



Working Together We Change Lives

It is not difficult to envision the consequences that are averted when a struggling student becomes a good reader. The Washington Literacy Council reports that more than three out of four of those on welfare, 85% of unwed mothers and 68% of those arrested are illiterate.

Each person represented in these statistics was once a young, struggling elementary student facing an uncertain future. Their life could have been different if they had received additional support and instruction during the critical early elementary years.

Many Omosaze students are in danger of being included in tomorrow's negative statistics, but they are also escaping the illiteracy trap due to the tireless work of schools, parents, and unsung heroes like those featured in this newsletter.

Dr. Linda Shearon is a reading specialist and former Director of Curriculum and Instruction for Marietta City Schools. She began consulting with Omosaze four years ago, bringing improved quality and focus to our instruction. Her practical guidance to parents on how to build on a child's reading skill at home (page 2) should not be missed.

Also on page 2, you can learn about the Weber Family Foundation. Words cannot express the impact this amazing foundation has had and continues to have on the development of Omosaze. Organizations like the Weber Family Foundation, that are committed to improving the lives of children, are an integral component to our success.

Reading Saturday would not be the same without an incredible group of volunteers who spend one hour with an assigned first grade student each Saturday. For insights into the volunteer experience, read Indushree Purushothama's story on page 3. The impact our volunteers have on the confidence and skill of their students is profound; it complements the excellent classroom instruction provided by our certified teachers, including Stacy Johnson, who contributes perspective gained over 5 years of working with *Reading Saturday*.

Due to the contributions of these and many other persons and organizations, we can report continued progress. In 2008-2009, we will:

- Add two new schools to the *Reading Saturday* roster, bringing the total number of Cobb County elementary schools served to 7.
- Expand on the successful implementation of the 4th/5th grade curriculum.
- Pilot a weekday after-school reading program.

In addition, we welcome Celisa Alston to our staff as a part-time Operations Manager. Her considerable educational and management experience will help facilitate the continued growth and development of Omosaze.

The names listed herein are a small fraction of the people who continue to make our progress possible. Whether you contributed time and talent, funds, or another valued asset, thank you!


Executive Director

Volume 2, Issue 1

Contents:

For Parents	2
Supporter Spotlight	2
Volunteer Perspective	3
Teacher Perspective	3

Our Purpose

To instill a passion for learning among under-performing elementary students by providing exceptional reading instruction outside of regular school hours.



For Parents: Helping Children Read at Home

By Linda A. Shearon, Ed.D, Education Consultant

Parents often ask how they can help their children at home. Here are three strategies to help children become better, stronger readers.

Talk! Talk! Talk! – Much of reading success is built on our knowledge of how language works. Children who have strong oral language have an easier time learning to read. Talking to and with your children will help them learn the rules of language long before they are expected to label sentences, subjects, predicates, nouns or adjectives. By modeling language and asking your children to actively participate in conversations, you help build language skills. So share jokes, create rhymes, learn the words to songs, talk about the events of your day, play a game naming one word that starts with each letter of the alphabet, practice naming shapes, colors, and objects, or pretend that you are animals (or movie stars) and make up conversations that you might have in character.

Build vocabulary – Good readers have good vocabularies; they know many ways to express their ideas. Help your children develop vocabulary by using a variety of words in your daily conversations. For example, instead of always telling your children they are great, sometimes tell them that they are creative, intelligent, thoughtful, or kind. Don't dumb down your conversation using "baby talk" and "baby words" after your child becomes a toddler.

Control the TV – Just like someone has to play often to become a good basketball or tennis player, a good reader has to read. Make a house rule that states that for every hour of TV watching there will be an hour of reading. Watch TV programs with your children. When a commercial comes on, mute the TV and ask your children to tell you what has happened so far on the program and what they think will happen next. Make television watching interactive. This will help your children build the skills necessary for reading comprehension.

By focusing on these seemingly simple activities, you can contribute significantly to the reading skills your children need to thrive and build on the experiences they have had in school and during *Reading Saturday*.



Ready for summer

Supporter Spotlight: Weber Family Foundation

Since the first days of *Reading Saturday*, the Weber family has been an on-going supporter of Omosaze programs. Their commitment has enabled *Reading Saturday* to grow and allowed Omosaze to expand program options available to the children, families, and schools of Cobb County.

The Weber Family Foundation was established in 1996 by Mr. Donald Weber, his wife Rosemary, and their three children, after Mr. Weber's retirement as President and CEO of Contel Corporation. The family wanted to help less fortunate persons in the metro Atlanta community by making annual gifts to deserving charities. As the first managing director of the foundation, the Weber's daughter, Jennifer Major, helped define the early philosophies and grant making priorities of the Foundation.

Mrs. Major was drawn to Omosaze due to experiences with her own children and a brother who struggled to read as a child. These situations demonstrated that reading can be the building block for all learning, and she concluded that Omosaze had enormous potential to change children's lives forever. The Foundation board agreed with her recommendation and made its first gift to Omosaze in 2001. Since then, Mrs. Major has had the opportunity to visit *Reading Saturday* and see firsthand the dedication of the volunteers and staff, and the determination of the students to succeed.

With this first investment, a long term partnership was founded on the shared beliefs of Omosaze and the Weber family. "We realized that, as a startup, Omosaze would face many challenges, but we also believed that, in time, Omosaze would succeed. While the story of Omosaze continues to unfold, the success stories from hundreds of students who have benefited from *Reading Saturday* speak to the tremendous work being accomplished," said Mr. Weber. "Based on this track record and momentum, the Weber Family Foundation looks forward to continuing its relationship with Omosaze for many years to come," adds Mrs. Major.



Donald and Rosemary Weber

Volunteer Perspective: Indushree Purushothama

It has been several months since my first day at Dunleith Elementary, and my Saturdays have never been so fulfilling. Working with the students at *Reading Saturday* was my first volunteer experience in the United States. Orientation introduced me to new concepts like sight words and word maps, and I could not wait to get started.

Throughout the year, I worked with one small girl. She and I had one thing in common - English as a second language. When we first got together on Saturday, she seemed shy, but then she was transformed as she read a book. As our time together came to an end in May, she eagerly grabbed two books at the start of every session instead of her usual one. It was clear to me that she enjoyed reading, and that she didn't see it as yet another academic exercise. She was equally confident as she reviewed sight vocabulary words on flash cards. Her response at *Reading Saturday* was very similar to that of children who struggle with reading in my home country of India. They are initially unsure of themselves, but after awhile they begin to know that they are capable of a lot more than what they had thought. They not only become more interested in reading but more enthusiastic about learning and experiencing new things.

Sometimes I just sat back and watched my student as she laughed at a funny line just read or as she intently turned the page to see what would happen next. In those moments I knew that *Reading Saturday* had accomplished its purpose.



Teacher Perspective: Stacy Johnson



For nearly five years, I have witnessed children trade in their Saturday morning cartoons in fuzzy slippers and pajamas for a better chance at reading. Before *Reading Saturday*, these children grappled with doubt and fear; they wished they could decode the mystery behind reading. But then suddenly, a face will brighten in an "ah-ha" moment, with the same delight as tagging another child and proclaiming, "You're it!" These are the times children run up to their parents to exclaim new nuggets of knowledge, like sharing a shiny penny or treasure suddenly discovered. It is in these moments that students deeply feel that they CAN read; they believe what we have told them all along.

Soon the children are writing unique, witty stories of their own. In fun, confidence-building ways, they practice sight words, new vocabulary, and reading aloud. All that was needed was some extra TLC (time learning creatively) among friends-peers and adults who care—who cheer them on, and expect the best of them.

Parent Comments

"Jeffrey has developed more confidence. When he gets home from Saturday classes, he can read me the paragraph of the day. Thank you for taking the time, which sometimes we lack as parents, to help Jeffrey learn to read."

 Jeffrey's Mom

"My daughter looked forward to going to *Reading Saturday* because it was fun and she learned a lot. She likes to read a lot more since going."

 Reading Saturday parent



Reading Saturday volunteer mentors help children grow to love reading.

Special Thanks to All of Our 2007-2008 Supporters

Government Partners: Cobb County CDBG Program, Marietta CDBG Program, Park Street Elementary, Dunleith Elementary School

Individual Supporters: Donald & Rosemary Weber, Amy Merrill, Leon & Verway Scott, Charles & Debbie Bethea, Dewain & Johnnie Carroll, Clare & Norman Richie, Rita Figaro, Robert & Lisa Smith, Brian Scott, Emily Wehby, Meredith Boyter, Jessica Wilkerson, Sundra Vann, Stephanie & Lonnie Haynes, Merritt Dyke, Anne Power

Corporate/Foundation Partners: Weber Family Foundation, The Imlay Foundation, John H. and Wilhelmina D. Harland Charitable Foundation, Target Stores, Publix Super Markets Charities, Washington Mutual, The Janus Foundation, State Street Global Advisors, Cobb County Friendship Club, Pathways Within, Power Performance Solutions

