

The BEAT

PEOPLE FASHION

BOOKS HEALTH LIFESTYLE RECIPES MUSIC ART

ALTA shatters stigma one syllable at a time

By CAROLYN K CORREIA

AN evening spent at the Adult Literacy Tutors Association's (ALTA) Reading Circle at St Anthony's College, Westmoorings revealed a world that many of us take for granted. It was inspirational to listen to the students and tutors express what reading and writing meant to them, and viewed through a different lens. Things like completing application forms, writing their own addresses, reading street signs and supermarket labels are proud accomplishments for these students. Anthony (last name withheld),

who is a businessman in the field of construction and painting, said he does not have to ask anyone to write his quotations and letters anymore, he can now do it himself. He is also more confident in his conversations with others. This entrepreneur encourages others who may be timid to ask for help, saying that the fear would soon disappear since "the tutors and students at ALTA are all one big happy family."

Tutors expressed how this experience has changed their world view, resulting in fulfillment in both themselves and their students. They urge others wanting to make a difference to

contribute their time to something meaningful and positive such as helping others improve their reading and writing skills. Lead tutor and reading guide, Rosemarie Olliverre shared her proudest moment came when a student was able to interpret a poem and "find the joy inside herself...she found the joy of reading!" She admitted that this is not something you can teach and in that moment this student discovered the aged old philosophy that happiness comes from within, not from other people or things.

Margaret and Euphemia (last names withheld), both students of this Reading Circle, admit

that they always wanted to learn and are glad to get a chance to make up for the past. Euphemia explained that her name is a saint name, taken from a Catholic calendar. She also pointed out the "e" in her name is silent and pronounced "Ufemia". The two students are more confident and big words do not intimidate them anymore. They learn from their tutors how to break them down into syllables and suffixes, which improves pronunciation.

Margaret said due to family commitments, she was unable to get the education she needed growing up, but realised her strengths when her children's

teachers reminded her of the good job she did tutoring them in their formative years. Her children are now grown up and proud of their mother, wanting to see her complete level three of the programme. Her plans upon completion? To start her own child-care business. Euphemia also wishes to get her cleaning company off the ground with her new literacy skills.

Tutor, Karlene Chin explained that learning is encouraged by allowing students to "think below the surface". This is done by allowing students to read about the life of icons such as Martin Luther King, while

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EDUCATION

Reading Circle empowers students

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exchanging personal experiences that enrich each other's lives. One student even built up her confidence to read an inspirational piece to the class, which was chosen and practiced on her own volition.

Her classmate Carmen (last name withheld) smiled as she relived some her experiences when she first joined ALTA six years ago. As she read some verses from the *Bible*, she shared her proudest moment of opening a book and being able to identify the words. Her advice to others wanting to join: "you have a second chance to improve your life as adults and you should jump at it...nobody should influence you when you have a chance to do something for yourself." She commended ALTA's founder, Paula Lucie-Smith on her great idea to help people in need. One of Carmen's deepest wishes is that other persons would assist in funding the programme in whatever small way, to improve the programme.

Ollivierre and Chin, who are former teachers, said everyone has their unique strengths and weaknesses and students should not be labelled with a learning disability. Tutors all respect and value students for what they bring to the world and to the classroom. Their motto rings

true: "it is in giving that you receive".

David Shim, another Reading Circle tutor encouraged persons to dedicate at least two hours a week to make a valuable impact in someone else's life. He recommended that students join the library and find ways to communicate on some level via email or text message so as to utilise some of the writing skills they learn in class. He said students respond to down to earth teaching methods where "tutors and students sit side by side and learn one syllable at a time, never saying anything is too hard."

According to 2012 statistics from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), 781 million adults of the world population were not literate, of which two thirds were women. A 2013 Human Development report from the United Nations Development Programme revealed that approximately 59 percent of the male and female local population has received at least secondary school education as of 2012.

ALTA's slogan for 2015 is "No shame. Go brave. Get in. Get through. You can read." They are calling on persons to come forward and seek help to enrich their lives and for more persons to volunteer as tutors.



WORKING together to increase the country's literacy level.



TUTOR and student participate in the Adult Literacy Tutors Association's Reading Circle at St. Anthony's College, Westmoorings.



AN ALTA tutor assisting a student.