

Not Able to Read

The ten words were broken into syllables for the students in Mark Edmond's Beginning Adult Basic Education (ABE) reading class at Center for Literacy (CFL). The ten students were able to pronounce and define difficult words with Mark's assistance: bilingual, receptivity, loquacious, alabaster, fiduciary, constipation, stimulation, inferior, fluorescent and matricide. "You need a game plan when you see a new word. Sound it out, break it into syllables. You can read anything if you have a game plan," advised Mark.

Mark has been with CFL for almost 20 years, as a tutor area coordinator and as an instructor for all levels of classes. A graduate of Central High (class 234) and Temple University, where he received a scholarship that earned him a master's degree in political science, he loves to teach. "All learners learn differently. CFL allows me the freedom to teach each learner in a different way. I feel blessed to have a job that I love." In his spare time, Mark plays the trumpet and manages a jazz band, Mark's Jazz Crew. Almost every weekend he plays at wedding receptions and corporate events.

Education was important to his family. While growing up in North Philadelphia in a very poor household with 10 siblings, his parents stressed that education was the ladder to advance in life. "All 10 of my brothers and sisters have done well. All of them have high school degrees and most of us have advanced degrees. My youngest brother has the only African American owned commercial real estate firm in the Delaware Valley," Mark says proudly. "I want the same for my learners. I know that it [education] can better peoples' lives."

The average educational level of his beginning ABE reading class is second grade. Some came to class starting at "0," meaning that they were barely reading. Some have learning disabilities. When asked why they want to learn how to read they answer: "to better myself, to learn how to fill out a job application; I want to read to my grandchild and be able to fill out papers at my doctors' offices; I want a better job; I want to read to my three-year old daughter; and to get a GED® and go to college."

Mark brings hope to his students.

One of his students, Adrian Lewis, found out that he was dyslexic when he was 24 years old. Over the six months in Mark's class he has improved his reading level from beginning ABE literacy to the next level, beginning basic education. Adrian came from Jamaica five years ago to get a better life and to go to school. "In Jamaica they help you with an education when you are a teenager, but there is no help for adults. There is no second chance like I am given now," he says.

Adrian was the oldest of five boys in a single parent household. His teachers thought he was slow and put him in the back of the class. "In Jamaica you have to choose one of them: school or work. I chose to work," which Adrian did when he was 17 years old to help his family and put all his brothers through high school. He worked for seven years at a resort in Montego Bay, moving up the ranks from busboy to bartender. When management wanted to promote him to supervisor they discovered that he could not read. "I always compensated for not being able to read. I memorized things. They were shocked to discover that I couldn't read," he says. "They tested me for reading and tried to teach me how to read but my job duties got in the way. I was always needed to do the work." One of the people staying at the

resort brought him a book about dyslexia. His friends read it to him so he would better understand what he was facing.

In 2008, Adrian resigned from his job at the resort and raised pigs, goats and chickens for four years. Then he came to the U.S. where he learned that it is hard to get a job. He didn't have a skill. Now he does part-time work as a laborer. "My ultimate goal is to have a skill. To be an electrician, a plumber, or an air conditioning technician. I realize that I need to learn how to read first. Once you have a skill, someone will always need you," he says. "For now, I would like to advance in my reading to be able to read a newspaper and to read a book to my three-year daughter, Laylani."