

# LITERACY BI-MONTHLY

McLit, Marathon County Literacy Council, Inc.

Issue 5, May 2021

*A Message*

## From the Executive Director



WOW, One-third of the year 2021 disappeared! That was fast. So many changes and things starting to feel 'normal.'

We are joining that group. We would like to invite all of you to our Grand Opening and Ribbon Cutting on Wednesday, June 9, at noon/12:00pm. Looking forward to giving you a tour of our new facilities and bragging about our new programs.

Stop in anytime and see if we can help you or someone you know.

**Connie Heidemann, Executive Director**



**Watch for our new sign on 3rd Street**

## Introduction

Welcome to our May newsletter! In the following pages, we share updates from McLit, local literacy news, and feature profiles of one of our hardworking McLit board members as well as our long-time partner, the Community Corner Clubhouse. As always, McLit has continued to support local literacy through its education center, outreach, and partnerships.

May was a busy month for McLit, which tabled at the Chamber's Business Expo 2021, celebrated many milestones for learning center clients such as graduations and new job placements, and saw planning and prep for our new parents/caregivers of young children program kick into high gear. Read all about this new program, "Share a Story: Plant a Seed to Read," in the pages ahead. We also invite you to stop in to learn more about the program as well as tour our newly renovated children's room, complete with an engaging mural hand-painted by a local artist.

In addition, McLit invites you to our openhouse and ribbon cutting, to be held June 9 from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. at 515 N 3rd St. in downtown Wausau. We are so excited to celebrate our growth, new space, and new pro-

grams with the community! The ribbon cutting will be held at noon. Festivities will start at 11 a.m., so come early, stay for the ceremony, and remain a little longer to enjoy some delicious treats provided by **La Prima Deli** and **Polito's Pizza**, visit with local celebrities (a wellknown mascot is scheduled to make an appearance), and enjoy the chance to visit with fellow literacy supporters and organizations. For more information, 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.



## McLit expands its services to include parents of young children

It's never too soon to plant a seed to read! McLit is excited to expand its adult literacy services to parents with little ones through its new program, "Share a Story: Plant a Seed to Read."

The program, set to launch this summer, is designed for parents, guardians, and caregivers, though it is open to anyone interested in best practices for helping their young children develop a lifelong love of reading. Tutors will use their expertise in adult literacy to tailor their assistance to the literacy level of each parent/caregiver.

"I am excited about adding parents and their toddlers to McLit's programming. A new room and new materials are headed our way," says Connie Heidemann,

executive director, McLit. "It's never too early to start literacy education."

Ligia Pineda, AmeriCorps member and Share-a-Story tutor, also is looking forward to the new services available through McLit. Pineda is a native Spanish speaker who will be on hand to help non-English speakers and English language learners as well as translate guidelines and tips to ensure everyone is able to participate to the fullest.

"This program will offer a set of guidelines to follow when introducing children to books," she says. "Every age has a set of developmental characteristics that require developmentally specific books and activities."

A newly renovated children's room at McLit's down-

*See SHARE A STORY, Page 3*

**SHARE A STORY, from Page 2**

town Wausau location will offer a variety of early literacy resources, books, and activities for adults with tots and preschool-aged kids. These materials will be available in English, Hmong, Mandarin, and Spanish - the largest language groups served by the McLit Learning Center.

Even the walls will be “interactive,” featuring a mural painted by a local artist. Children and their adults will have plenty to explore with the hand-painted animals, insects, and plants.

Colleen Thomasgard, early childhood specialist, explains that everyday activities that children enjoy including singing, playing, and telling stories help to cultivate important skills for talking and reading.

“A very good way to help children learn to say and understand new words, letters and numbers, is to talk about the pictures in storybooks, and help the child tell the story,” Thomasgard says. “You don’t even need to read to have fun sharing a book. Children love spending time with parents, grandparents, big brothers and sisters.”

Because the Share-a-Book program does not require a set curriculum, parents and caregivers will play a pivotal role in shaping the literacy sessions by shar-



ing their child’s interests, strengths, and weaknesses with the literacy tutor. The tutor will then connect them with developmentally appropriate resources, activities, and books. Activity cards categorized by age and developmental stage also will be on hand to share literacy tips and activities that can be used during the session.

While verbal pre-readers are the primary focus of Share-a-Story, there also will be activities for pre-verbal younger children as well as older pre-readers. These will include songs and games such as Pat-a-Cake for younger tots, and more focus on play with letters, numbers, and writing for older kiddos.

“This gives us a full spectrum of activities to meet the needs of younger and older ‘pre-readers,’ and plenty of reasons for parents and children to return to the Center again and again to build a habit of reading,” says Thomasgard, noting parents do not need to be strong readers to participate in McLit’s program. “This is an incomparable advantage of having McLit tutors as parent educators. They will know how to use the McLit model of one-on-one tutoring to create something unique for each parent-child pair.”

*See PLANT A SEED, Page 4*

**When early literacy specialists run a storytime, they are doing more than just reading a book, they are implementing the Every Child Ready to Read (ECRR) model.**

**They are using the 5 Practices:**

- reading
- talking
- singing
- writing
- playing

**to develop the 5 Components of Literacy:**

- phonological awareness
- print conventions/awareness
- letter knowledge
- vocabulary
- background knowledge

**and teach care-givers how to promote literacy:**

- through asides



***PLANT A SEED, from Page 3***

The McLit approach to teaching parents about reading with young children is based on a program called “dialogic reading.” Thomasgard describes it as a reading style in which the adult uses conversational techniques including repetition, open-ended questions, prompts, and praise to actively engage the child in telling the stories depicted in children’s picture books.

Outcome research that included children from economically disadvantaged homes indicates that this reading style has shown positive effects on young children’s oral language and emergent literacy skills, even in implementations as short as four and six weeks’ duration.

Thomasgard, professor emeritus with 30 years of experience in the design and evaluation of programs for parents and young children, will provide training in dialogic reading and child development to McLit adult literacy tutors. Both Thomasgard and trained tutors will then help parents learn about and practice these techniques. Thomasgard will be available one half-day per week, and trained staff will welcome drop-ins any day or time during the center’s regular hours, Monday-Friday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

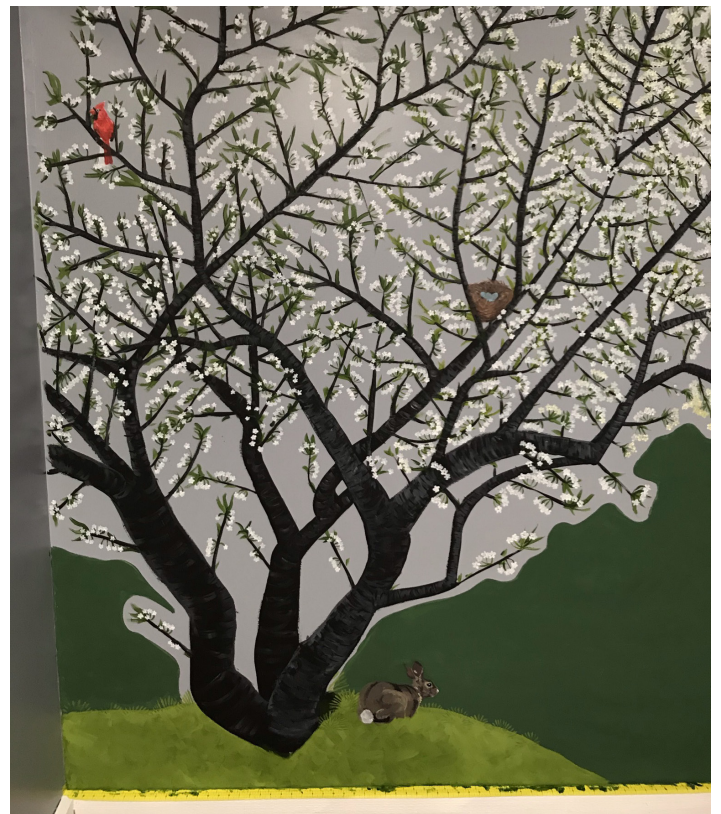
“I can see our Share-a-Story program filling a gap this summer with parents, grandparents, or babysitters

who are looking for activities for children,” says Jodi Sagstetter, Learning Center team lead and Share-a-Story tutor. “I think the program will also be a lasting way to give support to caretakers who are searching for ways to enhance their relationship with the little ones in their lives. In the long run, we will see better readers, better grades, and more opportunities for the parents/children that we work with.”

The Share-a-Story program also will be a stepping stone for families interested in getting involved with other community resources for early literacy. To achieve this end, McLit will provide a resource list of local organizations that will be readily available to parents and caregivers.

Stop by the McLit Learning Center at 515 N Third St. in downtown Wausau to talk with us and explore good books and activities that can plant a seed, feed a mind, and grow a reader. All of McLit’s services are free of charge and open to all adults, parents, caregivers, and early learners.

“Early literacy is equal to early stimulation,” Pineda says. “Children need to be introduced to books to love books and to develop a sense of curiosity as well as a long-lasting relationship to learning.” **McLIT**



**ABOVE:** Darya, a local artist, paints a blossoming tree filled with furry friends for the new children's room.



**ABOVE:** The children's room entrance with baby gate in place.

## A 'million word gap' for children who aren't read to at home

By Jeff Grabmeier, Ohio State News

Young children whose parents read them five books a day enter kindergarten having heard about 1.4 million more words than kids who were never read to, a new study found.

This “million word gap” could be one key in explaining differences in vocabulary and reading development, said Jessica Logan, lead author of the study and assistant professor of educational studies at The Ohio State University.

Even kids who are read only one book a day will hear about 290,000 more words by age 5 than those who don't regularly read books with a parent or caregiver.

“Kids who hear more vocabulary words are going to be better prepared to see those words in print when they enter school,” said Logan, a member of Ohio State's Crane Center for Early Childhood Research and Policy. “They are likely to pick up reading skills more quickly and easily.”

The study appears online in the *Journal of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics* and will be published in a future print edition.

Logan said the idea for this research came from one of her earlier studies, which found that about one-fourth of children in a national sample were never read to and another fourth were seldom read to (once or twice weekly).

“The fact that we had so many parents who said they never or seldom read to their kids was pretty shocking to us. We wanted to figure out what that might mean for their kids,” Logan said.

The researchers collaborated with the Columbus Met-

ropolitan Library, which identified the 100 most circulated books for both board books (targeting infants and toddlers) and picture books (targeting preschoolers).

Logan and her colleagues randomly selected 30 books from both lists and counted how many words were in each book. They found that board books contained an average of 140 words, while picture books contained an average of 228 words.

With that information, the researchers calculated how many words a child would hear from birth through his or her 5th birthday at different levels of reading. They assumed that kids would be read board books through their 3rd birthday and picture books the next two years, and that every reading session (except for one category) would include one book.

They also assumed that parents who reported never reading to their kids actually read one book to their children every other month. Based on these calculations, here's how many words kids would have heard by the time they were 5 years old: Never read to, 4,662 words; 1-2 times per week, 63,570 words; 3-5 times per week, 169,520 words; daily, 296,660 words; and five books a day, 1,483,300 words.

“The word gap of more than 1 million words between children raised in a literacy-rich environment and those who were never read to is striking,” Logan said.

The word gap examined in this research isn't the only type kids may face. A controversial 1992 study suggested that children growing up in poverty hear about 30 million fewer words in conversation by age 3 than those from more privileged backgrounds. Other studies since then suggest this 30 million word gap may be much smaller or even non-existent, Logan said. ■



McLit tabled at the **Greater Wausau Chamber of Commerce's Business Expo 2021**. Held in May, the expo is the largest business tradeshow in Wisconsin. It was a chance to connect to other exhibitors and attendees to share McLit's mission of improving quality of life through literacy.

**ABOVE (LEFT):** Johanna greets attendees at McLit's festive booth, highlighting local literacy programs, events, and volunteer opportunities. **ABOVE (RIGHT):** Judy and baby Winnie represent McLit as they pose for a picture at the Wausau VFW Post's booth.

## A typical, magical day at McLit (Marathon County Literacy Council)

By Jodi Sagstetter

The day begins at 8 a.m. with our eager adult student, Rita, waiting outside our door. She visits us three times a week to read out loud to us from the *Boxcar Children* series. We then work with her on writing sentences and counting money, using two of our tutoring workbooks. These are great life skills she needs to have out in the real world.

Then, a success story unfolds early morning as our student, Aaron, shares the details of his new job! He is fresh out of jail and we have been helping him search for a job and transportation to work. Highly motivated to become useful out in the world, he has been coming to McLit almost every day to get help applying for jobs online.

At 10 a.m., our English language learner, Gabriella, arrives to practice with one of our tutors. Also, at 10 a.m., we have a man walk in who was referred to us by another area business. He has just been released from the hospital, is homeless, and needing to find a temporary place to stay. After doing some research online and calling a few organizations, we set him up to meet with a local housing advocate and have a shelter as his backup plan. Since the shelter does not open until 4 p.m., we invite him to hang out at McLit during the day

if needed.

The 11:00 hour brings great news! A former student, Kevin, calls to tell us that he has been accepted at the group home that we helped him apply at. As wonderful, bonus news, he goes on to say that he has been offered a job! He had been coming to McLit almost everyday, working with a tutor to learn how to operate a computer and fill out applications online.

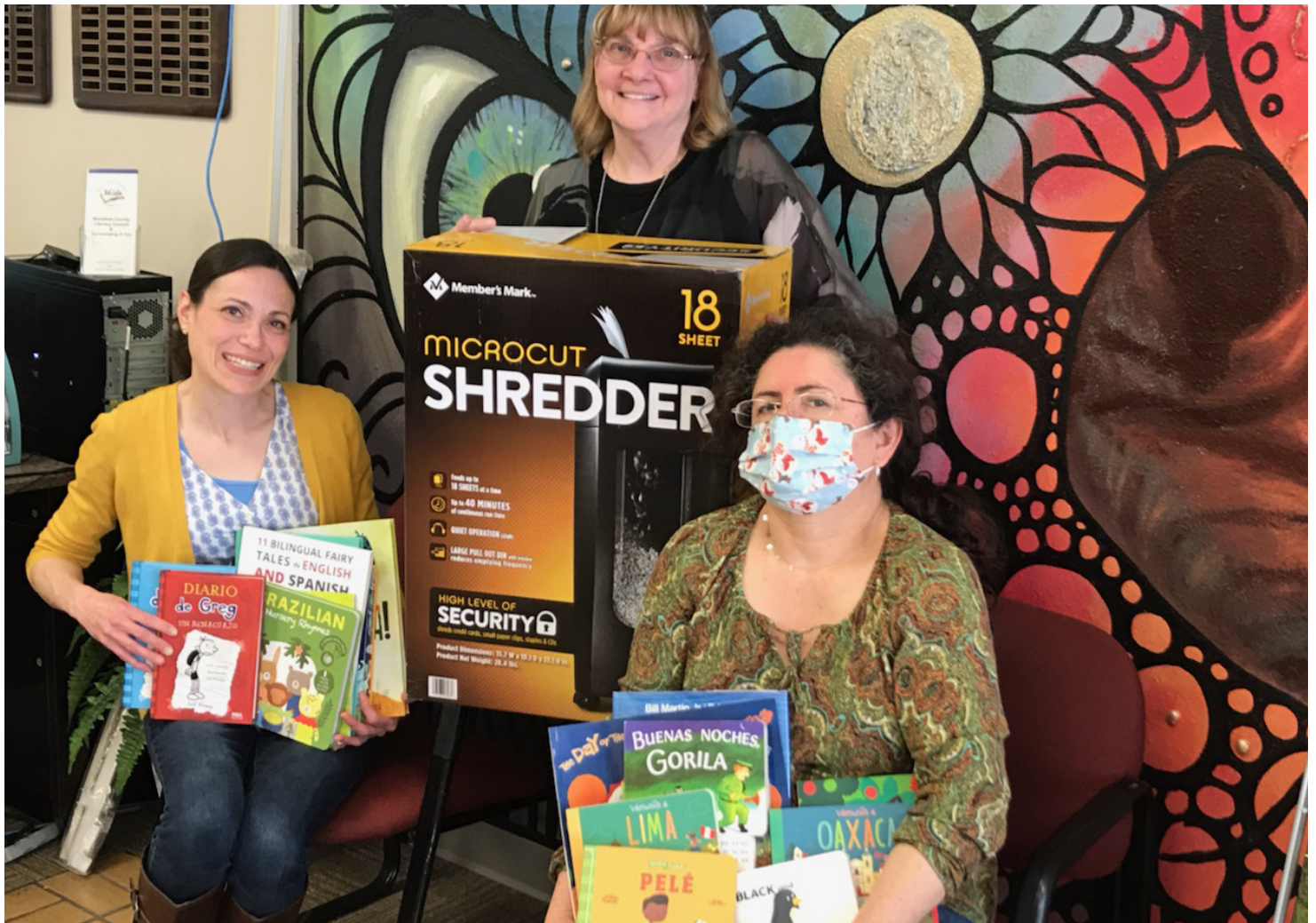
In the afternoon we meet with a student, Josh, who needs help researching the "why" and "hows" of COVID-19 vaccines. Teaching research skills helps students weed through what is fact and what is fiction online. A quick post on Facebook to show the progress of the mural on the walls of our new children's reading room is a cause for us to celebrate! How many little readers we will be able to help!

At 3 p.m., we learn that another student has been accepted into a Certified Nursing Program at a local nursing home. She has been using our computers to search for work and to read online study guides. Our tutors have been helping her brush up on her math skills too.

Our day ends with thoughts of a writing student, only 34, who recently passed away due to addiction issues. We hope his final days of writing and sharing book recommendations at McLit gave him many happy moments here on earth.

**McLIT**

# Thank you to our generous sponsors!



McLit extends a heart-felt thank you to AbbyBank for its generous donation. The funds were used to purchase bilingual books for children as well as English language learners. McLit also was able to procure a new shredder for its learning center.

## In Memorium

**McLit was saddened to hear of Jimmy's passing in May 2021. Jimmy often stopped in to our learning center to use our computer lab and visit with staff and volunteers, sharing his sense of humor, intelligence and unique way of looking at the world. He was a prolific writer, with poetry as gritty as Charles Bukowski and as lyrical as Jacqueline Woodson. To honor Jimmy, McLit is sharing a sampling of his poetry. More can be found at our website, <https://mclitofwausau.org/>.**

**We miss you, Jimmers.**



### BEAUTY AND DECEASED

Waving beauty  
Bearing down  
Gliding flight  
To the ground

The thunderous water  
Chasing rain  
Sand crystals  
Erosive pain

Violent wind  
Throwing grass  
Rolling thickets  
Down the path

Brush fire doom  
To wheat stacks gold

Crumbling mountain  
Recycling the old

Crackling geyser  
Bubbling spot  
Sprouting potato  
Gripping roots

Deep vast ocean  
Open blue mystery  
Snowflake in April  
Short lived history

The Earth is a puzzle  
Right now complete  
Too bad man's killing it  
And lost the receipt

### JIMMY'S READING PICKS

- Ham on Rye, Charles Bukowski
- Slaughterhouse Five, Kurt Vonnegut
- The Sun Also Rises/Anything by Ernest Hemingway
- Diary; Fight Club/Anything by Chuck Palahnuik
- Cider House Rules, John Irving
- Catcher in the Rye, J.D. Salinger
- Lord of the Flies, William Golding
- Essays by Henry David Thoreau
- Poetry by Walt Whitman
- Poetry by Maya Angelou
- The Bell Jar/Anything by Sylvia Plath
- Romeo & Juliet, William Shakespeare
- Thomas Jefferson biography
- Nikola Tesla biography



## Feature Profile: Community Corner Clubhouse

*Meet our friends at North Central Health Care's Community Corner Clubhouse. McLit has partnered with the Clubhouse since 2017.*

The Community Corner Clubhouse is known as a welcoming and supportive resource within the Wausau community. Dedicated to helping people build better lives, the Clubhouse helps adults with persistent mental illness and AODA issues by providing a support system and a space where they can go to meet friends, build self confidence, learn life skills, and discover new talents.

The Clubhouse is an internationally-certified, psychosocial rehabilitation community that provides vocational support; transitional, supported, and independent employment; educational opportunities; and housing assistance.

McLit also offers support and access to resources in many of these same areas, and jumped at the opportunity to partner with such a stand-out community organization.

"McLit has been helpful with members, educating and tutoring them in math, reading, writing GED, and HSED," says Mike Frankel, Clubhouse manager. "McLit brings in its expertise, and members look forward to the time they can spend engaging with staff."

Frankel also notes it is a standard of the Clubhouse model to assist members with educational goals and furthering their education - the partnership with McLit allows them to do just that. The long-running partnership allows McLit tutors to visit the Clubhouse every Thursday afternoon to work side-by-side with Clubhouse members. The focus of each individual session is determined by the needs of the members themselves.

Judy Staszak, assistant to the McLit director and onsite tutor at the Clubhouse, says her focus is on helping members with their literacy needs as well as building relationships. She has provided instruction in reading, computer literacy, personal tablets, mobile phones, keyboard/typing practice, and social skill building.

"I am reminded every time I go there that if you treat people with respect, and meet them where they are, you can build good relationships with anyone - regardless of ability/disability," says Staszak, noting how personally rewarding it is when one of her clients makes a break-through or reaches a goal. "One of the clients I worked with has gained enough confidence in herself that she now does her weekly tasks without my help."

Frankel says it is this consistent weekly contact that has helped build strong relationships between

members and McLit tutors. He estimates that over the past four years, McLit has worked with more than 20 different members.

"Those members have benefited by building confidence and self esteem related to their improving skills," Frankel says. "If something was out of the scope of what McLit could provide, we collaborated to find the resources to meet the member's need."

And while the sessions are educational, focused, and filled with lots of hard work, that isn't to say there's no time for some fun, too. Frankel notes that Judy has come to many Clubhouse events, including its annual picnic as well as a few anniversary celebrations. She enjoys playing yards games, card games, and visiting with members in a relaxed setting.

"This is a different way to stay connected with the members. The McLit staff always go above and beyond what is expected to meet the members where they are at," Frankel says. "We really enjoy the partnership we have built with McLit. We both have the same goals - serve those in need."

**The Community Corner Clubhouse is located at 811 N 3rd Ave in Wausau. More information is available at <https://www.norcen.org/services/mental-health/community-corner-clubhouse/>, or by calling 715.843.1926.**



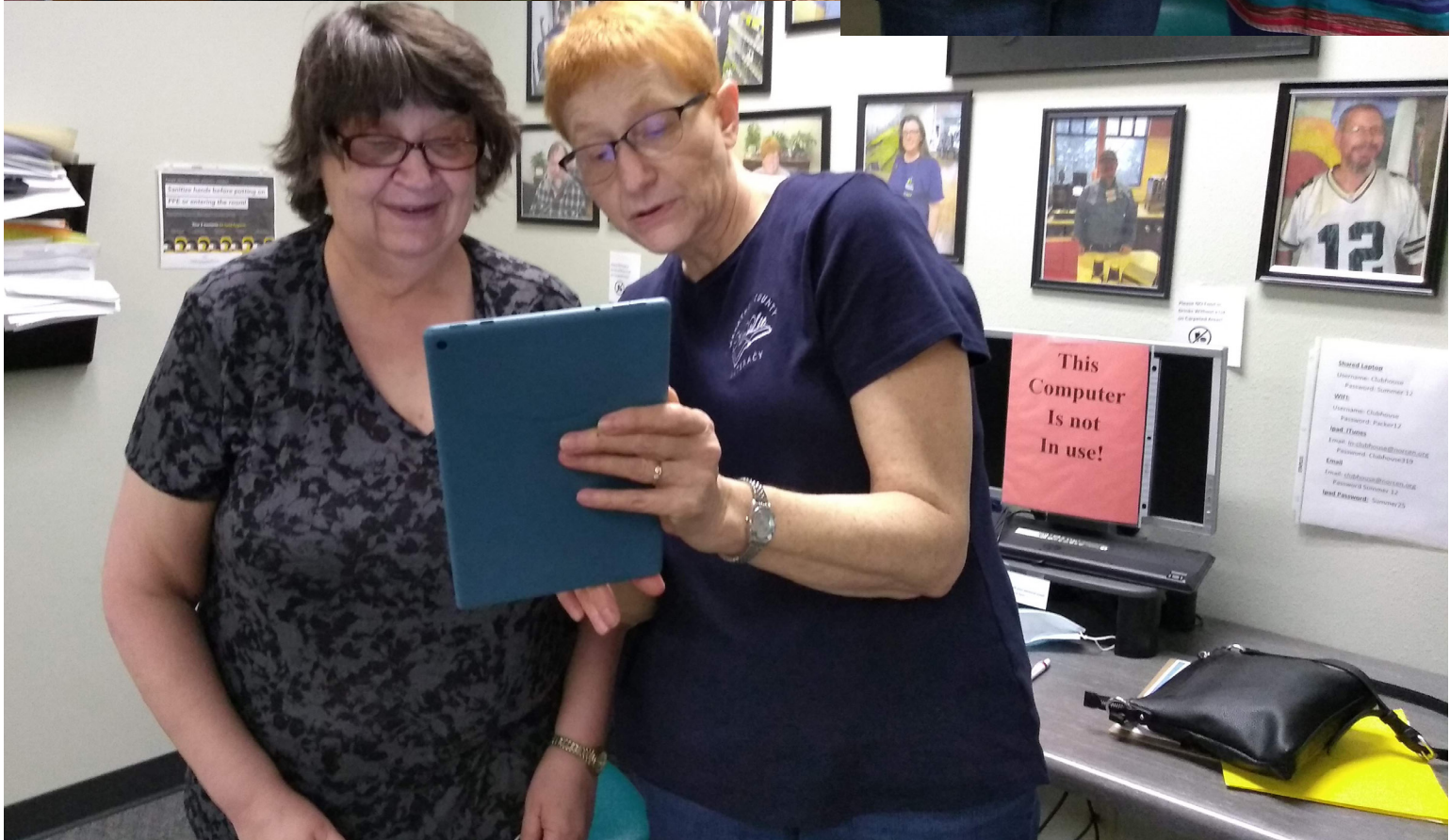
From left to right: McLit tutor Judy poses with Clubhouse staff members Paia, Amy, and Patrick.

## Feature Profile: Community Corner Clubhouse

*Judy is hard at work....*



*Judy helps Jane with her reading, Phyllis with her iPad, and Caroline with her iPad as well. All three are Clubhouse members.*



## Feature Profile: Maggie Cronin

*Meet Maggie Cronin, McLit board member. We recently asked Maggie to share a little bit about herself for our May newsletter. Here is what she had to say!*

### What is your role on the board, and how long have you been with us?

I was asked to be a member of the board due to my involvement with the Joseph Project. I value the mission of the Marathon County Literacy Council and believe that literacy is a foundation to success. I have been a member of this fantastic board for less than a year.

### What unique talents and insights do you bring to McLit?

As a former teacher I see the impact McLit has on the community. I have watched the program grow and have supported the educational initiatives that have been implemented thus far.

### What is your overarching vision for McLit in terms of goals and growth?

I call McLit a "hidden gem" of Marathon County. It is my goal to continue to promote and educate residents that this service exists. I have already seen its growth since moving to the new place on 3rd Street. Every day the staff and volunteers are making a difference in the lives of those who come to use the variety of services. I believe knowledge is power and for success, education is the key!

### How do you hope to achieve these goals?

Whenever I have the opportunity, I share the story of McLit and what it has to offer. Making other community leaders aware of the program will help spread the word.

### What is your job in the "real world?"

I am the District Scheduler for Congressman Tom Tiffany. I work in the Wausau District Office that focuses on Constituent Services assisting residents to navigate through federal agencies. I also assist Senator Johnson's staff with the Joseph Project. The Joseph Project is a jobs program that



connects individuals genuinely seeking employment with opportunities that already exist. Many of our students have faced challenges in their past. We teach such things as how to write a resume, time-management, conflict resolution, goal setting, financial literacy and spiritual fitness. McLit has been the backbone of the program assisting the students with resumes and applications through the help of their staff and volunteers. Additionally, I was an elementary school teacher for almost 20 years in the area.

### When you're not busy fulfilling all of your professional duties, what do you enjoy doing in your free time?

Of course, I like to read! I also enjoy crafting, knitting and crocheting. I love to spend time with my children and grandchildren exploring Central Wisconsin's festivals and events.

### Any additional comments?

I am so blessed to be a part of McLit. Connie and the entire staff use their talents daily to improve the lives of others and expect nothing in return. Wausau is so very fortunate to have McLit as a resource to foster not only the love of reading, but the quest for knowledge.

# Events Calendar

**Monday, June 7: Summer Reading Challenges begin. T.B. Scott Free Library, 106 W. 1st St., Merrill.** The library is offering a free reading challenge for every age this summer along with special prize drawings. Individuals, ages baby through adult, will participate in the online Beanstack Summer 2021 Reading Challenge. (Paper format will be available for those who are unable to participate online.) Starting June 7, go to Beanstack online, <https://tbscottlibrary.beanstack.com/>, or download the app on your iOS or Android device and start reading. **For more information, call the library at 715-536-7191.**

**Tuesday, June 8, 5:35 p.m.-8:35 p.m.: Woody's Reading Club Redemption Night #1. Athletic Park, 324 E. Wausau Ave., Wausau.** At the Wisconsin Woodchucks vs. Green Bay Booyah game, reading club participants can redeem their tracking sheets for game tickets and other prizes. Presented by TDS Fiber and Ruder Ware.

**Wednesday, June 9, 11 a.m.-3 p.m.: McLit's Ribbon-Cutting and Open House. McLit Marathon County Literacy Council, 515 N. 3rd St., Wausau.** Join us as we kick off a great summer and bright future! Get to know our new facility, learn about ways you can get involved, and celebrate with us! Ribbon cutting at noon.

**Sunday, June 13, 12:05 p.m.: Woody's Reading Club Redemption Night #2. Athletic Park, 324 E. Wausau Ave., Wausau.** At the Wisconsin Woodchucks vs. Kokomo Jackrabbits game, reading club participants can redeem their tracking sheets for game tickets and other prizes. Presented by TDS Fiber and Ruder Ware.

**Monday, June 14, 5 p.m.-7 p.m.: The Joseph Project Intake. The Cross Church, 740 Grand Ave., Schofield.** The Joseph Project-Wausau is a faith-based jobs initiative to connect people with jobs. Participants go through a weeklong life skills training program and then are offered a chance to interview with companies looking to hire. To sign up just show up to the intake session. Please bring your resume on a flash drive if you have it. **Next class session: Monday, June 21 through Thursday, June 24, 4 p.m.-8:30 p.m. For more information, contact Pastor Yauo Yang at 715-572-4549, or visit <http://www.josephprojectwi.org/>**

**Wednesday, June 23, 11 a.m.-noon: The Landing Literacy Book Club. The Landing, Woodson YMCA, 707 N. 3rd St., Wausau.** This month the club will discuss *Sold on a Monday* by Kristina McMorris. **For more information, call 715-679-6170 or send an email to [mcclitofwausau@gmail.com](mailto:mcclitofwausau@gmail.com).**

**Thursday, June 24, 10 a.m.-noon: Children's Book Swap. Grant Elementary, 425 W. Upham St., Marshfield.**

**Marathon County Literacy Council, Inc.**  
**[mcclitofwausau@gmail.com](mailto:mcclitofwausau@gmail.com), 715-679-6170**  
**515 N 3rd St. Wausau, WI 54403**

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