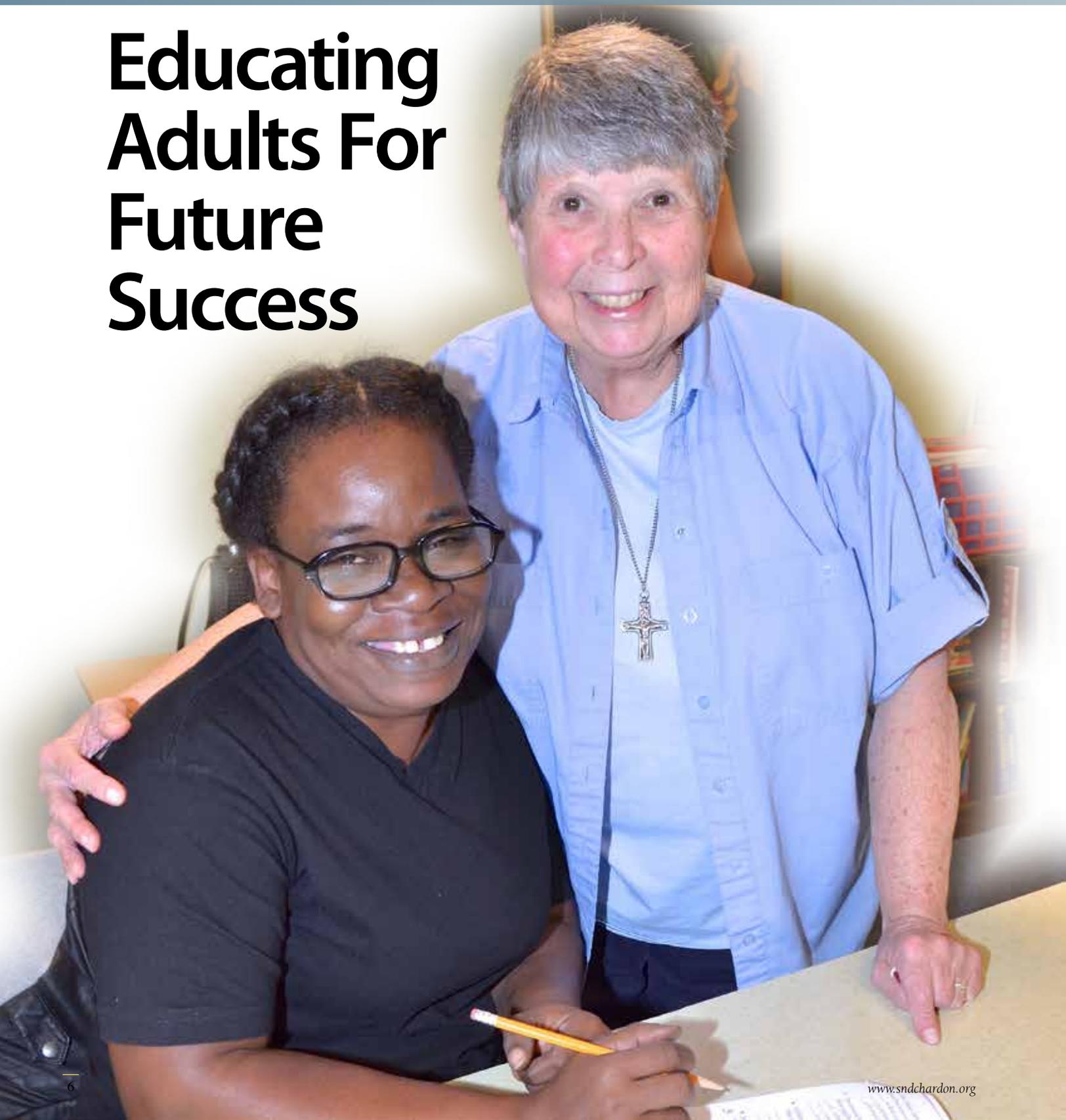


# THE LEGACY PROJECT:

## Educating Adults For Future Success



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## EDUCATION IS THE MOST POWERFUL WEAPON WHICH YOU CAN USE TO CHANGE THE WORLD.

- Nelson Mandela

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The Sisters of Notre Dame established The Legacy Project in July 2000 with the mission to bring their legacy as educators to the poor in the Glenville/Hough area of Cleveland. Sister Mary Frances Dunham, SND was the first director of the program, from 2000-2002. Sisters volunteered to teach computer skills, tutor children after school at St. Thomas Aquinas School, and tutor adults who were not able to attain a high school diploma. Sister Kathleen Ruddy, SND became director in August 2002, and estimates that more than 40 adults who participated in The Legacy Project have gone on to earn their GEDs with some moving on to graduate from college and work in the fields of nursing, business, social services, criminal justice, the arts and early childhood education.

Sister Kathleen, SND, explains, “It began with a vote of the Province in July 2000 to go back to Ansel Road and give back to the old neighborhood.” The Legacy Project is housed in the former provincial center of the Sisters of Notre Dame. Because the Sisters had

lived at this Ansel Road address for over 40 years it felt like going back home. Sister Kathleen responds, “We went back to give back!” Giving back to the Glenville/Hough neighborhood has been a privilege for the Sisters to help continue working with adults to further their education which in turn will pass down to their children. In these areas, 92 to 96 percent of adults read at or below the 4th grade level.

Sister Kathleen shares a story about a single mother who received her GED. “While working on her GED, she and her children would sit every night and do homework together and the mother told them that they did not want to be 40 year olds doing homework, so stay in school.” When parents make education a priority, children follow suit. If an eighth grade education is good enough for their parents, it’s good enough for the child(ren). The Legacy

**“It began with a vote of the Province in July 2000 to go to Ansel Road and give back to the old neighborhood.”**

- Sister Kathleen Ruddy, SND

Project through its free guidance and tutoring of adults who value education is making a difference in our neighborhoods.

“Historically there have been several generations of the GED tests,” says Sister Mary James Kelly, the current director of The Legacy Program. The purpose of the GED program in 1942 was to enable soldiers returning from World War II to complete their high school education and receive a diploma. Since then it has become a path for adults who did not finish high school to receive the equivalent of a high school diploma through education and testing. While the academic content areas in which candidates are assessed—English language arts (reading/writing), social studies, science, and mathematics—have not changed, the priorities and assumptions by which proficiency in these areas is assessed have evolved. The test is available in English, Spanish, and French.

According to Sister Mary James, the fourth generation GED high school equivalency test, begun in January 2014, is much more demanding than previous tests. “Now, the GED test is only administered online, so anyone taking the test must have basic computer skills as well as proficiency in the five subject areas. In addition, the writing requirement is more stringent; there is a writing requirement in all subject areas.”

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Over the years, more than 300 adults have attended Legacy for various lengths of time, improving their reading, math and writing skills. This small bit of education has enabled some to get jobs and others to help their children with homework and give them the message to stay in school and graduate.

Sister Kathleen explains. “Many students have reported back to let us know what they are doing such as Terelawanda, who owns her own

**“There are health problems, family difficulties, even addictions that must be overcome. Many of the adults we tutor have prioritized everyone but themselves.”**

- Sister Mary James Kelly, SND

business; Olga, who is working as a Catholic elementary school secretary; Jovahn, a communications graduate from Cleveland State University; Gloria, who went on to culinary school with the dream of working in hotel management; and Laurel, who went on to college for drama and the arts. To date, more than 250 other students have participated in the Legacy Program to improve their reading, writing, math and

thinking skills. Many were able to find employment because of these improved skills.”

She continues, “Isaac, one of the ‘Lost Boys of the Sudan,’ was one of the first in his group of refugees to pass the GED, graduate from college, and own his own home. He now dreams of returning to Sudan to help his people,”

Sister Mary James explains that now The Legacy Project’s goal is not to just prepare individuals for taking the GED but to strengthen the literacy and academic skills of these adults, many of whom reside in the Glenville/Hough areas.

“Today, rather than simply preparing adults to take the GED test, The Legacy

Project volunteers teach all five subjects included on the test. Our tutors are well qualified; one was actually a former GED judge who helped to score the high school OGT (Ohio Graduation Test). Another tutor teaches part time at a local college,” Sister Mary James explains.

Five Sisters of Notre Dame serve as tutors each week at Legacy Project, located at 1325 Ansel Road (formerly



Notre Dame Academy). They are Sister Mary James, Sister Mary Regina Alfonso, Sister Mary Ann Glaser, Sister Mary Lisette Petelin and Sister Mary Kathleen McCafferty.

A Sister of Notre Dame for 55 years, Sister Mary James earned a B.A in Education from St. John’s College in Cleveland and a M.S. degree in Elementary Education with a specialization in Mathematics from Dayton University. She taught 44 years with the last 20 being in junior high math at various schools. Sister Mary James tutors math at The Legacy Project.

The consummate educator is quick to remind everyone that a high school diploma remains the primary ticket to many entry-level jobs and is also a prerequisite for



promotions, occupational training, and postsecondary education. “In an ideal society, everyone would graduate from high school,” states Sister Mary James. “However, life happens causing some people to derail on their educational journey. There are health problems, family difficulties, even addictions that must be overcome. Many of the adults we tutor have prioritized everyone but themselves. Most who come in for help are really quite bright.”

She says one individual came to The Legacy Project because his employer said if he could get his GED in 60

days, the company would give him a promotion and pay for his college tuition. “It has been a pleasure to tutor someone who is highly motivated!” exclaims Sister Mary James happily.

GED testing offers the only nationally recognized opportunity to earn a high school-equivalency credential. Sister Mary James says it generally takes three years to prepare a person to take and pass their GED. The Legacy Project is open Mondays through Thursday from 9:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

The Legacy Project tutoring is free and open to anyone 18 years of age and older, but one’s class must have already graduated. You cannot quit school in April and try to pursue a GED. Currently, about 10 to 15 people come each week for tutoring. In the past, as many as 50 people attended The Legacy Project weekly. More volunteer tutors are needed, particularly in math, and financial support is always an issue, says Sister Mary James. She is currently working on obtaining grants to help support this worthwhile project. “One word of advice to young people – stay in school!” insists Sister Mary James. “You will get your high school diploma much more quickly, and it will mean more than a GED.” †

