



2023 Lois Asay Literacy Champion—Barbara Clarkson



Barbara Clarkson is a force to be reckoned with when it comes to literacy education and the rights for all people to become literate. Barbara is a firm believer that literacy is the gateway to living a quality life. As president of the Thurston Group of Washington State, Barbara has helped to secure over \$8 million dollars in college scholarships for underrepresented students to attend colleges of their choice. The importance of literacy is passed on to these students as she mentors them on how to be successful college students. Many of the scholarship recipients are first generation college students.

Barbara has also been instrumental in supporting the literacy development of children who struggle to read. To combat the summer reading loss experienced by many young students, Barbara was inspired to create a summer school program focused on teaching students foundational reading skills, reading comprehension, and vocabulary development. In partnership with St. Andrews First United Methodist Church, the REACH (Reading Enhances All Choices for Humans) program made its' inaugural debut in August 2018, providing summer literacy instruction to elementary students in grades K-5.

It is not uncommon to see Barbara Clarkson behind the wheel of a large truck, driving south on I-5 to pick up school supplies from one her vendor partnerships. Each summer, she loads her truck with backpacks, notebooks, pencils, pens, erasers, crayons, rulers, etc. and delivers the supplies to the South Sound Reading Foundation and North Thurston Public Schools Family and Youth Resource Center. So many students have been able to go back to school with the supplies they need because of Barbara's "hands on" efforts.

Barbara's current vision is to provide a literacy education center for the community. The purpose of the center is to provide literacy instruction for youth and adults, provide access to computers and various technology devices, support for adults as they seek employment opportunities, laundry facilities for families in need, and space for community organizations to rent for professional development training. Professional architectural designs have already been developed and over \$35,000 has been secured for this effort along with grants that have been submitted for approval. Knowing Barbara Clarkson's tenacity, there is no doubt that this endeavor will become a reality!

Barbara's hard work in promoting equitable literacy opportunities for all youth and adults in our community has not gone unnoticed in the world of higher education. South Puget Sound Community College has a center named the A. Barbara Clarkson Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Center which is committed to supporting the college mission to advance equity and embrace diversity. Also, alongside her late husband, Virgil Clarkson, Barbara has received an honorary doctoral degree from St. Martin's University, recognizing her pioneer efforts to enhance our community for all people.

Barbara Clarkson is a true champion of literacy attainment for all children and adults alike. It is a great pleasure and honor to nominate her for the South Sound Reading Foundation's Literacy Champion Award!

Submitted by Karen Johnson, Executive Director of Elementary Education, North Thurston Public Schools