

2010



Newsletter



Students from De Diego School enjoy reading during the Early Childhood program.

Greetings from WITS!

The leaves are not the only things changing this season. The staff has been buzzing around with program start-ups, volunteer trainings, book orders, and more. Delighted by the momentum of the new school year, WITS has been working tirelessly to place **1,300** volunteers back in the schools to read with over **2,300** students!

This summer, WITS welcomed four new Program Coordinators, Tooni Akanni, Shaunna Macleod, Morgan O'Neil, and Brian Meissner, as well as Kristen Eidson, our new Program Director.

Despite tough economic conditions, WITS volunteers have remained active participants in the community demonstrating what it really means to "give back"! We are delighted to report growth across programs with new partnerships and volunteers. "It's great to have so many people dedicated to volunteering," explains Executive Director, Jenné Myers. "The community has really responded to the needs of our schools, and I can't thank the volunteers enough for their time."

Our Early Childhood program has expanded to seven schools serving **40%** more pre-k and kindergartners this year. The Power Lunch and Workplace Mentoring programs have increased volunteer participation by **12%** thanks to our new partners: **AON, The Clare at Water Tower, Jenner & Block, Motorola, PEAK6, and U.S. Department of Education.**



The Credit Suisse Community

Todd Buchner, a Board Member and Credit Suisse volunteer, enjoys the view from the Sky Deck of the Willis Tower with students.

Every Wednesday afternoon at 3 p.m., employees at Credit Suisse trade a busy work schedule for 75 minutes with some very special students from Manierre Elementary School. Credit Suisse has been a long time WITS partner and year after year more employees participate in the Workplace Mentoring program. This school year, Credit Suisse will mentor 22 fourth and fifth grade students at their office.

Jenae Fonseca, a volunteer, explained, “For the past two years, I have had the opportunity to work with the same student and I am overjoyed with the progress she is making. Week after week, she enthusiastically comes to my office yearning for that one-on-one attention. Through WITS, I am able to not only fulfill her needs but my own. Thank you for offering a unique program that caters to both students and volunteers.”

The WITS Workplace Mentoring program is well-aligned with the volunteer driven mission of the Credit Suisse Americas Foundation, which is a commitment to improve the communities in which employees live and work. “We are fortunate to work for a company that understands the importance of giving back to the community, allowing programs such as WITS to come into our office weekly,” explains Tim Bixler, Managing Director and Global Head of Credit Suisse HOLT.

The Credit Suisse folks also treat the Manierre students to several specials events throughout the school year including a field trip to the Willis Tower, a holiday party and an end of year celebration at 10 Pin Bowling Lounge! Stop in at the annual holiday party and you’ll enjoy pizza, games, and probably leave after mastering the latest hip-hop dance moves....thanks to a lesson from the students!



Saturday Sky Rockets!



Junior Board member, Nicole Johnson, works with Cameron on Saturday mornings.

Saturday Tutoring has grown leaps and bounds since the 2008-09 school year. The number of participating students has increased 33% thanks to a 55% increase in volunteers from last year.

The unique program allows working professionals, including many members of our Junior Board, the opportunity to lend a hand. Its flexible schedule (two Saturdays per month) has really made Saturday Tutoring an attractive option for volunteers.

Julio Hernandez signed up for his second year of volunteering, propelled by the positive experience his first time around. "I get very excited when I see a student successfully read a once-difficult word. The fear of the 'big' words in the book begins to disappear and they read without a care of making mistakes," he explains. "I can hear the change in my student's voice when he begins to enjoy reading. It is my hope that this 'no fear' attitude eventually permeates into other subjects in school. And ultimately, the student really takes off!"

Hernandez is not the only one to notice the remarkable improvements of children in this program. Having watched the program grow for nine years, Principal Krish Mohip has seen first hand the impact of WITS volunteers. "Saturday Tutoring has provided my students with valuable assistance in reading comprehension," explains Mohip. "I am glad to have the volunteers give time to students and provide a service that promotes our children's academic success."

While academic success remains at the forefront, the program has mobilized its volunteers to get involved with Walsh in other ways. This summer, with the help of the Junior Board and volunteers, WITS painted two inspiring murals, which now hang side-by-side in the school's gym serving as a constant reminder of the power of reading!

Classroom Assistants Lighten the Load

Week after week, WITS sends over 50 dedicated volunteers into the schools to work as Classroom Assistants, offering teachers a pair of helping hands during the busy school day. Volunteers are assigned to a teacher and work one-on-one with students to give them extra attention.

Linda Swimmer has been a volunteer in Ms. Guzman's classroom at Peirce School since 2006.

Swimmer explains that she loves being an extra pair of hands in the classroom...or the hallways! She says, "For kids who don't have a lot of support at home, I know I'm a key influence throughout the week, and that is very fulfilling and gratifying."



Linda Swimmer works with a student at Pierce School.

A second year volunteer, Hillery Kraus, explained that this experience has far exceeded her expectations. "The teachers and the students are so appreciative of the time I spend with them. My biggest surprise is how I feel when I leave the school and I can't wait to go back! I am getting so much more out of this experience than I ever dreamed possible," Kraus explains. "It's the definition of 'give and you shall receive!'"





Kevin Lawler, a Power Lunch volunteer, reads with Damarean from Tilton School.

A Helping Hand from Harris Bank

WITS students have found a dedicated mentor in Kevin Lawler, the VP of BMO Capital Markets and three-year Power Lunch volunteer with Harris Bank. A longtime WITS advocate, Lawler credits much of his experience at Tilton School to the invested support of his company. “Yasmin Bates and her colleagues in Harris’ Community Affairs department do a great job of connecting its employees to the needs of the communities in which it does business. Harris walks the walk and really stands behind its tag line, ‘We’re here to help’.”

Every fall when Lawler re-enters the Power Lunch classroom, after spending the summer months away, he is quickly reminded of the tremendous satisfaction which stems from connecting with children. “I sometimes forget what great people and good company 3rd graders are and how receptive they are to attention and encouragement,” Lawler explains.

For Lawler, participating in the Power Lunch program is more than simply getting away from his desk for an hour, he finds great joy in identifying techniques to improve his student’s ability to read and comprehend. Once this first step is accomplished, sharing the love of reading is tremendous. As he explains, “There is great value connecting students with an adult, who finds pleasure in reading and understands the positive effect of teaching good reading and comprehension skills.”

In addition to the personal rewards of volunteering, the academic results when students gain essential reading skills are immeasurable. “WITS is helping students at a critical developmental period,” Lawler observes. “Tutoring will have an impact in all aspects and throughout a child’s life.” Lawler’s passion for education and giving back to Chicago’s youth must run in the family as one of WITS’ new Program Coordinators, Morgan O’Neil, is his niece!





Why is Volunteering Important?

A Student's Perspective

Volunteering is a selfless act. You're not always thinking about yourself, but other people. Volunteering is important because you set aside your time in order to work with people who need your help. For example, the WITS Volunteers set aside time out of their work day to work with different kids from different schools. The WITS volunteers work with the kids; they make them feel special. It's nice to know that there are people out there willing to set aside their time and work with you.

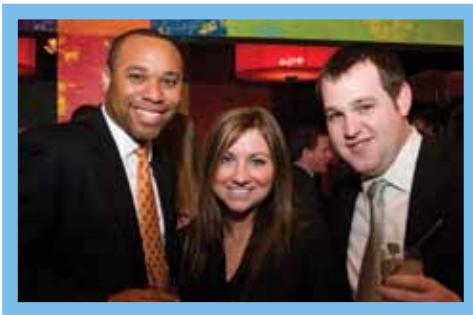
My WITS tutors, Jeff and Natalie, have taught me various lessons. The greatest lesson they have taught me is to always set a good example and to be a good remodel. Just like they are. I have learned how to be patient and understanding with other people. I have also learned how important it is to share your knowledge with the world. It's important to set a good example because you never know who is watching or who is looking up to you! I have a little sister and it's especially important for me to set a good example for her, so she can be as smart and as great as me in life.

Who knows, maybe one day I'll be a WITS volunteer.

By Stephanie Taylor, Power Lunch Student
McClellan School

Flashbacks

April



Blackboard Affair

More than 300 guests came out to support of literacy in Chicago. Hosted by our Junior Board, the Blackboard Affair, featuring an extensive silent auction, raised over \$45,000 for our programs.

May



Dare 2 Dream

Platform One Entertainment hosted a Dare 2 Dream benefit concert at the House of Blues Chicago featuring hip hop icon, Talib Kweli, to benefit WITS.

June



Founders Day

Sponsored by Charter One, WITS hosted this inaugural annual event. While recognizing twelve outstanding volunteers, the free event provided an opportunity for volunteers and donors to celebrate our mission.

August



Ride the Reading Wave

WITS & WAVE teamed up to host a back-to-school soiree. Generously underwritten by WAVE, a restaurant in the W Hotel Lakeshore, all proceeds helped WITS purchase books for the new school year.



Why I Give?

A Donor's Perspective



A committed WITS supporter since 2005, Carl S. Allegretti is a well distinguished philanthropist for his efforts to improve the lives of children through academic and athletic advancements.

Allegretti is the Global and U.S. Chief Tax Clients & Markets Officer at Deloitte Tax LLP

How did you first become involved with WITS?

One of my best friends and Partner at Deloitte, Ron Sonenthal, introduced me to WITS about 6 years ago. He is on the WITS Board.

Why do you continue to support literacy in Chicago Public Schools?

The children of America are our future. You can never take an education away from someone

What are you reading now?

I am reading *Our Boys: A Perfect Season on the Plains with the Smith Center Redmen* by Joe Drape, a reporter for the New York Times. My job is very intense, thus I read for pure pleasure.

What is your favorite children's book?

The Dr. Sesus Series.

How would you describe Board of Directors your experience as a WITS supporter?

Outstanding! My passion in life is children and helping them achieve their goals - academically and athletically. Supporting the WITS mission furthers my passion to help guide the youth of America!

Can you explain the unique way in which you give to WITS?

For years I have allocated a portion of my United Way contribution to WITS. It's a pretty easy process to set up, and once established WITS receives a monthly contribution from my account. What may seem incremental on a monthly basis really does add up by the end of the year! I would absolutely recommend this form of support as it is a great way to make a measurable difference.

What other charities/causes are important to you?

I am on the **Chicago Public Library Foundation Board** (Treasurer for 8 years) and currently serve on the Board of the Chicago Boys & Girls Club. From an athletic perspective, I founded the **Frankfort Youth Athletic Association**, which is a football and cheer program for kids K thru 8th grade, and was the Chairman of Illinois Special Olympics. Lastly, I am a financial supporter of **Chicago Children's Memorial Hospital** and **Miami Children's Hospital**, as my son is a cancer survivor. I am also involved with **WARM**, **Imerman Angels**, **American Youth Football**, **National Football Foundation Scholarship Program**, and **Lincoln Way East High School**.

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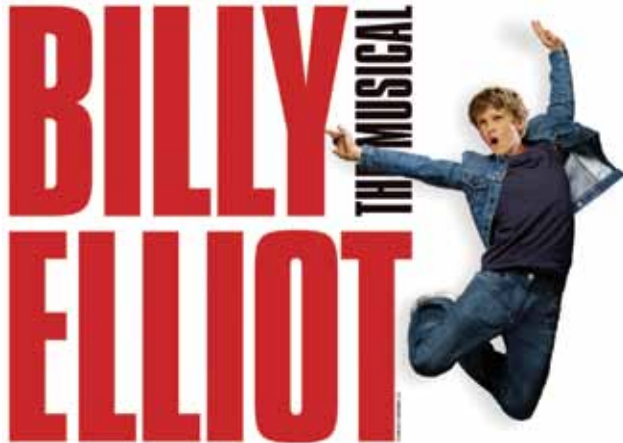
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