



Taking Steps Toward the Future

By Leon Scott, Executive Director

Reading Saturday enjoyed another amazing year in 2008-2009. We served over 200 students in grades 1-5 from seven Cobb County and Marietta Schools, and observed excellent results on our year-end student assessments. As always, we are grateful to the people and partners that contributed to our success.

As school budgets are reduced and incomes shrink, families of struggling students are calling on us more than ever. Omosaze is taking thoughtful steps to meet demand by continuing our transition to a three-part intervention model that incorporates week-day, weekend, and summer learning times. The weekday after-school initiative called

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Celebrating the Birthday of Dr. Seuss

By Celisa Alston, Associate Executive Director



As I watch the individuals, schools, and community organizations that contribute to the growth of Reading Saturday students, I have seen truth in the African proverb, *"It takes a village to raise a child."*

For the last three years, Omosaze has had the privilege to partner with two local organizations during an annual celebration of the birthday of Theodor Seuss Geisel (aka Dr. Seuss): Communities in Schools of Marietta/Cobb County and the North Suburban Atlanta Chapter of Jack and Jill of America. On March 7, high school volunteers from Jack and Jill read their favorite Seuss stories aloud to Reading Saturday students, an experience that seemed to capture the children's imaginations. It also reinforced the idea that good reading is something that all students can strive for and attain. It was gratifying to watch a connection develop between the students and our guest readers.

The reading was followed by a book distribution by Communities in Schools Marietta/Cobb County. Each student received a book of their own, and they were thrilled. Their eagerness is proof that Omosaze, along with parents, schools, and other organizations, is helping to set children on the right path. *"Oh, the places they will go."*

About Communities in Schools

Communities in Schools is a national organization focused on keeping kids in school and helping them prepare for life. Communities in Schools believes that every child needs and deserves 1) a one-on-one relationship with a caring adult, 2) a safe place to learn and grow, 3) a healthy start and a healthy future, 4) a marketable skill to use upon graduation, and 5) a chance to give back to peers and community.

About Jack and Jill of America

Jack and Jill of America is an African-American organization of mothers who nurture future leaders by strengthening children ages 2-19 through chapter programming, community service, legislative advocacy and philanthropic giving. They believe every child, with proper guidance and opportunity, can be a leader.

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Our Purpose

To instill a passion for learning among under-performing elementary students by providing exceptional reading instruction outside of regular school hours.



Teacher Perspective: Patricia Glenn



2008-2009 was my first year with the Omosaze Reading Saturday program. I taught second graders. Throughout the year, I saw their reading skills improve in the areas of decoding, comprehension, fluency, and language development and expression. There were also intangible improvements in their self-confidence and in their interpersonal relationships with each other.

Initially, the students seemed uncertain about learning on a Saturday. I could sense their hesitation and uninspired responses. But it was not long before the “light seemed to come on” and they were eagerly reading and developing sentences. It was remarkable to watch them go from canned responses to thoughtful answers that required them to make connections between what they already

knew and the new skills that we were learning. As the year progressed, I could see the students becoming not only better readers, but better learners as they enthusiastically worked to expand their thinking skills.

The small group work was a bonus as the children learned to work collectively and to encourage and support one another. Their confidence was boosted by an environment where they could try and fail without negative repercussions. The students particularly enjoyed the special activities that occurred during the year, i.e., guest readers from Jack and Jill and book give-a-ways, when they were able to select a book to take home and share with their families.

As an educational consultant, coach, and trainer working primarily with parents and educators, it was a privilege to work directly with children. Reading Saturday provides evidence that the collaborative work of families, schools, and agencies is helping to restore the children’s love of reading and learning, and leading them to a brighter future.

Parent Comment

“[Reading Saturday] has helped my daughter a lot. It has helped her to read with ease. I am grateful to all of the teachers that participated in this program. May God bless them all!”

 Reading Saturday Parent

Partner Spotlight: Dunleith Elementary School

Dunleith Elementary School, part of the Marietta City School District, was Omosaze’s first partner school when it debuted the Reading Saturday program in 2001-2002. The program was initiated under the direction of principal Jill Sims. Today, the program operates under the guidance of Tiffany Pollock, principal since July 2005. Ms. Pollock showed expanded support for the program in February 2009, when she joined the Omosaze Board of Directors.

According to Ms. Pollock, “We will never teach *all* of our students to read if we do not address the students who have the greatest deficits in reading. Teaching all students to read requires a consistent and pervasive commitment to early identification of students in reading crisis, followed by implementation of the intensive and effective interventions needed to help these students become proficient readers.”

Dunleith Elementary is a Title I school with over 530 students in Kindergarten through 5th grade. Over three-quarters (79%) of students are economically disadvantaged and qualify for free or reduced cost lunch. One-quarter (26%) of the student population is learning English as a Second Language.



“Today’s teachers,” says Ms. Pollock, “are being trained to address a wider range of student learning styles and academic challenges than ever before. However, the educational needs of many students are simply too great to expect the regular classroom teacher, alone, to meet them all. For this reason, partnerships with phenomenal organizations like Omosaze are greatly needed and appreciated. Omosaze has surpassed our expectations for helping students become strong readers. Our students have shown great gains in the areas of reading and writing. It is an understatement to say that the Reading Saturday program has made a positive impact on our students.”

Between 2005-2006 and 2007-2008, the percentage of third graders passing the Reading portion of the Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) at Dunleith Elementary increased by 21% (from 64% to 85%), a significant gain.

Omosaze is grateful to Dunleith Elementary for continuing to welcome Reading Saturday. Our partnership enables Omosaze staff and volunteers to make a hands-on impact in the lives of Cobb County kids. The partnership is truly win-win.

Volunteer Perspective: Lesa Tucker

As a member of the Junior League of Cobb/Marietta, I am an active volunteer, and this year I chose to dedicate my time as a reading friend for first grade students attending Reading Saturday. I have a great love of reading, and my family always encouraged me to read everything I could get my hands on. I wanted to share this love of reading with children who hadn't yet discovered it.



I've never worked in a learning environment, so I was a bit nervous at first, but Omosaze's morning volunteer orientation eased my initial concerns. On my first Saturday, when I was partnered with two children, a boy and a girl, I was a bit nervous again, but I learned that, because the lesson plan is so straightforward, it was just as easy to work with two children as it was to work with one. Each week, we would read, review vocabulary, brainstorm synonyms, and complete other learning activities, all in under an hour.

The children are amazing, so eager to learn. As the year progressed, I saw them really open up, growing in confidence and wanting to know more each week. I found myself smiling as they retold stories we read together, adding in their own bits and pieces as their imaginations took off.

Working with Reading Saturday has been the most enjoyable volunteer experience I've ever had. Each week, I would look forward to seeing my students, knowing that we would accomplish so much more than good reading. Omosaze gave me all the support I needed to be successful. I look forward to returning in 2009-2010.

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Reading Club is ready for implementation in fall 2009. During 2009-2010, we will be developing a new Summer Literacy Camp curriculum, with hopes of a summer 2010 debut.

This menu of reading services creates opportunities for cost-effective solutions by equipping us to integrate reading instruction with existing after-school programs at schools and other community locations. In 2009-2010, we will explore a weekday partnership not only with Reading Saturday partners, but with Girls Inc. of Greater Atlanta as well.

At the same time, in light of the current economy and in consideration of its comparatively higher operating costs, we will not expand Reading Saturday to any new schools during 2009-2010. We look forward to resuming strategic growth of Reading Saturday in future years.

Organizationally, the Omosaze board and staff are assessing and reconfiguring our structure to meet expanding service opportunities and to provide the required attention to programmatic, marketing, and fundraising activities. As part of this effort, and in recognition of the important role these women have played, former Operations Manager Celisa Alston has been promoted to Associate Executive Director, and former Site Coordinator Michele Jones has been promoted to Operations Manager. Celisa and Michele will play vital roles in what promises to be another exciting year for Omosaze, helping to ensure that we remain focused on delivering high quality, cost-effective reading instruction to every student.



Special Thanks to Our 2008-2009 Supporters

Government Partners: Cobb County CDBG Program, Marietta CDBG Program, Dunleith, Hickory Hills, A.L. Burruss, and Bryant Elementary Schools, Marietta City/Franklin Road Weed & Seed Collaborative

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Community Partners: North Suburban Atlanta Chapter of Jack and Jill of America, Incorporated, Communities in Schools of Marietta/Cobb County, Inc.

