



## NEWS RELEASE

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### Learning to Read vs. Reading to Learn: WISE & Healthy Aging's Inter-Generational Literacy Program Helps Kids Who Are Struggling to Read

**SANTA MONICA (September 11, 2009)** - Michelle Johnson considers Diane Lord a "godsend." Almost two years ago, Michelle's second-grade son, Jakeem, was struggling with school and in the remedial reading class at Grants Elementary School in Santa Monica. Today, he's headed into the fourth grade, enjoys school and is in the reading class for students who excel. Johnson has no doubt that it was Lord who made the difference in her son.

Lord is one of several adult volunteers at WISE & Healthy Aging who are involved in the national "America Reads" literacy program.



*Volunteer Diane Lord (right) reads with Jakeem Johnson while his mother, Michelle Johnson (center) observes. Lord tutored Jakeem through WISE & Healthy Aging's America Reads literacy program, helping boost his reading skills.*

"I just like helping kids," she says. "Besides, I'd always kind of wished I had been a teacher."

She's certainly getting her wish now. Each Monday she has a date with Jakeem. Their one-on-one tutoring sessions are held at the Fairview Library.

"Diane is wonderful," says Jakeem's mom, who volunteers at her son's Elementary School. "She's so gentle and has all the patience in the world. She coaches him – letting him rest and then having him come back to the task at hand.

"As a second-grader, he was below grade-level, but now he's doing very well," Johnson adds.

According to Grace Cheng Braun, president and CEO of WISE & Healthy Aging, Jakeem is just one example of what can happen when older adult volunteers get involved in helping youngsters.

"The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 increases pressure on schools to be accountable for student performance, but at the same time, budget cuts have eliminated enrichment programs and resources that are critical to student success," says Cheng Braun.

"Studies show that, up to grade three, children learn to read; after grade three, they read to learn. So there is a critical need for children to develop good reading skills early on, and that is what we are striving to provide through WISE America Reads."

Earlier this year, WISE & Healthy Aging's America Reads literacy program was awarded a \$7,500 development grant. According to Petula Storey, director of Volunteer Services at WISE & Healthy Aging, the funds will be used to help train senior volunteer tutors and will provide core operational support and oversight to sustain a long standing, valuable program that was recently converted to an all-volunteer model. Now with the new school year starting, Storey has just finished training 12 new volunteers who are ready to begin their assignments.

Now in its sixth year, the Wise America Reads program has trained and placed 200 volunteers who have delivered more than 20,000 tutoring hours benefiting some 800 children in lower-income elementary schools in the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District.

Focusing attention on children from lower-income families to improve their reading skills, WISE America Reads volunteer tutors make it possible for these struggling elementary students to receive the individual attention needed for developing good reading skills – attention they would otherwise not receive. For more information, call WISE & Healthy Aging at (310) 394-9871.

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WISE & Healthy Aging, a social services organization, enhances the independence, dignity and quality of life of older adults through leadership, advocacy and innovative services. This nonprofit is the result of a Nov. 2007 merger of WISE Senior Services and Center for Healthy Aging. that pairs trained adult volunteers with youngsters who are struggling to learn to read.

Through this intergenerational reading program, highly-trained, older adult volunteers provide free tutoring to students at lower income elementary schools who are struggling to meet grade-level literacy standards.

Lord, who is retired, started out volunteering in the WISE & Healthy Aging "Fraud Fighters" unit, decided to switch to the WISE America Reads program.