

Learning to read proves a lesson in perseverance

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By Jennifer Przydzial

For as long as Carolyn Kato can remember, she wanted to be able to read the newspaper.

Now with the help of Literacy Works, a nonprofit organization housed in the Eastern Family Resource Center in Rosedale, she can read this story and many others.

Kato heard about the program when she was staying at the cold-weather shelter located at the center next to Franklin Square Hospital Center.



Carolyn Kato, right, sharpens her reading skills with Anne Shelton, a volunteer with the Literacy Works program.

"I was way back in school and wanted to learn how to read," said the 61-year-old.

Linda Galinski, who helps at the shelter as a member of CAN, the Community Assistance Network composed of a group of churches that helps at the shelter, said "word of mouth spreads fast at the shelter downstairs."

Last week, Kato took an evaluation to track her progress. Her teachers said she is making great strides.

Not only is she learning how to read. She is also doing math and surfing the Internet.

"I even have an e-mail address," Kato said through a huge smile.

Literacy Works was established in 1989 by then-County Executive Dennis Rasmussen to promote adult literacy.

It offers adult-based education classes, General Educational Development preparation at night and English Speakers of Other Languages classes during the day.

Alice Miller, coordinator of Curriculum and Technology, said Literacy Works serves about 400 students a year at six locations, four in the county and two in the city.

From January through March, Literacy Works averaged about 15 students a month because the shelter is the most crowded during these times, Galinski said.

With the warmer weather, fewer students come to the Tuesday and Thursday night classes. The numbers may also be down because of success stories in which students found jobs and are no longer homeless.

"We have one student now who is working in an emergency room," Miller said.

Sometimes taking the first step to go from the shelter to Literacy Works is difficult, said Miller, a Parkville resident.

"Think of not being able to read as going to a different country," she said. "It can be a very scary thing."

When students come to Literacy Works, they are evaluated in reading, math and writing. Then they are teamed with volunteers, and individual learning plans are drawn up.

One of the biggest challenges is students sticking with the program, said teacher Jana Leonard.

"It is hard to keep coming back," said the Parkville resident.

Volunteer Nancy McKnight has seen some surprises.

"It is neat to see people so motivated to do things here and actually complete homework," she said.

Kato is one of those students.

Galinski said that during the winter, she showed up consistently, no matter the weather.

Kato is now living with her sister in Baltimore and takes two buses to get to Literacy Works.

"It doesn't take that long," Kato said. "Plus, I want to keep on learning."