



## Washtenaw Literacy

# LEARNER PROFILE: Calisa Reid



CALISA REID'S fighting spirit shines through the moment you meet her. When she starts talking about her past, you realize this determination has been present her entire life.

Calisa's early education was marred by a terrible experience. In the third grade, Calisa was humiliated and slapped by her teacher for making spelling errors. "The meanest thing was to get hit because I didn't know," she says of the paddle slaps to her hands. But Calisa didn't give up. She repeated the third grade and improved her spelling.

Calisa learned to love school, but dropped out as a teenager to raise her first child. She later returned to earn her GED. She and her husband added two more children to their family. Their boys grew into men; a grandchild was born.

Ten years ago, Calisa's life took a drastic turn. An auto accident left her in a wheelchair. Calisa was not paralyzed, but her body had become an unfamiliar place. She was no longer in full control of her movements. She could only look to her right. She was in pain. Calisa began forgetting things and realized that her brain had slowed down.

When many would give up, Calisa kept fighting. She takes a practical approach to her post-accident education. "I have to educate my whole self," she says. Although she passed the GED many years ago, Calisa currently reads at the sixth grade level and struggles with spelling, reading and pronunciation.

Calisa's Washtenaw Literacy tutor, Nancy Byers, was impressed from the start. "She knows exactly what

she wants to accomplish and is very eager to learn," Nancy reported after their first lesson. Two months into tutoring, Calisa and Nancy are both pleased with her progress. Calisa has been learning to break down words and improving her pronunciation, which also helps with spelling. She has been writing in a journal and reading a novel. Calisa also has improved her confidence, gotten a library card and begun a new volunteer position at St. Joseph Mercy Hospital.

Despite her life's setbacks, Calisa is well on her way to achieving her goals. In the short term, Calisa wants to read to her grandchild and understand story problems in a math class she is taking. Her long-term plans are to publish a novel and write grants for organizations that assist people with disabilities.

"She's not a person who sits at home and says I can't do this about anything," marvels Nancy, Washtenaw Literacy Program Coordinator, Blair Kraft, agrees. "I am so impressed with her determination," he says, "She could easily be in the position to feel sorry for herself, but instead just gets out there and goes after it."

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