

Sam Ferrante

# Writing Samples - Indy Reads

---

## **Student Presenter Speech for Fundraising Event**

*Ghostwritten speech written for a major annual fundraising event to be presented by an Indy Reads graduate of the High School Equivalency program. (Theme: Unlocking Our Potential)*

My name is Rebecca Strunk and in October, I completed Indy Reads' High School Equivalency program and earned my High School Equivalency diploma. I also want to add that I'm quite proud to have gotten that diploma before my 19-year old daughter, who I've been racing to the finish line since I started in Sarika's virtual class two years ago.

I've had a lot of barriers to overcome. Getting my HSE has been just one of those huge obstacles. I didn't finish high school the first time. I got pregnant with my daughter in my junior year and then fell into addiction shortly after. My dream is to be a recovery coach. I'm blessed to have the opportunity to work with people now in recovery on a volunteer basis. And now that I have my diploma, I can start being paid for this work. It's my calling and I would do it anyway, but I couldn't turn it into a career without that HSE.

I have been to the depths of hell myself and if it wasn't for God using people to reach out to me, I probably wouldn't be here now. I feel that because I've been where some of the people I help are, I can offer hope and extend my hand and help pull them out, even if it's just a little bit. One of the most devastating things that happened to me on my path was that I lost custody of my two kids: my son who is now 16 years old and my daughter, who is 19. Trying to climb out of that hole to get them back, which did finally happen, I had to fight.

One of the people that I'm helping right now is in the exact same fight and because I've been there, I'm able to extend hope and help on that situation. But we can overcome those things! We can't run back for comfort. Not everybody can say that from a place of, "Hey, I've been there." Becoming a professional recovery coach is my calling and Indy Reads really came alongside me, over two years, to help me get that first step. It's not easy to do four years of high school as an adult and Sarika, Anne, my classmates, the volunteers, they stayed with me while I did it.

When you see people come in and they've been knocking on death's door, you see that light and life come back into their eyes when they're starting to get sober. It's unbelievable. You see that transformation and restoration. It's in their families, too. They get that second chance. A big part of unlocking my potential is that having an HSE gives me the ability to work full-time with people in recovery to unlock THEIR potential.

In addiction, you're stuck. Helping somebody get out of addiction means that I have the ability to give people opportunities again. I took the opportunity to work with Indy Reads. To go to class, to learn fractions, to get my kids back, to help my son with his homework, and to sort of flex on my daughter, who is so, so smart. When I was finishing up learning all the social studies and science, I remember feeling kind of proud that I could do things like answer history questions or figure out a tip at a restaurant without having to guess. My kids get to see that; my husband gets to see that; and I get to feel that.

I took the opportunity that Indy Reads gave me, to do this work and earn my diploma. And now I'm going to use that opportunity to help others. I don't know if there's a stronger calling than that and I'm just so grateful. Thank you.

---

## **Together, Indy Reads Print Appeal**

*The first of two print appeals sent during the 'Together, Indy Reads' end of year campaign. Sent to 3500 residences. These were segmented into three separate appeals, with similar, but crucially different copy: recurring donors, lapsed donors, and donors who had already donated this year (second mile).*

Dear <<FirstName>>,

This month marks my one-year anniversary as Indy Reads' CEO, and it still humbles me to say that I get to lead this organization, team, and mission every day. I am immensely proud to serve as the organization's first female, person of color, and first-generation American CEO.

As a bilingual child of Palestinian immigrant parents, I was raised with the ethos that no matter your setbacks, no one can take away your mind. With that, you can always start over. When people are educated, lives, families, and communities are transformed for the better. I believe in Indy Reads' mission of *100% Literacy for All* because I know first-hand the capacity for this transformation.

With literacy and language education, our adult learners redefine their potential for success. They get new and better jobs, help their children with homework, and engage with society in new and deeper ways. Literacy is liberation. I like to say that Indy Reads advances social equity through education.

I realize an appeal email typically focuses on numbers served and an ever-increasing need for funding. While our numbers are at a record high, alongside increased demand for our adult literacy programming, I want to share with you why Indy Reads' work inspires me every single day. I understand and share the marginalization so many of our students experience; their linguistic and social isolation is real. When you support Indy Reads, beyond helping us purchase workbooks and remote students' WiFi hotspots, you are really telling our students that they are seen, they matter, and they deserve the opportunity to transform their lives.

People come to Indy Reads to build skills and advance toward their vision of success. They stay in our programs for the personal support our staff provides. They know we are truly committed to their success. Everyone should be empowered to realize their full potential. However, 1 in 6 of our neighbors struggle to read above the 5th grade level, and that affects us all.

**Will you make a gift to support Indy Reads and our vision of *100% Literacy for All*? Every new gift or pledge made during this holiday season, up to \$15,000, will be matched by a generous donation from Julie and Joe Whitsett.**

Thank you for investing in the lives of our students, their families, and a richer, more vibrant Indianapolis. *Together, Indy Reads.*

With Gratitude,  
Ruba Marshood  
*Chief Executive Officer*

**P.S. Your support by December 31, 2022 enables us to continue our services this program year.**  
Make your donation using the enclosed envelope, or by visiting [indyreads.org/TogetherIndyReads](http://indyreads.org/TogetherIndyReads) and clicking Donate.

---

### **Prospective Recurring Donor Email Sequence (Email 1A)**

*The first of two emails in an automation designed to convert one-time donors to Indy Reads' monthly donor program. The same content was packaged in a different way for Email 1B.*

Dear %%FirstName%%,

Well over 30 years ago, I became a nurse simply because I wanted to help people get better. And as a healthcare professional, I was shocked to learn that literacy skills are the strongest predictor of a person's health status. In fact, low health literacy affects more adults than obesity, diabetes, HIV/AIDS, and breast cancer combined.

There is a clear correlation between low levels of health literacy, socioeconomic disadvantage, and chronic illness. This means that those who could most benefit from the right health information can be the least likely to find and understand it. And understanding couldn't be more critical than during a public health emergency like COVID-19.

This is why I'm a passionate Indy Reads monthly donor. It's another way I get to help people get better.

It's so easy to have my donation come directly out of my account with my bills every month. This allows me to spread the financial impact of my giving across the entire year, and makes the commitment very manageable.

For me, supporting Indy Reads is not just about what is learned in its Community Classrooms program; it is also about the doors it unlocks to future well-being. Doing so through recurring monthly donations ultimately helps save time and money for everybody — making it a win-win for both Indy Reads and donors like me.

Sincerely,  
Lori K Hall RN

Indy Reads Board Chair

P.S. The need for literacy has never been greater. A monthly donation of only \$10 can offset the enrollment cost—practice tests and exam preparation—for one adult student this year.

---

### **News Article for Print & Web Spot**

*A news article ghostwritten for a prominent Indianapolis-based newspaper with a monthly print issue and a rolling web schedule.*

### **Indy Reads Sets the Stage for Growth in Fountain Square**

Indy Reads, the English literacy, high school equivalency, and job readiness nonprofit with an already-beloved bookstore in Fountain Square, has undergone some big changes in the last few years.

### **Customer Service Trainees in the Fountain Square Bookstore**

Just as the COVID-19 pandemic hit Indianapolis in early 2020, Indy Reads made the decision to move from their long-time home on Massachusetts Avenue into the old Fountain Square library at 1066 Virginia Avenue, opening their doors in November 2021. With on-site events ranging from Drag Story Hour to a Financial Literacy Series to local author book readings, the cozy space has continued its legacy as a center for writers and readers of all levels and languages, while expanding offerings to put Indy Reads students right at the center of our Fountain Square community with their new Customer Service Skills program.

The Customer Service Skills program is an “earn while you learn” initiative that allows adults to work in the bookstore for a living wage, receive intensive mentorship to grow essential soft skills, and earn an industry-recognized customer service credential. With several Customer Service Trainees already enrolled in the program, Indy Reads’ bookstore is now a home for more Hoosiers than ever before!

### **New Faces at Indy Reads**

The expansion of Indy Reads’ programming isn’t all that has changed on their corner in Fountain Square. You can expect to see a few new faces inside Indy Reads.

Their new Chief Executive Officer, Ruba Marshood, joined the nonprofit in December 2021 from a Leadership role with the Literacy Council of Northern Virginia. She is joining the Indianapolis community with her two children and is already expanding operations to create an even more accessible and equitable center for English literacy in Central Indiana. Heading up Indy Reads’ bookstore programming is Cat Cardwell, Bookstore Program Director.

A long-time Indy resident, Cardwell, who joined the team in August 2021, brings over fifteen

years of experience in the arts, community engagement, and all things books. Rounding out new additions to Indy Reads is Toby Stark, Chief Development and Communications Officer. Named a State of Indiana Bicentennial Torchbearer in 2015, Stark moved to Indianapolis with her husband more than ten years ago and has been developing Indy's nonprofit scene ever since.

### **Opening Doors Wider**

As Indy Reads gears up for a new program year, offering courses in job readiness, English literacy, and high school equivalency, they are also aiming to build a more accessible and equitable home in Fountain Square with the launch of their Open Doors Project campaign.

If Indy Reads is able to raise \$50,000 by June 20, 2022, the IHEDA will match those funds to help purchase new inventory for Indy Reads' bookstore, renovate one of their public bathrooms, update their front door for ADA-compliance, install interior murals by local artists, and add public access to technology.

"This is such an exciting time for Indy Reads!" Ruba Marshood said. "We are very proud to be the first step in Marion County's adult education continuum, serving students from all walks of life and eager to be more fully engaged in the community. We are thrilled to be so well-positioned to invite all readers, students, and neighbors to join us. Connect, learn, and be a part of our mission in Fountain Square."

You can find out more about the Open Doors Project at [indyreads.org/OpenDoorsProject](http://indyreads.org/OpenDoorsProject).

### **Planning Your Trip**

On arriving at Indy Reads, you can expect a friendly and knowledgeable staff of AmeriCorps members, volunteers, and Customer Service Trainees, both new and used books, a quaint children's section, and vinyl spinning during all open hours.

"As an avid reader and book lover, I'm excited to promote the traditional local author events and kids' story time," Cat Cardwell, Bookstore Program Director, said. "However, I am passionate about bridging the gap between all types of literacy, whether that be financial, cultural, health, legal, etc. If knowledge is power, then literacy is freedom. I love being able to provide another piece of the puzzle to those still searching."

You might also stumble upon an audience watching a theatrical reading by Indy Shakes or a group of young chess players participating in the Thursday night Chess Club for Kids event. Then there are letter writing gatherings to incarcerated survivors of domestic violence, poetry slams, creative writing workshops, and book launch celebrations. Most events are pay-what-you-can and the best way to make sure you don't miss one is to check out [indyreads.org/events](http://indyreads.org/events)!

If you would like to donate gently used books to support this nonprofit, stop by on the First

Friday of every month between 11am and 7pm. If you have any questions or would like to make a larger book donation, please email [bookstore@indyreads.org](mailto:bookstore@indyreads.org). For more ways to support Indy Reads or to volunteer in Indy Reads' bookstore or Community Classrooms, visit [indyreads.org/get-involved](http://indyreads.org/get-involved).

---

### Monthly E-Newsletter Primary Feature

*The primary feature of Indy Reads' monthly newsletter. Sent to 11k+ subscribers, this content comes from bi-weekly interviews with adult learners, volunteers, and donors.*



**"I think, 'If I not continue each class, I lost.' That's the reason I never missing the class. Sometimes I take my class in the parking lot [on break at work]. Sometimes in the street; in the hospital. I never want to lose my class."**

— Olimpia R., English Language Learning Student

### Student Spotlight

Olimpia came to Indy Reads after working with [La Plaza Inc.](#), an Indianapolis-based nonprofit strengthening Latino youth, families, and communities, for several years. Now in her second year with Indy Reads, Olimpia sat down with us to share her English Language Learning story.

"I'm from Mexico City," Olimpia said. "I'm coming to [to Indianapolis] September 15, 1999. I'm coming here with my boyfriend. When I lived in Mexico with him, it's nice, but when he's here, he change a lot with me. I no have family, just me and him."

In the last 23 years, a lot has changed.

"Now, I have 7 children," Olimpia said, as she began to count them off on her fingers. "My oldest is 39 years old; her name is Adriana. My second down is Mary; she has 37 years. My third is Yvette. Yvette is 36. Sarai is my fourth girl. She has 35 years old. My son, Miguel; he pass away last year. He have 30 years. My other son—Isa—27 years old. Another son is Alan. He has 26 years old. I have big family."

But Olimpia wasn't finished. "I have maybe 18 grandkids and I have 3 great grandbabies. My granddaughters is 8 months and I have my great granddaughter who has 40 days. My grandbabies speak English. They help me a lot; explain to me things I don't understand, especially the pronunciation. They say, 'No; no; no; like this. Repeat!' My grandbabies speak more English than Spanish, but I'm trying to learn them Spanish, too. It's important," she said.

Olimpia enrolled with Indy Reads in April 2021 and has never missed a class.

"In the first class, I no understand nothing!" Olimpia said. "I said, 'What are they talking about that?' But Sam [AmeriCorps WorkLiteracy Coach] told me, 'If you want, you need to come back to the next year and you learning more English and you need to more practice this.' And that's the reason I never missing the class. Because, in my mind, I think 'If I not continue each class, I lost.' I understand everybody have kids and everybody have to work, but I like this place McDonald's [where Olimpia works], because I'm talking with my General Manager and I explaining to her about my school. I have class three days a week and I don't want to lose any class. She say, 'Okay; you come to work and you do two hours the break.' Sometimes I take my class in the parking lot. Sometimes in the street; in the hospital. I never want to lose my class."

Olimpia has big dreams for how to use her education from Indy Reads. "I want to get the best job, but I need to more speak English," she said. "Brittany [AmeriCorps WorkLiteracy Coach] gave me a link for the [Customer Service Skills program](#). I'm gonna start this year. I also take [cosmetology] classes, because I love to fix makeup, hair, nails, anything. When I was young, in Mexico, I take class. But I no finish because I marry when I was 16. Very young. We have [cosmetology] class in school. I finished middle school and started high school, but I marry and I no back to school," Olimpia explained.

"I'm dreaming of getting my business by myself," she said. "The first thing, I want to get my [High School Equivalency (HSE)] diploma. After that, I want to get my certificate for the cosmetology and make my business by myself. I want to do Beauty and Hair. I have a name for my business. *Miguel's*; it's for memories for my son."

We are honored to work with students as dedicated to education as Olimpia is. Her commitment to achieving her goals, for herself and her family, is inspiring. We cannot wait to see her move into our High School Equivalency class, earn her diploma, and use her education to open her own salon and make her dream a reality!