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Thank You...

To Pine Avenue United Church and First United Church of Oak Park for donating tutoring space on Tuesdays and Thursdays and the Oak Park River Forest Food Pantry for donating healthy snacks each week for students.



Cluster is committed to helping youth from the Austin community realize their potential through the power of learning in an environment that strengthens the student, the tutor, and the community.

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www.clustertutoring.org.

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**Cluster Tutoring
PROGRAM**

www.clustertutoring.org

Annual Update • 2019



Cluster Student Kevin, a 5th grader, surprised his tutor, Maggie Boyaris, with a personalized "Super Teacher" t-shirt.

New Programs, New Home, New Accomplishments It's been a busy year for Cluster!

Cluster is excited to share highlights from our 2018 – 2019 year. In this report, you'll be introduced to two special Cluster students who gained experience as teaching assistants in our summer reading program.

In the fall of 2018, we welcomed Erin Agboola who leads our Project Next Step program, helping students to prepare for and navigate the challenge of applying for college. In addition to meeting Erin, you'll also be introduced to a tutor / student pair who demonstrate how this program, combined with tutor and student determination, lead to success for our students.

Finally, Cluster has a new home in the Austin Community! Prior to the start of our current program year, Cluster moved our office and our Tuesday evening tutoring to Circle Urban Ministries. We are enthusiastic about our new home and grateful for everyone who assisted in making this move possible.



Cluster Student Taliya, a graduating senior, with her long-time tutor Jackie Eckholm. The pair have been together for 6 years!

It's certainly been a busy year for the students, tutors and staff at Cluster, and we are excited to see the program continue to grow! As you read our report, we hope you enjoy learning about the many ways we are connecting to our community and impacting the lives of our students and tutors.

We are thrilled to be an integral part of the community and feel fortunate to be supported by so many generous donors. On behalf of Cluster's Board, thank you for your continued support.

With Gratitude,

Abby Sullivan, Board President
Kara Kalnitz, Executive Director

According to our volunteers, the #1 reason they tutor is getting the chance to watch a young person grow and mature over the years.
JOIN US...become a Cluster Tutor Today!

Volunteers are the Key to Cluster's Success

Cluster's volunteers enjoyed a night of socializing and a delicious meal at our end-of-session Volunteer Appreciation Dinner on May 23. Thanks go to our Executive Director Kara Kalnitz and her committee of tutor volunteers for organizing the event.

This year volunteers donated over 6,500 hours of their time tutoring, mentoring, working in the library, helping with computers, leading story time and using their talents in a variety of ways to benefit Cluster's students. This contribution of their time is approximately valued at \$325,000, but is truly priceless!

The photo below includes all of the tutors who were able to attend our Volunteer Appreciation Dinner, many of whom have volunteered with Cluster for over a dozen years. As we played an ice-breaker game to get to know each other, we wondered: How is it that so many tutors have eaten insects as food?



Tutor Spotlight: Cluster Alum, Aisha Williams, Pays It Forward

Aisha Williams embodies the mission of the Cluster Tutoring Program. She was so successful while she was a student at Cluster that she earned a college scholarship and then pursued a degree from Northern Illinois University. She knew the best way to give something back was to become a tutor herself. When her daughter, Kyla, started kindergarten, Aisha enrolled her at Cluster. After all, Cluster had given Aisha a strong start, so she knew that was a good route to strengthen Kyla's learning skills.

Aisha started tutoring at the same time. She took a break when her son, Blake, was born, but returned when she enrolled him in tutoring. Kyla is now a freshman at Elmhurst College studying computer programming. She was tutored by long-time Cluster tutor Phyllis Bowen. Aisha's 9-year-old son Blake is in 4th grade.



*"I was the first person in my family to graduate from college," said Aisha, who attended Cluster from 7-12th grade.
"I know how important it is to give something back."*

Having her own children at Cluster hasn't been too much of a distraction, Aisha said. "Sometimes my son will wave at me from across the room, but most of the time he works with his tutor and I work with my student" (*right*, Aisha at Cluster with her student, Jasharia).

When Aisha is not tutoring and caring for her own children, she is a Supervisor at a health insurance company.

THE MISSION OF CLUSTER TUTORING is to help students realize their potential through the power of learning in an environment that strengthens the student, the tutor, and the community.

When the Student becomes the Teacher in the Summer

The students who came to Cluster Tutoring's Summer Reading Program found extra help in the form of four teenage assistants. Along with the teachers, the four assistants helped the youngsters with reading and vocabulary. These teacher aides found that they learned as much as the kids. Two of them are Aliyah and A'meena, both longtime Cluster students.

Aliyah has spent two summers as a reading program aide. The first summer, she worked with younger students in 3rd and 4th grade. This summer, she worked with 5th and 6th graders.

"I like working with little kids — it's fun!" said Aliyah, now a senior at Prosser Career Academy.

Last summer was A'meena's first year as a teenage assistant. She said she also had a lot of fun with the students, but she was surprised that she was learning along with them.

*"It was a good review," A'meena said.
"I was learning more, refreshing what I knew about vocabulary."*

A'meena said she especially enjoyed helping struggling readers figure out words. "We worked on vowels, consonants, whatever they needed." A'meena worked with two groups of four to five students each. While the teacher taught one small group, A'meena took the other, making sure they were doing their work.

A'meena appreciated the training in orientation sessions before the summer program started. "We got to meet the teachers first and find out what we were going to do."

A'meena is a sophomore at Christ the King Jesuit College Prep. She likes working with children and is aiming to be a pediatrician.

Both teens have been with their tutors for several years. A'meena (right) has worked with Alex McCleese for three years, and Aliyah (left) has been tutored by Andrew Reed for five years. Both tutors praised the teens as good students.

Cluster's Summer Reading Program offers extra help in reading skills and vocabulary building so students can avoid the "summer slide" where students lose ground in reading. The program is offered to both Cluster students and those outside the tutoring program in grades K-6. It runs for six weeks, two evenings a week, for two hours a night.



Cluster's Local Fundraisers: CROP Hunger Walk & Donut Day



A big thank you to the organizers, walkers, donors, and other supporters of the CROP Hunger Walk. Its subsidiary, Hunger Walkathon West, gave Cluster a much appreciated donation of \$2,310 which will go a long way toward buying snacks for Cluster students on Tuesday and Thursday nights throughout the tutoring year. The CROP Hunger Walk is held annually on the first Sunday in May.

Time to Make the Donuts!

Thanks to all the tutors, students, families, and friends who mixed, fried, coated, boxed, sold, and bought donuts at the Oak Park Farmers' Market on July 20, 2019. Despite the heat, the donut makers had fun, and all the donuts sold out!

The event typically raises over \$1,000 and we greatly appreciate the partnership with Pilgrim Congregational Church.



You've Earned an Award! - Incentives to Succeed

Every week at tutoring, Cluster students have an additional reason to read, do homework, prepare for college entrance exams, and more. It's all part of the **Y.E.A! Incentive Program**. Now in its third year of operation, this program was adapted from a similar concept shared with Cluster by the Chicago Lights Tutoring Program at Fourth Presbyterian Church.

YEA! stands for You've Earned an Award! Students can earn up to six points per night in several ways and trade them in for awards. Points are given for reading, homework, standardized test preparation, reading comprehension exercises, vocabulary work, and more.

Students compile points each week at tutoring and redeem them at an incentive "store." The store is open three nights per year, in December, March, and May.

All students are eligible for an award and prizes are distributed based upon grade level. Students in grades K-6 can redeem their points for prizes such as art kits, fidget spinners, or jump ropes. Older students in grades 7-12 can use their points to receive gift cards.



Cluster's 2018-2019 Major Achievements

- 117 students from the West Side of Chicago were paired with 117 volunteer tutors.
- 76% of Cluster's 3rd graders improved their fluency by an average of 51%.
- 65% of Cluster's students showed improvement or maintained an A or B grade average in core courses.
- 100% of Cluster's graduates created post-secondary education plans with the assistance of our Project Next Step program. All of them were admitted to the college of their choice.
- Parents of Cluster students reported an overall 98% satisfaction rate with the tutoring program.
- 72% of students participating in the Summer Reading Program improved their reading fluency.

Cluster Tutoring has a new HOME!

After 29 years, Cluster Tutoring has a new home. The Cluster office and Tuesday night tutoring space are now located at 118 N. Central Ave. at Circle Urban Ministries, a nonprofit organization whose aim is to help disadvantaged residents in Chicago's Austin neighborhood. Circle runs programs to help youth, so Cluster fits perfectly into their mission.

The new Cluster space offers two large rooms for tutoring, a library, a computer lab and an office. In addition, our new space includes multiple parking lots, a receptionist, a large lobby where tutors and students meet before tutoring, and an elevator.



"We're looking forward to program growth," said Cluster's Executive Director Kara Kalnitz. "We're closer to public transportation — the Green Line isn't far away, and we're just north of Washington Avenue. There are other great programs in the building, so we have an opportunity to network."



Project Next Step — Preparing for Life After High School

2019 was the seventh year that Tad Polley and David worked together at Cluster. When in high school, David took a different path than most of his peers. He attended classes two days a week at Chicago Virtual Charter School, pursued most of his assignments online, and received tutoring and mentoring from Tad at Cluster.

Cluster's Project Next Step prepares high school students for life after high school by studying for the ACT/SAT, writing college entrance essays, developing college/career plans, completing applications for entrance, scholarships and financial aid, and exploring options other than college. Through it all, David was guided by his tutor Tad and the Cluster staff. This fall David enrolled at Northern Illinois University and is majoring in Business.



David and Tad started working together in 2012, when David was in 5th grade. David said he enjoyed tutoring — a lot. "I loved it," David said. "I learned how to be productive. There's always something to do here." Tad shares in David's enthusiasm and agrees that their time together has been beneficial for both.

"It has been amazing to watch David grow and mature over the years," Tad said.

"I am very proud of him!"

Staff Spotlight: Q& A with Erin Agboola, Project Next Step



Q: What is your favorite thing about coordinating Project Next Step?

A: I have enjoyed getting to work with the high school students, their tutors, and their parents through Cluster's Project Next Step. It is a special opportunity for me to get to know so many students while they go through high school, to see how they grow over those four years, and to be able to support them in their journey to find what they would like to do after high school.

Q: What is most challenging about the program?

A: The hardest part of the program is not seeing students every week during tutoring after they graduate. However, being able to help them begin their life path is worth the hard parts, and some students keep in touch after they graduate high school. Another challenge of working with the high school students who want to attend college is helping them find enough financial support to be able to graduate college without insurmountable debt.

Q: What have you learned about yourself since working with Cluster's high school students?

I have learned that I enjoy working with high school students! Prior to Project Next Step, I had not worked with high school students. I usually worked with younger children. However, I really enjoy working with high school students and getting to know each of them as individuals.

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Lyons Elementary School—*Student Council*
Parkview Presbyterian Church
Pilgrim Congregational Church
St. Giles Family Mass Community

The John Alec Kenealy Memorial Fund

A new endowed fund established in memory of a former tutor will provide support for current and future students of Cluster Tutoring.

The John Alec Kenealy Memorial Fund honors the memory of John Kenealy, who volunteered at Cluster Tutoring as a high school student. He enlisted in the U.S. Army after studying business at Elmhurst College. He was a specialist and vehicle commander in the Attack Company of the 4th Battalion, 17th Infantry Regiment, with whom he was deployed to Afghanistan. John died in August 2018.

Tutoring has been a family affair for the whole Kenealy family. John's parents, David and Janet Kenealy, are long-time tutors and supporters of Cluster, and Janet served on the Cluster Board. John's older sister, Anne, also was a tutor as a college student. Friends of the Kenealy family set up the fund in John's memory.



The John Alec Kenealy Fund will provide support for educational enrichment beyond the scope of the tutoring program itself. For example, students may require some financial assistance to participate in a class trip to Washington, D.C., to attend a special math program, or to purchase special supplies needed for class. Need would be identified by tutors. Requests will be submitted to a committee composed of select Cluster Tutoring staff, board members, a past Cluster Tutoring student, and a Kenealy family member. In future years, the fund could help with college and other post-graduate programs.

“John wouldn't know what to make of the outpouring of affection he's received, and yet I think he'd be so pleased to know the students of Cluster will be given some of the opportunities he had in his life through this fund,” Janet said. “He would be humbled.”

The fund is managed through the Oak Park-River Forest Community Foundation. Those wishing to donate can make checks payable to Oak Park-River Forest Community Foundation, with “Kenealy Memorial Fund” in the memo line. Checks can be mailed to: Oak Park-River Forest Community Foundation, 1049 Lake St., Ste. 204, Oak Park, IL 60301.

George Washington Middle School Students Raise Funds for Cluster

Along with being a first-year tutor at Cluster, Nancy Thomas teaches English Language Arts at George Washington Middle School in Lyons and is the sponsor of the school's Student Council. Each year, the students raise money for an outside group. This year, one of the students asked Nancy about her own volunteer activities at Cluster Tutoring, and the students chose that as the school's fundraising focus. The theme was “Patriots CLUSTER together for a common cause.”



The students held a week of fundraising events in late March that included an open gym basketball game, raffle tickets, out of uniform passes and other creative fundraising opportunities.

“The entire student body of 800 students got involved in the project. The students were excited to raise \$600,” Nancy said. “The most successful days were the out of uniform and open gym.”

“This is the first year we raised money for Cluster Tutoring, but we would like to make it an annual project,” Nancy added. “My students at GWMS wanted to give back and help other students their age, so this was a great opportunity for them to raise funds and donate to a local organization,” she said.

At Cluster, Nancy tutors a fifth grader, Lena. In addition, this past summer was Nancy's second year teaching at Cluster's Summer Reading Program. Cluster Tutoring would like to deliver a big THANK YOU to the students of George Washington Middle School for their donation. Go Patriots!