

## Opportunity Youth

In addition to providing support to adult learners, Center for Literacy (CFL) also works with out-of-school youth, ages 16-21, to help them with their literacy skills. The program is called “Opportunity Youth” and programming is done in partnership with the Philadelphia Youth Network’s (PYN) E<sup>3</sup> Power Centers.

At the E<sup>3</sup> Centers, the youth are provided with tools for Education, Employment and Empowerment, where they receive literacy services, job readiness training and case management. There are four E<sup>3</sup> Centers in Philadelphia:

- E<sup>3</sup>West, in West Philadelphia, operated by The Bridge (an affiliate of PHMC)
- E<sup>3</sup>Southwest, in Southwest Philadelphia, operated by Communities in Schools of Philadelphia
- E<sup>3</sup>North, in North Philadelphia, operated by Congreso de Latinos Unidos
- E<sup>3</sup>Center City, in Center City, operated by JEVS Human Services

CFL has one literacy specialist at each center. Bess Davis is at E<sup>3</sup>West, Duane Waters is at E<sup>3</sup>Southwest, Sean McKenzie is at E<sup>3</sup>North and Debbie Pope-Williams is at E<sup>3</sup>Center City. They work with students who come in at a 6<sup>th</sup> grade or below reading level in small groups over a period of one year. As the students improve their reading skills they attend intermediate classes and then go on to Adult Secondary Education, with the goal of a high school credential.

Bess has been with CFL for four years, the longest of the E<sup>3</sup> literacy specialists. She is most proud of a student of hers who went up three grade levels within three months. “This young woman entered E<sup>3</sup>West reading at a 2.9 grade level. Her goal was to be able to read to her children and to improve her own reading skills. She quickly became a more fluent reader and improved her comprehension and critical reading skills—mostly due to her persistence and excellent attendance.” Bess matched books to the student’s interests. She is now at 5.9 reading level and looking to start pre-GED classes in August.

“Our work at the E<sup>3</sup> Centers changes the lives of the students and their families,” said Cynthia Allen, M.Ed., assistant director of education for instructional quality. “It is a team effort that empowers the students to continue their education. It is a holistic approach that gives a second chance to youth.”

***Photo: Cynthia Allen, assistant director of education for instructional quality, CFL, and Bess Davis, literacy specialist, E<sup>3</sup>West, CFL.***