

Catholic Courier

Posted: January 23, 2012 | Last Updated: January 23, 2012

Learning center now reaching out to adults

By Amy Kotlarz/Catholic Courier

ROCHESTER -- Barbara Wright tapped her fingers together, counting, as she went over multiplication tables at Notre Dame Learning Center with School Sister of Notre Dame Evelyn Breslin.

Wright worked her way through a list of numbers multiplied by four and by six. When she skipped ahead to the 10s, Sister Breslin showed her how she could add a zero to any number to quickly multiply it by 10.

"You didn't know that?" Sister Breslin asked.

"No," Wright said.

Wright is working toward her high-school equivalency diploma. She noted that it may take her a while to get it, especially since she has been out of school for 47 years. She tried to work the degree it in 1996, but she had to drop out of the program she was in to help take care of her ill mother.

Now she has joined two of her sisters for classes at the learning center that help prepare students their high-school equivalency exams. Wright also has applied to join another area program to receive additional classroom help. Wright, who works part time at an adult day services facility at Unity Health's St. Mary's campus, said she needs the diploma to advance.

"It is something I'm determined to get," she said.

The high-school equivalency tutoring program began in October at the center, which is a sponsored ministry of the Atlantic Midwest Province of the School Sisters of Notre Dame. In the past, the learning center's free tutoring programs were limited to children, who continue to receive one-on-one tutoring in math and language arts after school and during the summers. However, the learning center recently added the equivalency program and computer-skills classes for adults to better meet the needs of the community, Sister Breslin said.

Right now five women are taking the high-school equivalency exam preparation classes, which are one hour on Mondays and Tuesdays, but Sister Breslin said her goal is to have adult learners at the center studying for several hours a day for three to four days a week. To achieve this goal, the center needs additional help from volunteer tutors. It also has the capacity to accept more adults who are interested in taking the high-school equivalency exams, which cover reading, writing, social studies, science and two sections of math.

"What we're trying to do is increase our availability to the people of the city," Sister Breslin said.

The learning center has been helped in that quest by donations from individuals and institutions, including recent grants of \$25,000 from Fairport's St. John of Rochester Parish and \$10,000 from St. Louis Parish in Pittsford, Sister Breslin said. Those grants paid for such materials as a digital white board and computers that can be used for both the adult and child tutoring programs.

One thing that seems to be in ample supply at the center is motivation. Sister Breslin said the adult learners she is working with now have all said that in order to land more secure jobs, they have found they need high-school equivalency diplomas. Some also have said that their children have high-school diplomas, which has made them want diplomas, too, she said.

Margie Gaines, who is one of Wright's sisters, said she is taking the classes so that she can get a permanent job. Gaines said her current, part-time position as a receptionist with Charles Settlement House is a temporary position through the national Experience Works job-training program and her time in the program ends in the fall. Years ago, Gaines didn't finish school

because she didn't get the extra help she needed, she said.

"I was in a special class, and my mother worked all the time, and I didn't have anybody to help me study," she said.

In addition to greater employment options, she said she wants the sense of accomplishment that comes from earning the degree.

"I'll feel good getting it," Gaines said.

The center is helping to meet a huge need for the area, said Sister of St. Joseph Francella Quinn, who worked for 28 years preparing adult learners for high-school equivalency exams. Sister Quinn donated her high-school equivalency training materials to the learning center when she took a job as an administrative assistant with the diocesan Department of Catholic Schools in 2008.

She said there are many adults in the city of Rochester and in the suburbs who didn't complete school for a variety of reasons, and she said they often struggle without a degree. The learning center is equipped to help those students end their struggles by earning their equivalency diplomas, she said.

"They have a wonderful program over there," she said of Notre Dame Learning Center.

Unless otherwise noted, all material copyright ©2012 Rochester Catholic Press Association, Inc. May not be published, broadcast, rewritten or otherwise distributed ? including, but not limited to such means as framing or other digital copying and/or distribution method, in whole or in part ? without the publisher's written consent.