



25TH ANNIVERSARY

Building Communities. Empowering Readers.

WITS LEGACY

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”

◀ **MARGARET MEAD** | Sociologist

“WITS strives to boost the skills and attainment of Chicago’s students by giving kids the opportunities they desperately need and deserve; that they may not get at home or in the classroom.”

◀ **Arne Duncan** | Former U.S. Secretary of Education

Twenty five years ago, three Chicago change agents created two programs, now combined into one organization to empower students as readers.

In 1991, Joanne Alter and Marion Stone befriended a teacher at Byrd Academy who expressed her students need for 1:1 reading time with caring adults to help get them up to grade level reading. Joanne and Marion got to work. They cleaned up the school library and read with students. As students were transformed into empowered readers, Joanne and Marion were inspired to found Working in the Schools (WITS) with the vision of activating volunteers as literacy mentors for students throughout Chicago.

Simultaneously, just a few blocks north at Oscar Mayer Elementary, librarian Rochelle Lee was inspiring generations of students and parents through her love of reading. In honor of her impact, the Rochelle Lee Teacher Award (RLTA) was created to provide teachers with the training and resources needed to inspire a love of reading in students. In turn, RLTA teachers emerged as literacy leaders in their schools.

In 2015, these programs merged under the WITS umbrella to create a holistic approach to literacy support in classrooms and schools. WITS stands on the shoulders of these visionaries and their belief that empowering students as readers will build communities of lifelong learners.



JOANNE ALTER
(1927-2008)



ROCHELLE LEE
(1922-2009)



MARION STONE

1989

Rochelle Lee Teacher Award (Boundless Readers) was founded by Rochelle Lee

1991

WITS was founded by Marion Stone and Joanne Alter

1993

WITS was incorporated as a 501(c)3 organization

1999

WITS Workplace Mentoring was established with its first corporate partner, CBOE

2003

WITS offers weekend program and establishes WITS on the Weekend

2005

WITS Early Childhood program was established

WITS IN CHICAGO

“WITS gets students excited about reading. WITS exposes them to another world that they don’t know about. WITS is bridging the gap and transforming the lives of the neediest kids in Chicago.”

■ **KRISH MOHIP** | Former Chicago Public Schools Principal and WITS Board Member

Working in the Schools (WITS) creates positive learning communities through a portfolio of volunteer literacy mentoring programs and teacher professional development; a comprehensive design to inspire students’ passion for reading.

WITS works for our city’s students. Our students make significant improvements in their attitudes towards reading, foundational literacy skills, and self-efficacy. Additionally, our students show greater gains in reading levels than their peers. WITS’ approach is two-fold:

We activate the largest corps of volunteers in Chicago Public Schools. Each volunteer works 1:1 with the same student throughout the year. Research shows that these strong, supported, and sustained relationships with caring adults provide an important space for youth to experiment and develop. In turn, our volunteers are transformed through their service and have a better understanding of the opportunities and challenges that face our city’s youth and educators.

We provide world renowned teacher professional development through the Rochelle Lee Teacher Award (RLTA). WITS trains our teachers to be literacy role models in the classroom and leaders in their schools. According to research, students thrive in an environment with collaborative teachers, effective leaders, and supportive adults. RLTA creates engaging classrooms where students receive instruction from highly trained teachers.

WITS creates a stronger school community and culture.

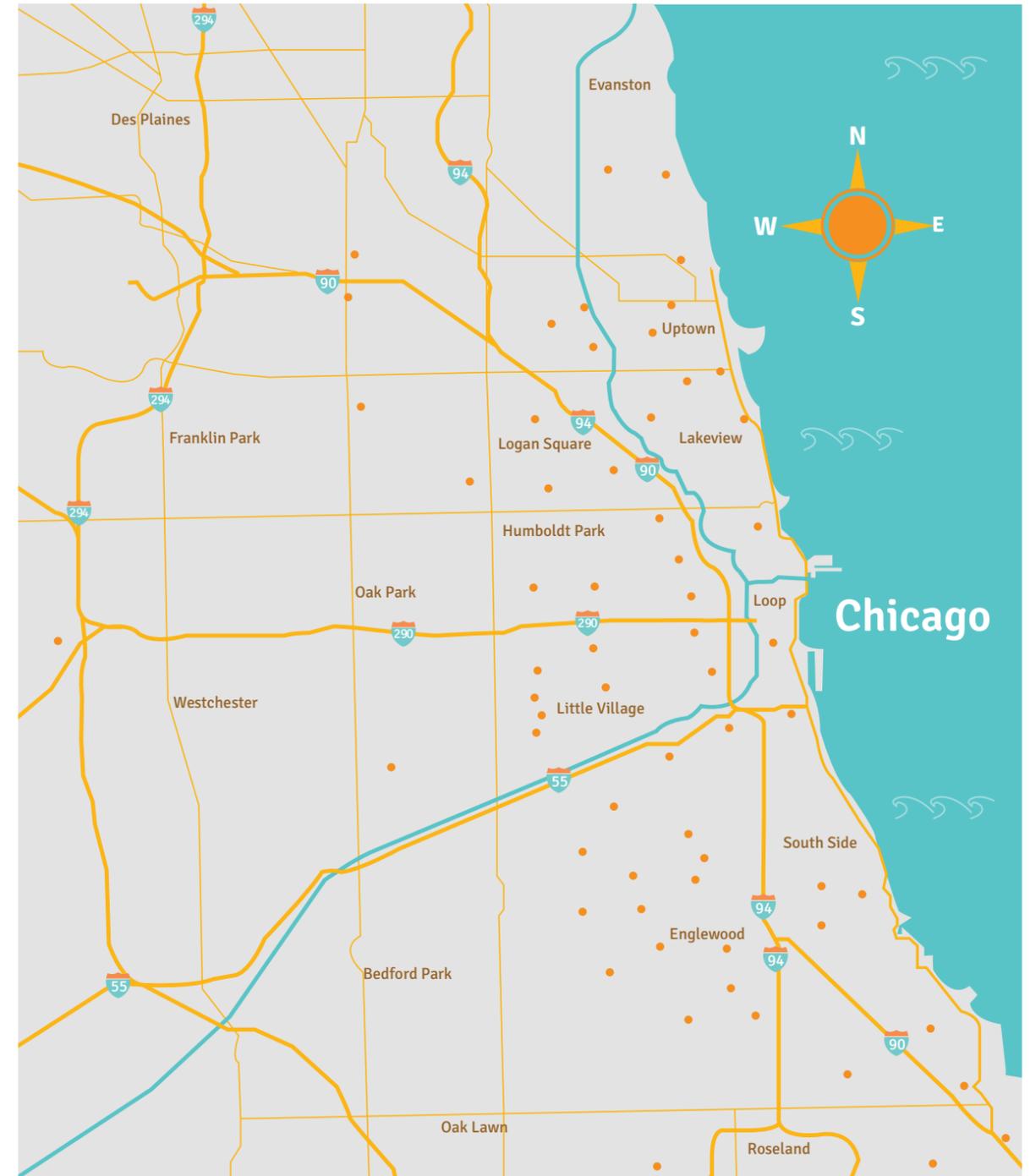
In the schools served by WITS, **95%** of students come from **low-income households** and approximately **97%** are **minority students**

95%

97%

“Our school was named #19 on the list of ‘Most Improved Schools in Illinois.’ When I found out, I immediately thought of WITS and the work that you do here. WITS is a big part of this success; WITS is a part of something big.”

■ **JOSEPH SHOFFNER** | Principal, McClellan Elementary School



WITS is 100% privately funded - at no cost to our partner schools. WITS serves 8,500 CPS students at 89 schools in 29 neighborhoods by supporting 317 teachers and activating 1,850 volunteers.

* Nagakoa Jenny, et al., The University Of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research, “Foundations for Young Adult Success: A Developmental Framework”, <https://consortium.uchicago.edu/publications/foundations-young-adult-success-developmental-framework> (June 2015)

VOLUNTEERS AT WORK

“WITS helps me understand my employer’s position as a corporate citizen within the city of Chicago. It’s encouraging that large firms like Credit Suisse facilitate employee involvement in programs like WITS that make tangible improvements in students’ future opportunities.”

■ **STEPHEN PRICE** | Volunteer & Associates Board Member

Many WITS volunteers give their time through their employer in group mentoring programs such as Workplace Mentoring and Mid-Day Mentoring. In these programs, groups of colleagues volunteer together as a company. For Stephen Price, participating in Workplace Mentoring stemmed from his own positive experiences growing up. “I aspire to reflect the values in the many mentors, coaches, and adults in my life who have helped me reach milestones and become who I am today,” acknowledges Stephen, a Credit Suisse volunteer since the fall of 2015. “When a co-worker asked if I wanted to be involved in the Workplace mentoring program, I knew it was the natural progression of starting to give back.”

Stephen began working with Valeria, a fifth grader from Otis Elementary. The pair quickly bonded over social studies, although it was far from Valeria’s favorite subject. Meeting her reluctance with enthusiasm and positivity, Stephen helped Valeria access the subject from a new, engaging way. “I enjoyed watching her get excited about stories and topics we read about each week. Over time she became more excited about it and even showed a genuine interest.”



Stephen Price and his WITS student at Credit Suisse

His passion for WITS has helped him build connections beyond his weekly participation in Workplace Mentoring. “Being involved with WITS helped me engage with different members of my firm across divisions and groups. It’s been an easy way to break the ice with different co-workers and build a strong internal network outside of an office setting.”

As the connection between student and volunteer grew over the course of a school year, so did Stephen’s desire to get more involved with WITS mission. Shortly after he began volunteering, Stephen became a member of the Associates Board. Although Stephen and Valeria’s partnership ended for the school year, the impact of the program was evident. “WITS opened my eyes to the reality of Chicago Public Schools and why programs like this are essential to helping today’s students.”

For the 2015-16 school year, WITS provided literacy mentorship to 735 students through the service of 1,370 corporate volunteers, such as those from Credit Suisse, in the Mid-Day Mentoring and Workplace Mentoring programs.



98% of WITS students improved their reading levels and **73%** reported an improvement in overall attitudes toward reading and reading behaviors from beginning to end of program year.

INVESTING IN WITS

- 1** **Whole School Literacy Support**
\$100,000 provides an entire school with holistic literacy support with multi-grade literacy mentors, two Rochelle Lee Teacher Award study groups, and books for the school.
A trained Rochelle Lee Teacher Awardee leading the class
A trained WITS classroom reading tutor dedicated to serving one teacher and one class of students throughout the school year
New, diverse and relevant books for the teacher to add to the classroom library
Well researched, age and grade level appropriate books for students to take home twice a year

- 2** **Activate Volunteers as Literacy Mentors and Develop Teachers as Literacy Leaders**
WITS activates nine programs designed to develop a student's passion for reading and increase foundational literacy skills. These programs revolve around volunteer literacy mentorship and teacher professional development.
\$75,000 provides **three** WITS classrooms with weekly literacy mentors, teacher professional development, and books for the classroom and for students to take home
\$50,000 provides **two** WITS classrooms with weekly literacy mentors, teacher professional development, and books for the classroom and for students to take home
\$25,000 provides **one** WITS classroom with weekly literacy mentors, teacher professional development, and books for the classroom and for students to take home
\$10,000 supports a Rochelle Lee Teacher Award study group for one school year
\$2,500 provides professional development and books for a classroom library to one teacher

- 3** **Increase Access to Books in the Classroom and at Home**
Research shows that having access to books increases a student's likeliness to be a lifelong reader. WITS provides students books in the classroom by awarding teachers classroom libraries through the Rochelle Lee Teacher Award program and sends students home with new books throughout the school year.
\$750 sends an entire class home with books
\$400 builds a Rochelle Lee Teacher Award library
\$150 sends books home with five students

Our program portfolio

GOOD MORNING MENTORS

Volunteers who can give time during the school day may be interested in our Classroom Reading Tutor or WITS Kindergarten programs. These programs usually take place in the morning and vary in time from two to four hours and from one to four days per week. These volunteers have the unique experience of building relationships with teachers and classrooms - and often become familiar faces in the school.

VOLUNTEER COMMUNITIES

Volunteers who want to read together as a company, college, or social group may be a good fit for our Mid-Day Mentoring, Workplace Mentoring, or WITS on Campus programs. Each program is facilitated by a WITS staff member and involves a weekly or every other week commitment from October through May. These programs provide a great way to build community within an office or network while sharing the power of reading with an elementary school student. Workplace Mentoring students travel to meet their mentors at their office or university. In our Mid-Day Mentoring program, teams of volunteers travel on a school bus to meet their students at their school.

SCHOOL'S OUT VOLUNTEERS

Literacy never takes a vacation - neither does WITS. Volunteers who would like to read over the weekend or during school vacation may be interested in our WITS on the Weekend or WITSummer Early Childhood Programs. Each program is facilitated by a WITS staff member and volunteers support students in a fun way during out-of-school hours.

- **WITS on the Weekend** brings volunteers and students together in teams for two hours on select Saturdays throughout the school year.
- **WITSummer Early Childhood** volunteers read with students for two hours, once a week, for the six weeks of CPS summer school.

ROCHELLE LEE TEACHER AWARD

Each year, over 250 Chicago Public Schools teachers in grades Pre K - 8 apply to participate in the Rochelle Lee Teacher Award (RLTA) and are selected through a competitive application process. When applying, teachers choose to apply as an individual or with a group of teachers as a study group. When awarded, teachers receive 20+ hours of professional development on research-based literacy best practices. Teachers also receive approximately \$400 (individual) or \$700 (study group) worth of new books for their classroom libraries. Teachers commit to RLTA throughout the school year by agreeing to implement best literacy practices in their classrooms such as reading aloud to their class for 20 minutes each day, allowing students an additional 20 minutes of independent reading, as well as providing students with the opportunity to take books home daily.

IMPACTING THE CLASSROOM

“I am ever so grateful for the opportunity to have Lisa [WITS Volunteer] in my classroom. Lisa has been flexible in what she does, whether reading or writing, and able to work with a wide range of children. She is observant about students and their needs and is comfortable asking me about students and sharing what she observes. I feel very fortunate to have her, and continue to feel very indebted to WITS for this opportunity!”

■ **JULIE PHELPS** | 1st grade RLTA teacher at Corkery Elementary School

Volunteer service inspires students and helps teachers advance the classroom.

“I remember that I wanted so badly to have books available for my students,” said Olimpia Bahena, Principal at Talcott Elementary. Before she was an administrator, Olimpia was in the classroom as a fifth and sixth grade teacher. She taught for ten years in the Back of the Yards neighborhood in schools that could use all the resources they could get.

“When I learned about the Rochelle Lee Teacher Award, I didn’t hesitate to apply.” At first, the award was about building a great classroom library and providing students with access to books they wanted to read, but soon the true value of the award revealed itself as more than just a capital grant. Now, Olimpia describes her Rochelle Lee Teacher Award experience as one of the defining moments of her early teaching career, “I was able to talk to other teachers and be a part of an official teacher network. I participated in workshops and book clubs. We were exchanging great ideas for classroom gains in a safe professional environment.”



WITS third grade students improved, on average, by 5 Fountas and Pinnell* reading levels from beginning of program year to end of program year, whereas non-WITS students demonstrated an improvement of only 4 reading levels.

* Fountas and Pinnell is a book leveling system, categorizing books on certain levels of difficulty, A-Z. This system is used by WITS and by many Chicago Public Schools to match students to books that will be at their appropriate reading level.



Olimpia Bahena speaking on educator’s panel at the WITS Back to School Luncheon

Teaching can be a difficult and thankless task; a network of peers who were motivated to do more elevated the teaching profession for all awardees.

Olimpia continued to develop as an educator and eventually went into school leadership. She has been the Principal at Talcott Elementary for six years, where she has supported and grown WITS programming for her students and teachers in this West Village neighborhood school. This year, Talcott will host 97 volunteers through WITSKindergarten, Mid Day Mentoring, Workplace Mentoring, and WITSummer Early Childhood programs. **“There is a saying that ‘it takes a village to raise a child’—volunteers bring this concept of community, which is so needed in urban education.”** Students need to see that their education is valuable. Volunteers who are a consistent presence have the power to both cheer students on through difficult tasks and reinforce classroom concepts. These volunteers become part of the village that Olimpia leads to help her students achieve academic success.

This year, Olimpia joined the selection committee in the Rochelle Lee Teacher Award’s first year as a WITS program. “As I drove to the selection committee meeting, I was thinking about my own experience as an educator and how much these WITS programs have meant to me and my students—now I would grant that same experience to another teacher. I felt like my career had come full circle.” The award had meant so much to her as a young teacher, the volunteers had meant so much to her students, and the support of both the volunteer and teacher programs had supported her team of teachers in her role as an administrator. “It was a great responsibility to be given, and after years of teaching and watching volunteers come into my school, I knew I had been preparing to make these decisions my whole career.”

DEVELOPING TEACHERS AS LITERACY LEADERS

“Small victories. All the little things. Test scores and academic gains are wonderful and they are what my success is measured by from others, but I feel more of a sense of accomplishment when my students do things that show me their character is developing. I love that my boys wait for all of the girls to walk into the room before they do. I love that they don’t laugh when someone gets hurt. I love that when they are late to school, they walk up to me and say “I’m sorry for being late.” I love that they like to be different from the other classes. This is the class I dreamed about when I decided to become a teacher.”

◆ **MOLLY NELSON** | Rochelle Lee Teacher Award recipient

Molly Nelson knows that reading is more than an academic skill, it is character building. She has taught in the Lawndale/Garfield Park area for four years, but the 2014-15 school year was her first in a Chicago Public Schools neighborhood school and she’ll tell you that it was also her hardest.

“Behavioral, social and emotional problems ate up a lot of our instructional time and I felt like we could never catch up,” she recalls. Her students were far behind their peers on basic reading and math skills, and they struggled to make any gains. “It seemed like I had a class of angry 20 year-olds trapped in third grade bodies.” But the tone of Molly’s classroom would change on Thursday mornings when WITS volunteers arrived to read one-on-one with her students. “I would sit back and watch them with their WITS mentors, and they would return to being eight and nine years old again.”



Molly Nelson, 2015 Rochelle Lee Teacher Awardee and 3rd grade teacher at Melody Elementary

“My students desperately wanted one-on-one attention and time with books. WITS provided that.”

This school year, Molly received the Rochelle Lee Teacher Award. Over the summer, she began participating in WITS professional development workshops and, as part of the award, she received books for her classroom library. “The WITS workshops were far better than most professional development I have attended. I gained so much information and ideas. At the end of it all, I received so many books and that was a wonderful thing as well!”

Now, Molly incorporates the lesson ideas and teaching strategies she gained over the summer in her classroom. She also has WITS volunteers in her class on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Students check books out of her brand new library to take home and read on their own. Students can name the authors they like and the topics they want to read more about. “WITS is a weekly dose of something that both my students and I need. WITS gave me the opportunity to evaluate myself as a reader and as a teacher. WITS reignites a passion for reading and learning.” WITS helped Molly’s students meet an academic need—the critical practice of reading—as well as a social emotional need—the lifeskill of learning to talk about a book and listen with respect.

WITS teachers receive **5,000 hours of professional development**, impacting the lives of more than **5,544 Chicago Public School students**.



WITS TODAY

The cost to Chicago Public Schools, teachers and students: \$0

- ▶ 317 Chicago Public School teachers assisted
- ▶ 8,500 Chicago Public School students served

With the support of:

- ▶ 1,850 volunteers
- ▶ 1,400 hours of volunteer training
- ▶ 40,810 hours of volunteer service
- ▶ 46,551 new books in classrooms and student homes

The Rochelle Lee Teacher Award consists of:

- ▶ 865 hours spent by teachers in WITS review library
- ▶ 5,000 hours of teacher literacy professional development



WITS TOMORROW

WITS believes that when communities of teachers and volunteer literacy mentors teach and model what it is to be a passionate reader, students will follow, engage and form a mindset for success.

WITS will...

Expand programs that guide Chicago's students toward a love of reading which will create stronger, safer and more empathetic communities.

Bring literacy mentorship and teacher professional development programs to every Chicago neighborhood, creating a culture of empowered readers in schools.

Create a positive, collaborative, and supportive community across our network of volunteers, teachers, principals, and investors to support a strong future for our schools.

This year, WITS volunteers invested 360,000 hours into mentoring elementary school students - totaling nearly one million dollars.

At the beginning of program year, WITS students were reading, on average, only 30 minutes outside of school. By the end of program year, **WITS students reported reading an hour each day outside of school.**

95% of WITS volunteers said that they built meaningful relationships with their students during the program year.



2013



WITS offers programs year-round and establishes WITSummer in the Parks

2014



The Rochelle Lee Teacher Award is integrated into WITS program portfolio

2015



WITS moves to the Literacenter

2016



WITS celebrates its 25th Anniversary

OUR MISSION

Working in the Schools (WITS) creates positive learning communities through a portfolio of volunteer literacy mentoring programs and teacher professional development; a comprehensive design to inspire students' passion for reading.

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