



## Faye Combs

Faye Combs is Senior Advocate for Senior Literacy with the City of Berkeley, where she has worked over 30 years, even into retirement. Faye has been a continuing student and inspirational speaker for Berkeley READS adult literacy program, sharing her story “from shame to learner to leader.” She is a mentor to other learner leaders across the state through many projects, including California’s Adult Learners Leader Institute (ALLI). For the Key to Community Project, Faye has been on the core planning group helping to expand the project’s network and impact.

A long-time advocate for adult literacy to elected officials, Faye helped persuade Governor Jerry Brown to restore \$15 million to the California State Literacy Program. For six years she was President of VALUE – Voice of Adult Learners United to Educate – a national organization of adult learners who work together as a self-sustaining group without government assistance.

Faye has been an active member of St. Paul AME Berkeley for 58 years, holding various national and local leadership positions. For this work she received an honorary doctor of humanities degree from Monrovia, Liberia. Faye is mother of three adult children, grandmother of seven and great grandmother of four. A published writer in two anthologies, Faye continues to meet weekly with her tutor Carmen, now on Zoom, and is working on an autobiography of her life. She inspires our team to remember that “We are all learners and we are all teachers.”



## Resonja Willoughby

Resonja Willoughby has worked at the Second Start Adult Literacy Program as a Student Advocate /Outreach Coordinator for 23 years, coming in as a student of the program. She says: “Still today I wonder how they hired an angry student. I was angry enough to show up and expanding yourself is hard work. If you’re looking for change, be ready to step into discomfort.”

At Second Start, Resonja has developed several new programs including a Community Talk series to help students learn about the issues and find ways to volunteer that suits their skills and interests. For the Key to Community Project, Resonja led development of the popular How to Be Heard and Make a Difference workbook and workshop and has hosted Easy Voter Guide review sessions for several elections. She is a mentor to other learners to help expand the project’s leadership team.

Throughout her career at Second Start, Resonja has developed effective partnerships with groups throughout the community. She received the Oakland Mother of the Year Award in 1998. “I have worked countless hours in my children’s schools and with community organizations taking on many hats like raising money and feeding the homeless.” Resonja also helped create Women of Oakland books. She is now a proud grandmother of 1-year-old grandson Magnus. Her advice: “Don’t live up to the negative expectation that others set for you.”



## Alma Hernandez-Miller

Alma Hernandez-Miller has been an Adult Learner on Staff for Berkeley READS since 2013 after starting her library literacy work at Richmond's Project LEAP. Alma provides hands-on support to her family and community. She has managed fund-raising and the Snack Shack for her sons' sports teams. Her oldest daughter is deaf and she has been a committed advocate for the deaf community as an American Sign Language communicator. Alma worked as a vocational counselor for the autistic adults-CA Autism Foundation. Bilingual in Spanish, she interprets for her mother and helped her in obtain citizenship and vote for the first time after living in the U.S. for 60 years. A current volunteer activity is distributing free lunches to school families.

Alma has been a facilitator for the Adult Learner Leadership Institute and has co-presented at national as well state conferences. Alma was co-designer of the New Resume Project and is a mentor to adult learners. Alma has shared her voice via personal testimony to government officials and by authoring her Personal Triumph Story for the National Coalition of Adult Learners site. At the 2013 Value Leadership Institute, Alma met with United States Secretary of the Department of Education, Arne Duncan, in Washington, D.C. to make recommendations on how to improve services for adult learners. She was elected President of the VALUE-USA adult learner board. Alma is guided by her belief that "helping others to reach their dreams is an important priority."



## Zuleeka Mohammed

Zuleeka Mohammed serves as the Literacy Advocate at Read Santa Clara, the Adult and Family Literacy Program of the Santa Clara City Library. She provides orientations for new adult learners and supports learners and volunteers in the program.

Zuleeka came to the U.S. from Kenya in 1992 and her family is originally from Ethiopia. Because of war, most of her childhood was spent in a refugee camp outside of Somalia. She began learning English in 5th grade and has graduated from Cal State East Bay where she played college level basketball. Zuleeka enjoys inspiring people to achieve what they are reaching for. "I graduated from middle school, high school and college, but I've always played the catch-up game in the school system. I'm grateful for everything that I have accomplished, even with this struggle. But I know I'm supposed to do big things in this world, so that's why I won't stop trying to figure this out."

Zuleeka is starting a new learner support group at Read Santa Clara. She has participated in the Adult Learner Leadership Institute and is on the leadership team of the Key to Community project. Zuleeka is also an entrepreneur in fitness and wellness and is a representative for Herbalife. She is committed to helping people meet their literacy goals, fitness goals and financial goals.



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## Tanya Jauregui

Tanya's motto in life is "Don't Hide, Go Seek." She joined the Redlands Adult Literacy program at the A.K. Smiley Public Library in 2017 to build skills that would help her further her education and career. Tanya grew up in Moreno Valley, the oldest in her family and Spanish was her first language. She was recently promoted to the position of Finance and Administrative Support Coordinator for Cal State San Bernardino where she graduated after attending Moreno Valley Community College.

Tanya said that she has been active in many of the Redlands Adult Literacy program activities because "in order to keep moving forward, I have to go out and seek the opportunities." She gained regional recognition in the Writer to Writer program and was asked to present at the California Library Association's annual conference. This year she has helped to start up and facilitate a learner-to-learner book club.

After attending the Adult Learner Leadership Institute (ALLI) bootcamp in 2018, Tanya was asked to facilitate the program for other learner leaders in Southern California. For the Key to Community Voter Engagement project, Tanya participated in special training at the state capitol, has led voting workshops and has been instrumental in keeping the cohort connected across the state. She is enthusiastic about connecting learners from the southern and northern part of California and is inspired by: "coming together for a purpose."

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## Martha Romo

Martha Romo came to the United States from Guadalajara, Mexico when she was 23 years old. She settled in Redlands and chose housecleaning as a way to support her family and still be available for her two daughters. When they graduated high school, she joined the Redlands Adult Literacy Program in 2015. She wanted to communicate better with her employer, read to her grandson who is now five years old and increase her language competency to confidently participate in her community. She has successfully met these goals and more.

In 2017 Martha attended the Adult Learner Leadership Institute and was invited to return the following two years to serve as a facilitator and present about Goal Setting. She knows how to create a comfortable environment and put people at ease while also inspiring them. Last fall, Martha participated in training for the Key to Community Project and co-led voting and census workshops at her local library. She also enjoys active leadership in the new Learners Book Club.

Martha has spoken to prospective literacy tutors during tutor training sessions, providing important perspective. "The confidence that I have in my work as a housekeeper and as an independent distributor for Nature's Sunshine Products, is a direct result of the support I have received from the literacy leaders in my community. I have exceeded my original goals, and I am so grateful." Martha's message to others is, "Smile, and fly toward your goal."



## Taru Shah

Taru Shah moved to the United States in 1992, with her husband and three children. She worked in accounting for 9 years to help support her family until her granddaughter was born. When Taru started taking her granddaughter to the Placentia Library for the storytime programs, she learned about the library's Adult Literacy program. In 2014, she started working with a tutor with the goals of helping her granddaughter with homework and to build her English language communication skills

Through her unwavering commitment to learning new things, Taru has been meeting and exceeding her goals. In addition to weekly sessions with her tutor Ramona, Taru is an active participant in the literacy program's "Read, Write, Speak" club, book club and the annual Summer Reading Program. She also enjoys attending the yoga, tai chi, and art classes at the library. Taru has formed friendships with fellow learners and has had many opportunities to use her literacy skills.

Seeing Taru's consistent involvement in community events, Placentia Library Literacy Coordinator Sabrina Rosengren encouraged her to become a learner leader. Taru is now participating in the Key to Community Project, including the Easy Voter Guide working group, and will co-lead a voting workshop in the fall. She wants to help other learners become more connected to their community. Her advice is, "Don't miss your opportunity, and never give up."



## Phebe Dennis-Fortt

Phebe Dennis-Fortt came to the United States from Liberia in the 1980's and lives in Modesto. In Phebe's words: "With fortitude and hard work, I was able to become a resident and then a citizen. As a lifelong learner, I apply that same determination to my studies. After taking a public speaking class at a community college, I wanted to further those skills and found Learning Quest."

"I trust in the importance of non-profits and their power to impact the community. I am an active member of many and have started my own: Relief, Inc. The mission of Relief, Inc. is to improve the lives of impoverished women and orphans in Liberia by providing them with opportunities to become entrepreneurs. Because of my interest in community outreach, I was delighted when Rose Jurado at Learning Quest asked me to participate in the Key to Community training at the state capitol.

"After becoming knowledgeable about Key to Community and voting, I collaborated with Rose to create two voter workshops with the help of Donna Linder. We were able to reach a diverse group of people and provide them with important information." Phebe also served as a poll worker in Stanislaus County for both the March and November 2020 elections. Phebe shares: "I am passionate about voting. I believe that it is critical to our wellbeing and the future of our family, friends and neighbors."