In this newsletter, we are bringing you the latest news on one of the Adult Learning Center’s former “stars,” Tevin Reams, and will tell you a little about Tevin and his adventures since receiving his High School Equivalency Certificate in 2014.

Before we met him, Tevin described himself as somewhat rebellious while in high school at Natrona County High School. He said he wasn’t sure if it was his natural adventurous spirit, or just part of the teenage years, but everything felt like a constant battle. School was not pleasant for him.

During this challenging time in his life, Tevin experienced a devastating brain injury which left him in a coma, and made it necessary for him to relearn the most basic life skills, including walking and feeding himself. Tevin’s family support enabled him to bounce back physically, but he was too far behind in his studies, and was struggling too much after the accident, to graduate from high school.

That’s when he came to the Adult Learning Center … Tevin was 19 when we first met him, and we knew right away how special he was. He said he liked the atmosphere at the center, and felt like a person, not a number. He felt that the center was his last chance to prove himself to his family, and to have a successful life. Learning was still difficult for him because of the traumatic brain injury, and he felt like giving up many times, but he never did. Through a lot of repetition, frustration, pep talks, tears, and with the help of a dedicated volunteer, Carolyn Buff, who tested him at the center, he was able to get his High School Equivalency Certificate in April of 2014. Tevin was the Student of the Year at the High School Equivalency graduation; he received this high honor because of the difficulties he’d overcome to walk across that stage.

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Imagine you had to evaluate every English Language Learner that comes to the Adult Learning Center at Casper College before they can begin classes. Now imagine how you would assess their language skills. Would you have the ability to listen to a student speak and place a value on the level of English that is spoken? That is just what our favorite expert does for our center. Mary Jo Watters is one of the ALC’s best-kept secrets. One of the many qualities she brings to our center, besides her generous personality and keen sense of humor, is her background and experience in speech pathology.

I had the pleasure of interviewing Mary Jo for our fall newsletter, and rather than try to rewrite her story, I thought it better to let her tell her story in her own words.

Q: Where did you grow up?
A: I grew up in Aurora, Colorado, and moved to Casper in 1973 after graduating from college and getting married. Teaching jobs brought us to Casper and although we didn’t intend to stay here, we fell in love with the community, laid down roots and were blessed with two boys, Justin and Jeffrey.

Q: Where did you attend college?
A: I graduated from the University of Northern Colorado with a bachelor’s degree in speech language pathology. While working in Casper at the Wyoming School for the Deaf and then Natrona County School District No. 1, I spent summers working toward my master’s degree at Clarion University in Clarion, Pennsylvania. I completed a Master of Education degree in speech language pathology in 1976.

Q: What was your career title? When, where, why, and how long?
A: I truly enjoyed my career of 34 years! I served students K-12 in all but two of Natrona County’s schools as a speech language pathologist and teacher for the deaf.

Today, Tevin is a full-time Casper College student, enrolled in the welding program, studying TIG and oxy welding, and he plans to get either a welding certificate or an associate degree. His short-term goal after graduation is to either work in the auto body field or do pipeline welding, and eventually get his own truck. He wants to stay in Casper, where he’s spent his entire life, and enjoy the wide-open spaces. His long-term goal is to retire by the age of 55, at which time he’d like to branch out his welding skills to more artistic forms of welding, such as decorative security doors and art for patios and yards. He also plans to travel the world.

What little spare time Tevin has is spent playing “really complicated” video games. He likes to garden and do lawn work; he pointed out he picked off the dead heads on the flower arrangement at the center while waiting for his interview! He also enjoys hiking in the prairie while looking for artifacts.

Tevin said he owes the Adult Learning Center at Casper College “everything and beyond” for the patience and dedication of the instructors, and now he wants to pay it forward by giving back to the center, Casper College and the community. Tevin is a wonderful example of how a high school equivalency certificate opens doors to the world, and we knew you’d want to share in the story of his success!
and hard of hearing. My dream job materialized at the end of my career when I was assigned to Bar Nunn Elementary all day, every day (no traveling!). Together with the speech and language pathologist at North Casper Elementary, we designed and implemented an early intervention speech and language program, working closely with kindergarten teachers in their classrooms. I decided to retire at this peak in my career, with no regrets, to be able to care for my aging mother.

Q: When did you start working with the ALC?
A: I attended the tutor training for Literacy Volunteers of Casper in the fall of 2010 and discovered there was a huge need for assistance in testing in the ESL program. I was trained to administer the BEST Plus oral language test and quickly found my niche in the program.

Q: What attracted you to volunteer with the center?
A: I was attracted to this volunteer opportunity as a way to pay it forward. I so appreciated the assistance that the wonderful staff at the Adult Learning Center offered my son as he was transitioning from high school (where he was hopelessly behind on credits) to a very successful career in the United States Air Force.

Q: What activities do you currently do as a volunteer?
A: I continue to pre and post test the oral language skills of the English language learners. I have also assisted with the “speech” needs of some of the advanced students by offering help in accent modification to make their spoken English a little easier to understand.

Q: What’s been your favorite experience so far in volunteering with the ALC?
A: Identifying one favorite experience is impossible! I look forward to each and every day I get to spend time at the center. I am entertained, humbled and enriched by my encounters with these ELL students. I enjoy hearing about their countries, traditions and struggles, and in celebrating their accomplishments. They are so willing to learn and openly appreciative toward all the staff and volunteers.

Q: What do you do outside of volunteering for work or for fun?
A: I love retired life!!! I enjoy gardening, walking/hiking, reading, traveling, and art. I am currently taking art classes at Casper College with my coveted Golden Age Scholarship! Casper College rocks!

Q: What advice do you have for someone looking to volunteer for the ALC or any organization?
A: Find your niche and use your talents. There are so many opportunities and your best fit might not be what you were expecting!

Mary Jo is always committed to the mission of the ESL program and its’ needs. With her willingness to give of her time and talent, we can provide top quality testing services and education to our students. She is a very special person with many wonderful qualities and we are honored and lucky to have her as one of our favorite volunteer tutors!
The Adult Learning Center at Casper College started offering structured classes called “In 2 Win” in the fall of 2010.

The classes took a core group of young adults and for three hours four times a week, we were diving into math computations and reading in the science and social studies subjects. Each semester we tweaked “In 2 Win” to meet the needs of our students. Some classes lasted six weeks while others stretched out to 10 weeks. Our department finally decided to focus on math and language classes, as these were the bigger needs among our students.

Over time, things change. To stay compliant with our funders, following research and analyzing the data, we were asked to make classes mandatory for our students. Many of us were scared that our students would be unable to commit to structured days and times versus the drop-in system that we previously had. However, we were pleasantly surprised to find this is not necessarily the case.

This fall, I’m teaching three math classes and it’s been a challenge keeping up with them! Ha! I asked our math students what they thought of this “new system” and would like to share what they had to say:

– “Math class is better for me personally. The group projects help out with what we all struggle with. The one-on-one helps me out.”

– “I love that we are now in math classes! It makes things easier, especially math. You get more one-on-one time with the teacher. You also get to see who else is having the same issues/problems as you are. Overall, this new way is way better than working by yourself. You work as a group with packets and we get to see it written on the white board. This makes things a whole lot easier.”

– “When working by myself in the guided lab, it’s harder to concentrate. When in class, we do games to help us learn. Our teacher uses different colors so we know where we are at on a problem.”

– “The tools and packets we have been taught are very helpful. I like having the choice of working with others or individually.”

– “This class is spectacular in every way. I enjoy that the teacher teaches you in ways that you understand. The teachers are nice and treat you with respect and care for your needs. They are great at listening to your problems and wanting to help in any way possible.”

– “The classes help a lot with learning new things that I didn’t even know how to do. It’s fun working in groups helping with problems as well as playing games.”

– “The games that you have for us work awesome! They help us learn more on what we need! I never did this math before so I’m having to learn everything over. I think this class is awesome!”

– “I personally think the class has improved my math skills tremendously. The fact that you offer these set-in-stone class hours have been the core reason I’m learning. Starting from the basic and working our way up has refreshed my math brain. I personally have appreciated these classes! I learn a lot of tools to use in everyday life!”

– “Teaching tools and still using worksheets helps us perfect skills whilst learning needed material. The teacher tries to succeed at finding ways to help each and every student, not just a portion.”

As you can see, we are receiving positive feedback about these math classes. Students also told me that one drawback is that the classes sometimes go “too fast.” My issue is that I’m trying to cover about nine years of math in one semester. I realize the pace seems rather fast but on the other hand, I have students asking, “When will we get to Algebra?” “Why does it take so long?” “I need my high school equivalency by next week for a job.” Some days the reality sets in hard. Getting through the math material may take longer than students anticipated. Students are setting new goals and wanting to understand this material. Our discussions not only involve math in our daily lives but computations we have had to use at our jobs. We are also discussing college and math and major requirements for a degree. Our learning communities provide a safe, fun, and friendly environment that supports our students’ needs!
Felipe Medina was born in Puebla, Mexico. Felipe grew up in a one-room house with his mom, dad, two sisters, and two brothers. His family was very poor. He was one of the fortunate children who had the opportunity to go to school. Food was scarce in his family and Felipe’s parents could not afford to pack a daily lunch for him. While his classmates hauled bags or aluminum containers full of tortillas, black beans and rice, Felipe walked to school empty handed. Felipe’s favorite cousin Librado went to the same school and everyday Librado happily gave half of his lunch to Felipe. The daily sharing of a meal sealed the deal of best friends forever. Despite his poverty, Felipe felt rich with boyhood joy. One would often see him roaming the streets of his town until dusk, swimming in the local river or playing in the woods.

Life changed drastically at the age of 12 when his parents divorced. Felipe’s mom moved away and he and his siblings remained in the house with an alcoholic father. After a while, Felipe also needed to get away from his father. Eventually, Felipe moved in with his older sister but the stress of the previous years took a toll on him and he became withdrawn and angry. His sister kicked him out of the house at the age of 15. Felipe got a job working construction and saved up enough money to pay for a little shack and a daily meal. Felipe missed his mother greatly and wanted to make a difference in her life as well as create a better future for himself. This is when he began to save for his journey to the USA. After months of saving, Felipe called his brother-in-law who lived in the United States and asked if he could come and live with his family. His brother in law said, “Yes.”

On August 21, 2005, Felipe left Mexico on a bus and never looked back. He now happily resides in Casper, Wyoming. Felipe is a self-taught English speaker. When he entered the English as a Second Language (ESL) program at Casper College he tested as a level 7 of 10 in speaking! Felipe gives credit to Taco Bell for the best ESL training one could have. He was put in charge of the drive through when he only could speak a handful of English phrases! He is a stellar ESL student who is very inquisitive and catches on fast. Over the years, Felipe worked his way up the food service ladder and currently works as sous chef at one of Casper’s finest, Fire Rock restaurant!

Felipe stays in touch with his mother and siblings in Mexico and sends them money every month. The hope is to someday build a home in Mexico for his mother and younger brothers and sisters. Felipe would like to earn his High School Equivalency Certificate and eventually attend college. I have no doubt that he will reach all of his dreams and I am proud to be his ESL instructor!
Being the “new kid on the block” has made me also take on the role of the new techie in the building. While I am not a self-proclaimed technology whiz I will admit to being able to figure out most things I need to when working with today’s technology that changes and advances at breakneck speed.

**When in doubt, push a lot of buttons!**

Seriously, have you tried unplugging it and plugging it back in again? If you haven’t, try leaving it unplugged, and then press down the power button for about a minute. This action drains whatever charge is left in the battery/device and entirely shuts it down, which can help with a more successful reboot.

“Digital Natives” was a popular term in the late 1990s and early 2000s and it continues to be used in some educational circles. However, with the way technology changes individuals, even those millennials will have to learn to adapt to the new technology. What makes some of them better than us older people when it comes to using technology?

The easy answer is, they push a lot of buttons. It really takes a lot to completely crash a computer, (I’ll admit to doing that twice in my life), and they understand that messing around and learning-as-you-go is the best way to learn to use a new technology. So, yes, you can put down the user’s manual and just hop right in. Learning by doing, with technology as well as almost anything else, is the best way to learn.

**Tech in the Center**

As an educational institution the Adult Learning Center at Casper College has to be ready and equipped to deal with students who come from a much more digitized world and feel that they “learn better” with technology. It’s no secret why technology helps reach learners; it’s adaptable. It’s also more entertaining and oftentimes the educational suites that are purchased come with adaptations for a wide-range of learners, from having the ability to change font size with a click of a button to easily accessible hyperlinks to more in-depth knowledge as well as pronunciation guides and audio.

At this time we have 13 learners who are working on obtaining their High School Equivalency Certificate via distance education. Distance education is a popular means of learning for students who may have difficulty finding time during our operating hours to come and learn, whether in a class or guided lab. Distance education allows for remote access 24/7 to educational materials through our center. Students need 12 seat hours and to sign an agreement before they start distance education courses. Currently, our main program is “SkillsTutor” and this program allows for instructors to set up materials as well as manage the learning paths and assignments for students.

Computer programs like these allow students to work at their own pace in a low-stress environment to achieve their educational goals. It is managed by an instructor and reports can be generated to track student success. I anticipate that our number of distance education students will grow as more people become aware of the flexibility it allows students.
It’s All in the Numbers
By Chelse DePaolo-Lara, Adult Learning Center Director

Adult education programs provide important services to the communities in which they are located. These same programs are considered effective, or not, based on outcomes that are measured by numbers. Our team and volunteers don’t see numbers each day, however, they see the faces of students they are so passionate about serving. These individuals run our Adult Learning Center programs, making them comparable to none. We are also fortunate to have the necessary monetary backing to function. In review of last year’s outcomes, we have launched into a celebration! These achievements have been made possible by the special individuals involved in our center and the crucial fiscal support we receive. It’s all in the numbers, and here’s how they are adding up…

Over the past year we served **549** students and retained **65.7** percent of those learners. Faculty at the Adult Learning Center provided **18,663** hours of instruction. Amazingly, our High School Equivalency Test pass rate rose from **94.78** percent in 2014 to **97.3** percent in 2015. We also served **50** percent more English Language Learners than in the previous year. Lastly, Literacy Volunteers of Casper reported **33** active and involved tutors who delivered **2,375** hours of instruction.

These are just a few of the digits we are smiling about. We couldn’t be more grateful for our generous volunteers, wonderful partners, dedicated teammates, and many different funding sources. We look forward to what this new and exciting year will bring, and most of all, we cannot wait to engage our students alongside our amazing tutors and partners.

The Littlest Assistant
By Sue Sigler, Instructor

A new addition and the sweetest surprise to the Adult Learning Center at Casper College this year, is little **Bria Marie Lara**. She arrived on July 17, and immediately took on the role of ALC Director Chelse’s personal assistant! She weighed in at almost 8 pounds. Big brother, Auri, was thrilled until the first time they left the house together, he didn’t want to take her along. He told his mom to put her back in her bassinet!

Chelse is back at the ALC only part-time; finishing out her much needed maternity leave. She enjoys feeding and cuddling Bria on her lunch hour at the Early Childhood Learning Center on campus. When Chelse was still on leave, she brought Bria to team meetings so the staff could meet her. Bria was the perfect assistant by sleeping through the entire meeting!

Big brother Auri with Bria.  
Chelse, Damian, and Bria Lara.
We’re always looking for a place that feels like home, a place that is permanent in our lives. Our newest instructor, Alison Hofer, says she has finally found that place at the Adult Learning Center at Casper College. Replacing newly retired Rick Burgin, Alison was hired over the summer as the sixth instructor in the department.

Alison was raised in Nebraska, attended the University of Nebraska at Kearney, and then went on to obtain her master’s degree at the University of Wyoming in curriculum and instruction. As a kid, she always wanted to work for the History Channel, but soon realized that being a history teacher was second best. She moved to Wyoming when she accepted a position as a high school English as a Second Language teacher in Rawlins. Her great uncles were glad and told her “all the great Hofers live in Wyoming!”

Alison wanted to move on from K-12 education because she witnessed and understands what happens to young people when they drop out. She wanted to make a great impact on her students. When she interviewed at Casper College, Alison stated that she was impressed with the people here. She told her mom, “This felt like a place were I could belong.” She is excited to be a part of the community college experience.

Alison is extremely young at heart and people say she is exuberant over simple things, like spinning around in a chair. She is adventurous and is willing to try just about anything, at least twice! Her bubbly personality shines through when she shares her puns, jokes and riddles. Her hobbies include crocheting, camping, hiking, reading, and traveling. Technology comes easily to her, so she has been helpful in the center and is always offering to help in any capacity. Alison became recently engaged, and says that Layton is the reason why she originally looked into Casper College. Alison lives in Douglas, Wyoming, and commutes daily to Casper.

Alison says before coming to Casper College, she was always looking for more, always searching for what could be the next position in the future. After accepting the position at the Adult Learning Center, she doesn’t feel temporary anymore. For the first time, she’s living “in the now” and enjoys the things around her. Congratulations on finding that place called home!

We have “new additions” at the Adult Learning Center! One of our additions comes from Natrona County School District No. 1, by way of Michigan, South America, Denver, Belize, and New Mexico. She is originally from Wisconsin and was born to immigrant parents from Europe! Janet DeVoogd is our new ESL (English as a Second Language) instructor.

She is happily married with two adopted daughters from Mexico who are in junior high. She hit the ground running in August and has not stopped. We are so thankful she is here to help our bilingual students learn English in fun ways!

She is bubbly and innovative in her classroom. The students love that she wants to help them learn!

They play games, break up into groups and work with volunteers. She has integrated technology into the classroom and utilizes our center’s computer lab. The ESL program is bursting at the seams with students and they are having a wonderful time learning!