

Improving

LITERACY

WPSU inspires young readers in low-income communities

“Miss Lori is real!”

The little boy could hardly contain his excitement as he ran to his parents. He had just met Miss Lori, host of PBS Kids, at a “Kid Connection” event in Lewistown. Bringing Miss Lori to the occasion was one of the many ways in which Penn State’s WPSU and community partners such as the United Way and Mifflin County Library have engaged low-income Lewistown-area children and families, as well as educators, in an effort to improve literacy.

Over the past year, WPSU also has hosted family nights, day care workshops and booths at youth-centered community events. The outreach is part of a national PBS Kids Raising Readers literacy initiative, funded by the U.S. Department of Education; WPSU was selected as one of 10 Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) partners to participate in the initiative.

The initiative uses entertaining, research-based PBS Kids programs like the new “SUPER WHY!” and “WordWorld,” as well as classics like “Sesame Street,” as tools to meet the literacy needs of at-risk children ages 2 to 8. Multimedia educational materials based on these shows complement the programming, all of which are designed



Celeb to young PBS watchers, Miss Lori reads to a crowd in Lewistown.

to increase understanding of phonics, vocabulary, letter recognition and comprehension.

TV as Learning Tool

“We have been able to show parents and caregivers how to use television as not only entertainment, but also an educational tool,” said Jessica Peters, program specialist with educational services at WPSU. “It’s so rewarding to go to Mifflin County and hear stories from parents telling us how their child is interested in reading from ‘SUPER

WHY’ and learned how to spell from ‘WordWorld.’”

WPSU also introduced “Passport to Reading”—a program that motivates kids to read a checklist of books—to several thousand children in Lewistown and distributed 700 books from this year’s selection of the “Pennsylvania One Book, Every Young Child” program.

“WPSU is bringing PBS programming to life—helping to inspire a new generation of readers,” said Dr. Babs Bengtson, director of educational services for WPSU.

OVER THE LAST FIVE YEARS, students of Dr. Barrie Litzky, assistant professor of management and organization at Penn State Great Valley, have provided pro bono business counseling services to nearly 40 socially conscious businesses and non-profits. Local high school students participate free of charge, learning business skills from graduate student mentors.

For example, M.B.A. and Leadership Development graduate students worked with high schoolers to devise a business plan for the continued success of Camp Possibilities, a program that provides education and camping activities for children with Type 1 diabetes from low- to middle-income families.

"I have been able to apply the information generated by Dr. Litzky's students to help problem-solve a number of our current issues," said Jeff E. Dietz, founder and executive director of Camp Possibilities.

"Entrepreneurs are particularly good at recognizing opportunities, exploring innovative approaches, mobilizing resources, managing risks and building viable enterprises," noted Litzky. "These skills are just as valuable in the social sector as they are in business."

Twenty high school students participate, mostly from Malvern Preparatory School, Conestoga High School and Great Valley. "The high school students add a lot of value to the classroom experience because they tend not to censor their creative ideas the way adults do," said Litzky. "They benefit by interacting with business and community professionals, making contacts, gauging course loads for their upcoming collegiate experiences, and seeing first-hand the positive outcomes that can be achieved in the world."

Impact Around the Globe

The impact of this course is felt around the globe. For the Ray of Hope Foundation, which seeks to provide medical care for children in India, the student team performed a strategic analysis, identified funding organizations and performed a social-impact analysis to help in the grant-writing process.

For the West Africa American Trading Company, a sustainable trading company with offices in Monrovia, Liberia, the group developed a five-year strategic plan.

Students also helped Selene Whole Foods Cooperative in Media, Pa., the nation's first Fair Trade Town, with a cam-

High schoolers learn business skills from mentors at Penn State Great Valley—and help socially minded organizations in the process

THE SOCIAL SCENE



As a grad student and mentor, Michael Katz (kneeling) worked on Camp Possibilities' business plan.

paign to increase the involvement of its membership.

A number of organizations are on the waiting list for the course, and dozens of others have requested information on participating. "Organizations are chosen based on their triple bottom line philosophy (profit, people and planet), willingness to actively participate in the course and having a business need that the students can achieve in the time frame of the course," said Litzky.

WITH TEEN PREGNANCY back on the rise across the state and nation, sexuality education is critically needed, according to Dr. Patricia Barthalow Koch, professor of biobehavioral health in Penn State's College of Health and Human Development.

Koch is the faculty director of the Pennsylvania Learning Academy for Sexuality Education (PLASE), a

new initiative providing education and training to teachers, counselors, health care providers and other professionals who present sexuality education to students, families, clients and patients, among others.

PLASE is a collaborative effort between the Department of Biobehavioral Health and the Pennsylvania Coalition to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, which holds

SEXUALITY EDUCATION



an annual Teen Pregnancy Prevention Conference with Penn State Conferences at the University Park campus.

The first six PLASE workshops will be delivered at Penn State campuses throughout the state this fall. These workshops, funded by the Pennsylvania Department of Education, will focus on the prevention of HIV and sexually transmitted diseases. In spring 2009,

four more workshops focusing on other aspects of sexuality education will be offered at University Park. These spring workshops are partially funded through a grant from the Penn State Outreach Thematic Initiative Fund. The workshops will be delivered via Penn State Conferences and Continuing and Professional Education Outreach units in conjunction with the College of Health and Human Development.

“By pooling our knowledge and experiences, this statewide collaborative effort will have a significant positive impact on the health and well-being of Pennsylvania youth, through the efforts of our dedicated school and community professionals,” said Koch.

For more information about PLASE, contact Koch at p3k@psu.edu.

THE ART OF TEACHING SCIENCE

PENN STATE IS INSPIRING future scientists by building strong science-education foundations for children in the Reading and Philadelphia areas.

Penn State Berks is leading a three-year science education-improvement initiative in the Reading School District, thanks to the support of the Wyomissing-based Carpenter Technology Corporation.

The new initiative involves facilitating a revision of K-5 science curricula consistent with Pennsylvania's academic standards, helping to acquire hands-on science materials, holding science camps for children and their families and providing professional development and graduate training for teachers and administrators.

“It is essential that young students develop

both a good foundation and an interest in science at the elementary school level in order to build upon their knowledge and motivation as they progress to the upper grades of school,” said Dr. David S. Bender, associate professor of educational psychology and program coordinator of elementary education at Penn State Berks.

In the Philadelphia area, Dr. Kathy Fadigan, assistant professor of science education at Penn State's Abington and Great Valley campuses, has been encouraging urban youth in grades 4-12 to pursue academic achievement and careers in science, through her work with the city's annual George Washington Carver Science Fair.

Fadigan recruits and trains the fair's judges—professional scientists and educa-



Judges spend time with participants at an annual science fair, offering constructive feedback.

tors from local school districts, industry, and medical and higher education institutions (including Penn State)—who serve as mentors and provide constructive feedback to the 800 children who compete.

“This is our next generation of researchers and engineers, so it is crucial they have the support of the entire community,” said Fadigan.