learning new things, practice, and review.

Whether it is language classes, learning a new instrument, taking up a brand new craft, or signing up for a continuing ed class, the important thing to do is to keep your brain active and engaged.

The bottom line: You can and should teach mature dogs new tricks. ■

Reflections on 1 Year at McLit

By **Jodi Schreier**

It has been 1 complete year since I discovered the Marathon County Literacy Council (McLit) and began working here. When people think of a literacy council, they of course think of reading and writing, but over the last 12 months I have learned so much more about the role that our literacy council in Wausau plays. I have also learned more about our community members and their needs. Here are some of my reflections.

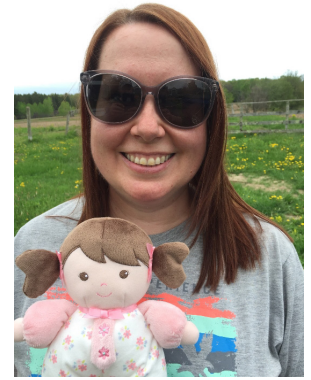
Our community here in Central Wisconsin is very diverse. I have tutored students from Mexico, Nicaragua, South Korea, and Venezuela. I have had the pleasure of meeting people from Afghanistan, Germany, and Peru. What a wonderful experience I have had helping them with their English skills, listening to their immigration stories, and sharing cultures. Thanks to everyone who helps to make their Wausau experience more positive. Just today one of my English language learners told me that he has been stopped on the street a couple times by curious walkers who wanted to know where he was from. After a short conversation explaining his South American roots, they exclaimed "Welcome to Wausau!" How nice it is to know that there are so many open minded and welcoming voices here in our town.

Drug and alcohol addiction is a major problem in Wausau and the surrounding areas. Addiction is a dream killer for all socio-economic groups. Sometimes it is the coatless, homeless alcoholic we saw at McLit this past winter. His drinking caused him to continuously forget where he set his coat down. Sadly, we noticed that this alcoholic never misplaced his bottle. Sometimes it is the downtown worker who jumps from job to job because his addiction only allows him to cover his drinking for a short period of time. And sometimes it is the meth addict who wants to be around nonusers the day before he heads to treatment. Due to addiction, we see many people in our community struggle with simple things like hygiene and housing. We also see many people fresh out of jail. With a record of drug use, drug dealing, drunk driving, and things like theft or arson, it is a hard path ahead for them. Finding an apartment or a job with their history causes a lot of closed doors. I have learned that there is a strong social services aspect to working at McLit. We have daily walk-ins looking for help connecting with community services. With some, we sit and help them create a resume. For others, we help them fill out online applications and for many, we sit and hear their story. Having a place that accepts them and all their human shortcomings (don't we all carry our own) is such a gift to our community. McLit is a place that is never boring, always rewarding, but

at times, it is a very heavy job. We see the unpleasant side to human life, everything from addiction to discrimination and homelessness to domestic abuse. Worrying comes daily for me, and I have a strong sense of sadness when I see someone we know pass away from suicide or someone we know head off to prison. After all, we are all just people. We all have a favorite color and a favorite chip and we all like warmth and a hot cup of cocoa or coffee. There is so much that bonds us together.

On a happier note, I have many favorite things about McLit. I enjoy the meet-and-greet part of my job. Each day we have such a wide variety of students, volunteers, and donors who walk through our doors. It is so fun to chat with everyone and make them feel welcome. I also love our new Share a Story program for children ages 1-5 and their parents. Helping children grow their love of reading and books is amazing. I also have a very special place in my heart for my English language learners. They come from such faraway places, some leave their families and homes behind searching for a better life. What a blessing to see them feeling more confident and hopeful as our lessons progress. Lastly, through community book donations I am happy to say that every day at McLit I am surrounded by rows and rows, shelves and shelves of books. Whenever I have a heavy moment and need a break, I search our bookcases and page through a little history, or a little gardening or a gorgeously illustrated children's book and all is well with the world again.

I want to spread the word that our Marathon County Literacy Council fills so many important roles. Topics that we have assisted with this past year include: homelessness, apartment searches, job hunting, social security, disability, discrimination, immigration, domestic abuse, counseling, food and clothing needs, driver's license, taxes, health insurance, budgeting, computer training, and parenting. We are not experts on everything, but we try our best, and we also refer many people to area services that fit their needs. With our free computer use, helpful staff and volunteers, and our desire to help, we are changing lives each and every day. Please support us with your monetary donations and allow us to continue our mission to help everyone who walks through our door. There are so many depending on us. Help share and shape our vision! ■



Jodi Schreier

Feature Profile: Celin, Assistant to the Director

What drew you to McLit as a place to work?

When I came to McLit my only aim was to study English, any expectation to work in it wasn't in my mind. However, the more I got familiar with not only the McLit literacy environment but its professional staff I started to think that it is the place I would like to work as a volunteer.

How long have you been with McLit?

Three months

What are your main roles and responsibilities?

Spanish tutor, basic English tutor.

What unique talents/insights do you bring?

I have experiences teaching English to Spanish-speaking people. These experiences combined with my native language (Spanish) and some skills as an engineer could be useful for those Spanish-speaking people who come to McLit to look for help with basic English.

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

Till now my favorite memories are: McLit allowed me to use its facilities to prepare my asylum application and also McLit gave me the opportunity to work as volunteer.

What do you enjoy doing in your free time?

Work out, yoga, read a book, read poems, promenade, and theater.



Guess the celebrity look-alikes!

Here at McLit, we have our very own celebrity doppelgangers. Can you guess which stars Celin and Judy resemble? Hints: Celin's look-alike was the star of the blockbuster hit, *The Equalizer*. Judy's celeb twin was a member of the Brat Pack who looked awfully "pretty in pink." Send your guesses to mclicofwau-sau@gmail.com!

Feature Profile: Bailee, Office Assistant



Hello! I'm Bailee, but right now I go by Sister Gustafson while I am a missionary for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. I was raised in Provo, Utah, and was going to college to get my degree in business management before coming on a mission. Primarily I teach others about Jesus Christ and love opportunities to help in any way I can. I love learning about new cultures, hiking, being with my family, and eating yummy food. Above all, I love helping others reach their fullest potential and have fun along the way! McLit is the perfect environment for learning. Let's learn together!

Feature Profile: Evita, Office Assistant

Hi! My name is Evita (but right now I go by Sister Royer while I'm serving as a missionary for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints). I was born and raised in Charleston, South Carolina, and I am 20 years old. On my mission, I help other people like Christ would! Whether that's helping people understand the scriptures, doing acts of service, or helping them understand the role of Jesus Christ in their lives! I have loved being on my mission and seeing people changing their lives! Before my mission, I enjoyed dancing, swimming, being active, shopping, and hanging out with my friends and family! I also did one year of college before my mission at B.Y.U. in Provo, Utah! I'm preparing to be a physician's assistant (at least that's the plan right now.) I'm so excited to help out at McLit and meet so many wonderful people. I know that God has a work for all of us to do!

*****Evita recently moved to Chile to continue her missionary work. We will miss her smiling face and positive attitude, but wish her all the best!*****



Thank you to our generous sponsors!



Dudley Foundation



Literacy Events April-May 2022

Saturday, April 9, 2022, 10:00 A.M.-3:00 P.M. Northcentral Technical College. **Central Wisconsin Science & Engineering Festival.** Volunteers and the Michigan Tech Mind Trekkers team will guide attendees through fun, hands-on STEM experiments. <https://www.ntc.edu/central-wisconsin-science-engineering-festival>

Monday, April 11, 2022, 5:30 P.M. Marathon County Public Library, Wausau. **McLit board meeting.** Everyone is welcome to a presentation on vaccines put on by Wisconsin Health Literacy at 6:30 p.m. in the MCPL conference room.

Wednesday, April 13, 2022, 1:00-2:00 P.M. Online. **Vitamins, Supplements and Your Health Virtual Education Session.** United Way RSVP is offering a free program presented by Nathan Tvedten, licensed pharmacist in residency with Aspirus. Visit <https://www.unitedwaymc.org/event/vitamins-supplements-and-your-health-virtual-education-session/> to register.

Thursday, April 14, 2022, 5:00-7:00 P.M. D.C. Everest Senior High. **Wellness Day.** From 5-6 PM, local counseling agencies and organizations will be on hand to talk with the general public. From 6-7 PM, Chris Hines will share his story.

Wednesday, April 27, 2022, 11:00 A.M. The Landing, Woodson YMCA, 707 N. 3rd St., Wausau. **The Landing Literacy Book Club** will discuss *The Bad-Ass Librarian of Timbuktu* by Joshua Hammer and *Circling the Sun* by Paula McLain. Email mcLitofwausau@gmail.com or call 715-679-6170 for more information.

Monday, May 9, 2022, 5:30 P.M. **McLit board meeting** via Zoom.

Thursday, May 12, 2022, 9:00 A.M.-6:00 P.M. Central Wisconsin Convention and Expo Center. **Business Expo.**

Saturday, May 14, 2022, 9:30-10:30 A.M. **McLit tutoring training/roundtable.** Email mcLitofwausau@gmail.com for more information or for the link to the meeting, or call 715-679-6170.

Today I want to be a dinosaur: McLit promotes literacy at Children's Fest

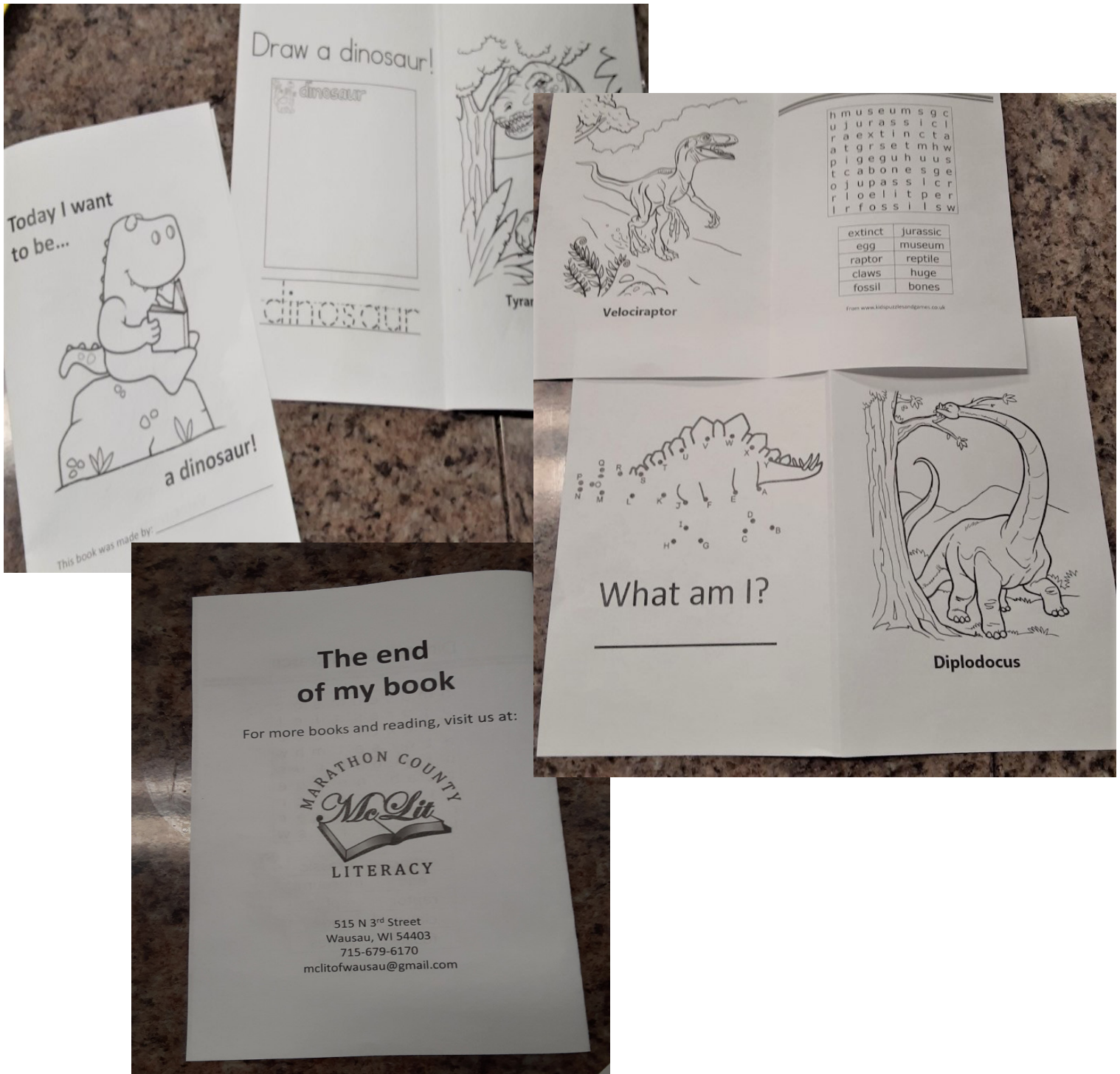
The place to be this past Saturday, March 26, was the Children's Festival at Marathon Park. Despite chilly temps, families with young children found fun at the fair. In addition to information booths for parents about local health and social services, there was lively music, a magic show, and face painting. Hands-on games and activities - digging for dinosaur bones, coloring, jumping, throwing, sawing and hammering - kept children moving and showed parents their little ones' growing physical skills and coordination.

The bean-bag toss at the McLit booth was very popular. Winners received a book of their

choice. Equally popular was our dinosaur word-search puzzle book and coloring table which gave everyone a chance to rest, read a book, and recharge.

The festival was the perfect venue to showcase our new children's program "Share a Story" for parents (or grandparents!) with children under five years of age. We hope to see many of the families we met at the Children's Festival at McLit headquarters, where our staff can show parents how to help their preschoolers get ready for reading.

Many thanks to our volunteers who made this a fun and successful day. ■



McLit in pictures: Children's Fest 2022



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