This year, USC ReadersPlus celebrates its 20th anniversary. I’ve been fortunate enough to have directed the program for all of these 20 years and I am filled with immense pride and joy. Each student who has joined our beloved program is a very special member of the ReadersPlus family and has played an important part in building the program’s success. Together, we have achieved many accomplishments:

- Over a thousand USC students from a wide array of majors have contributed over 360,000 hours of individualized reading and math assistance to over 10,000 K–12 students since the program’s inception.

- At least seven of our ReadersPlus alumni are now teachers at our own partner schools. They host our ReadersPlus tutors as well as other JEP service-learning participants. A number of other alumni, equipped with their experiences, have gone on as Teach for America Corps members.

Over the past two decades, ReadersPlus has built partnerships with other organizations dedicated to promoting literacy education in our community. Our work with the Jester and Pharley Fund and their “Reading Makes a Difference” USC Good Neighbors Grant encourages students to read and give back as they engage in Read-a-Thons; a collaboration with United Voices of Literacy creates a forum for students to build literacy skills and confidence through oral readings; and through the generosity of the Ella Fitzgerald Charitable Foundation, children in our schools are gifted with books four times a year to take home for their own collections.

Our program’s success is directly attributable to the members of our ReadersPlus family-school partners and donors—all of whom have demonstrated tremendous commitment to our program. However, the truest heroes are our USC students who work with K-5 students in our schools every day. The dedication and excitement they demonstrate in their work and the retention rate we have had over the years is truly inspiring. Each year, 40–50% of our tutors return from previous semesters, and many remain with us until they graduate from USC. Jon Peppin, for example, a Site Coordinator at Weemes Elementary School, began the fall of his freshman year and will be continuing in his current position until he graduates in May 2018, with a double major in Accounting and Social Science & Communications, with a minor in East Asian Language and Cultures.

It has been an honor and a privilege to have worked with so many dedicated, caring people! I am so grateful to each and every one, and look forward to many more years of success. As we say at the end of each of our Little Yoginis lessons: Namaste—I bow to the divine in you.

—Tina Koneazny, Associate Director of JEP
Alumni Spotlights

To celebrate our 20th anniversary, we reached out to ReadersPlus alumni to reflect on their time with the program and how it has shaped them into the people they are today. Here is what some of them had to say:

Adela Hernandez Harrison, Class of 2003

Working for JEP as a USC Reader and coordinator at Norwood was and will always be a blessing. It helped me realize that I wanted to work with children as a career. Seeing students' excitement when they were able to read a new word or write a complete sentence—those moments were priceless. The relationships that were built with the students and parents were rewarding beyond words.

Now, after teaching for eleven years, that same excitement still continues. A memory that often comes to mind when I teach my current struggling students as a 4th grade classroom teacher is a Readers training I attended, where a difficult and frustrating assignment was given. Tina told us that students often feel that frustration when they don't understand an assignment, and that to be a good educator we needed patience with frustrated students. That's a piece of advice that I will forever cherish.

Erica Edwards, Class of 2010

ReadersPlus was truly the most impactful aspect of my USC experience. The strong bonds I cultivated with the students and their families continue to inspire my career today. The 32nd St. after school program allowed me to learn about community work and education with the support of fellow student leaders and JEP staff. The elementary students I tutored always put a huge smile on my face. After college, I taught pre-kindergarten in the Bay Area through Teach For America and most recently attended California Institute of Integral Studies, graduating in 2015 with a Masters in Counseling Psychology. My plans for the future include becoming a licensed Marriage and Family Therapist in order to offer mental health services to children and their families. ReadersPlus helped to pave my path and fall in love with this challenging, yet incredibly rewarding work.

A'aron Heard, Class of 2014

Being a part of ReadersPlus was foundational to my undergraduate experience. Through this program I was able to share my love of learning with youth who were growing up under similar circumstances as I did. I have no doubt my experiences as a tutor and coordinator pushed me along the current trajectory I am on. After graduating, I joined the Teach For America Oakland corps as a middle school English/History teacher. Just as when I was a part of Readers, I displayed my passion for education as social justice. This year I've also been blessed to be an Agency by Design Fellow for a Harvard Project Zero Program. I am working to bring the makerspace movement to my school site. I will always be grateful to ReadersPlus and Tina for helping me develop as a service leader.
Alumni Spotlights

Rick Ramirez, Class of 2005
My time with Readers Plus was one of the best parts of my USC experience. I had a blast working with all of my students in my four years as a Reader. All of the teachers felt like a second family to me, even inviting me over for meals since I was far away from home. Tina, her staff, and Readers Plus was always the best part of my day at USC and served as a springboard to my adult life. Without the program, I may have never gotten into Teach For America, or built the skills needed in my current role as a television producer. I am so grateful for everything the program provided me.

Ifeyinwa Asiodu, Class of 2003
I came to USC looking for an opportunity to change the world; however the USC Readers Plus program changed my life. This program provided essential insight about the resiliency of children and their families, our education system, and the community surrounding USC. This unique program sought to build confidence, improve reading and math skills, and achieve equity through tutoring and community engagement. I gained valuable leadership experience and honed my mentorship and advocacy skills as a math mentor and site coordinator. The best part of my day was witnessing transformations of shy children, once reluctant to speak, reading their favorite stories aloud or selecting new books to read from our library. The skills and experiences gained from the program have supported me throughout my academic and clinical career as an Assistant Professor at UCSF School of Nursing. I will forever be grateful to everyone involved with this phenomenal program.

Lizette Zarate, Class of 2002
One of the most rewarding experiences I had as a student at USC was working as a Reader in the USC Readers Plus program. In my time with Readers Plus, I served as a reader, assistant site coordinator, then site coordinator at Foshay Learning Center, my alma mater. It was rewarding to see the excitement on my students' faces when I picked them up from class for one of our sessions, but it was most rewarding to witness the amazing strides they made in their reading. Looking back, my work with the Readers Plus program was an important step toward my career as an educator. Currently I am a curriculum and instruction specialist with USC’s Neighborhood Academic Initiative.

Sherry Nguyen, Class of 2004
Reflecting back on my college years, being a part of this program was my most rewarding experience. It was inspiring to be a part of an organization that supported children's literacy in a special way. I loved that it gave the Reader an opportunity and the flexibility to create their own reading lesson plans fitting to each of their students. The kids were especially the best part of it all. They were so sweet and eager to learn from our sessions. I am so grateful for this program, and I have made lifelong friends and continue to be an advocate for children's literacy.
New Year, New Directors

Kiara Damian-Rodriguez, Math Director

Transitioning into the role of Math Director this semester has been an exciting and inspiring experience. Aside from the many times I felt nervous and unsure of my ability to succeed, I have always been extremely proud to be a part of such an amazing program. Being in this role has allowed me to support and professionally grow with coordinators, assistant coordinators, tutors, and fellow central staff members, who are all committed to supporting students in our surrounding communities. This has been especially important to me, being that I was once an elementary student in a community surrounding USC. Knowing that students have role models they can look up to through this program is very important. Although I am not directly working with elementary students, I appreciate hearing how the resources I provide help a student become inspired to learn, while also developing a relationship with their tutor. This inspiration has only encouraged me to continue to work diligently to improve and grow as the Math Director. I am very eager to see what new things I learn, and the improvement and growth of not only myself, but of everyone who is a part of the program this upcoming semester. I strive to continue to provide our coordinators, assistant coordinators, and tutors with valuable resources and advice, and also hope to find new ways to better connect USC to our surrounding communities, encouraging more USC students to become involved with JEP and Readers Plus. I am eager to continue my work as Math Director, and hope that all tutors know they can come to me for support.

Phebe Chew, Literacy Director

There have definitely been many new things to learn and understand coming in as a new Literacy Director. Before joining Readers Plus, I was definitely nervous and began to doubt my ability. What is the dynamic of the program, and how do I fit into it? How would I be useful to the program... to my fellow coworkers, to the coordinators and assistant coordinators, to the tutors, to the students? Though I am writing and rewriting the answers to these questions each day, I find that my desire to be the best Literacy Director I can be comes naturally as a result of what I see from others in the program. Time after time, I am amazed and inspired by the commitment and work our coordinators, assistant coordinators, tutors, and fellow central staff members are capable of.

The impact tutors and coordinators of this program have is incredible. The fact that they are able to directly contribute to the community—to lift a young mind up, and in turn, learn from their service semester after semester is humbling in its undeniable impact. I am honored to be a part of this program with them and to have met so many incredible individuals through it. I will try my best to be the best I can be for everyone in the program.

In my upcoming semesters with Readers Plus, I am excited to see the improvement and growth of each and every person in the program—coordinators, assistant coordinators, tutors, and students. Central staff is always thinking of ways we can best support our coordinators and tutors so that we can make this the best experience it can be for them.
New Year, New Staff

Alexis Alexander, Foshay Coordinator
Lillian Brownfield, Foshay Asst. Coordinator
Evan Monroe, 32nd St. Coordinator

Sabrina Barrow, 32nd St. Asst. Coordinator
Claudia Frankel, Norwood Coordinator
Andrea Williams, Norwood Asst. Coordinator

So Dam Park, Vermont Coordinator
Ivianna Law, Vermont Asst. Coordinator
Jon Peppin, Weemes Coordinator

Stacey Lau, Weemes Asst. Coordinator
Carol Abrajan, Science Center Coordinator
Nick Lopez, John Mack Coordinator
Welcome New Tutors!

32nd Street
Faheem Chunara
Daniela Cruz
Timaj Kalifa
Sophia Lopez

Foshay
Osward Xol
Nicholas Ekers
Chasia Jeffries

Norwood
Mariah Williams
Christina Braa

Weemies
Dayanara Saucedo
Victoria Garcia-Lopez
Natalia Wurst
Zoë Bautista
Tariq Ahmed

Vermont
Hunter Wilkinson
Tamazin Moffett
Sarahfina Luuga
Kate Guion
Olivia Dang

John Mack
Erica Noll
Emily Camacho
Bella Nava
Cecilia Nguyen

Science Center
Breana Davidson

The Impact of Readers\textsuperscript{Plus}

Two of our new tutors have been serviced by Readers\textsuperscript{Plus} when they were in elementary school. Here is what they had to say:

Growing up in South Central and attending Foshay from 1st to 12th grade gave me the knowledge of living in an inner city community. During my 3rd grade year at Foshay, I was able to experience the Readers\textsuperscript{Plus} program during an after school program. Additionally, being a part of Neighborhood Academic Initiative (NAI) gave me the opportunity to work with freshman JEP students where I received aid in my personal statement essay. Those experiences influenced me to participate in a program similar to Readers\textsuperscript{Plus} and JEP where I guided 4th and 5th graders in their writing skills. Being a part of Readers\textsuperscript{Plus} as a college student now has allowed me to continue giving back to my community.

—Osward Xol, Literacy Tutor at Foshay

When I was in 5th grade, I struggled in both reading and math. I was enrolled in the USC Readers\textsuperscript{Plus} program, and I strongly believe that this program has helped shape me into who I am today. The mentors I met and the experience that I had has left an impact on my life, and for that reason, I would like to give back to my community the way it gave to me. In high school, I went on to participating in similar programs to Readers\textsuperscript{Plus}. I helped 4th and 5th graders after school with their writing skills, and also mentored girls in STEM-related topics. I remember the moment when I taught the kids about putting their feelings into their writing and to try to love it that way. I could see a spark coming out of them, like seeing a light bulb left off and untouched, finally being turned on. Being a part of Readers\textsuperscript{Plus} as a USC student allows me to make a difference in the younger generation.

—Victoria Garcia-Lopez, Literacy Tutor at Weemes
Since 1997, ReadersPlus tutors have worked with five schools in the surrounding USC area, which include 32nd Street USC MaST Magnet School, Foshay Learning Center, Norwood Elementary, Vermont Elementary, and Weemes Elementary. John W. Mack Elementary and Alexander Science Center were later added in 2011. Since the inception of our program, our tutors have provided individualized academic assistance to students from kindergarten to fifth grade in literacy. In 1999, math assistance was added. Today, our tutors continue to provide individualized literacy and math sessions, and participate in after school programs which include homework help, yoga (Little Yogginis), literacy (Turn the Page), and STEM (Wonderkids), having provided academic support and mentorship to nearly 20,000 K-5 students over these past 20 years. Here are some statistics about our current group of students this semester.
Tutors This Semester

Endless Curiosity and Wonder with Readers Plus

This semester, I worked with three different age groups: 2nd, 3rd, and 4th grade. Each student required very tailored lesson plans that catered to their learning styles and needs. My favorite part was being creative in what lesson plans I presented. With my second grader, we played a game called “Island Hopping.” In this game, I wrote down several sight words that we had worked with on the blacktop at school. Next, we took turns calling out words and running to the word that the other person called out. The goal was to recognize the word quickly. As we progressed through the game, I added a timer. The goal here was to stand on more words than the other. My student loved that game and it really inspired her to learn.

However, the most challenging part was getting my fifth grader to realize that having fun is not the only thing we’d be doing. My student wanted to play games instead of really focusing on the educational aspects of our tutoring sessions. I had to learn how to balance physical activity with a lesson in order to keep my student engaged. To achieve this, I began incorporating short breaks within our lessons. I saw a complete change in my student and his interest in the program. Overall this semester has taught me a lot about myself, as well as learning new and innovative ways to encourage excitement about learning.

—Ivianna Law, Literacy Tutor and Assistant Coordinator at Vermont

Excitement to Learn

Working for Readers Plus as a literacy tutor has been the most rewarding part of my time at USC thus far. As this is only my second semester with the program, I am still growing as a tutor and learning how to best support my students. This semester I worked with two second grade boys, and I had such a great time with each of them. The most enjoyable part was getting to know my students and creating a tutoring experience that was catered to each of them individually. It has been a true joy tutoring and making it their favorite part of their day. The most challenging part of tutoring for me really was having enough energy for two seven year-olds at 8am!

—Emma Dessau, Literacy Tutor at Foshay

A Learning Experience for My Students and Me

Readers Plus has been a great learning opportunity for me. I have previously volunteered at schools with children, yet none have been quite like this experience. I have enjoyed the personal nature of tutoring children one-on-one in reading and being able to take creative freedom in doing so. This semester I tutored three children, each of them in a different grade. They all have unique learning styles, and as such, I have had to learn how to cater specifically to each to best educate them. My youngest student, a kindergartener, has been the most fun to tutor. He was only just learning to differentiate between letters of the alphabet, and it was especially clear with him to see how he was progressing as I tutored him. It was rewarding to see him retain what we have been going over every week. Although observing his progress was great, the best part of tutoring him was seeing the huge grin on his face every time I picked him up from his classroom. I loved seeing his excitement entering the tutoring room to learn with me. While at times it was challenging to make unique lesson plans weekly and wake up early to tutor my kids, once I was on site and interacting with my students, it was always rewarding and encouraging. Being a part of Readers Plus is an experience that I will draw from in the future, and one that will help me remember that there is more to life than simply just being a student.

—Tamazin Moffett, Literacy Tutor at Vermont
Lesson Plan Spotlights

Learning Fractions with Play-Doh

The September lesson plan contest winner for math was Elliott Kramer from Science Center. His lesson revolved around learning fractions in an exciting, new way. He first began the lesson by reading *James and the Giant Peach* by Roald Dahl with the student. Next, he drew a peach on the board and demonstrated how the piece of fruit could be divided into fourths, thirds, halves, etc. Next, he modeled with Play-Doh how fractions would look like with a clay peach. He then cut the Play-Doh peach into the same fractions he demonstrated on the board. With this, he was able to show different sized pieces of the peach to explain different sized fractions. Elliott says, “Many students are initially confused by how 1/4 is larger than 1/8, given that the 8 is larger than 4 on a number line. With this activity, the student was able to tell the difference between 1/4 and 1/8 because of the different sized pieces of the peach.” Then, when the student seemed to have gotten the hang of the concept, he asked them to cut the peach into specific fractions on their own. Doing so would also help the student understand about equivalent fractions showing that, for example, 2/4 of a peach is also half of the peach. We thought that this was a great lesson to teach when a student is beginning to learn fractions but cannot visualize them. It is a great interactive lesson that gets the student involved, while still incorporating a book with the math concept.

—Elliott Kramer, Math Tutor at Science Center and Alyssa Rubio, Central Coordinator

Halloween Fun with a KWL Chart

Luis Loza, a literacy tutor at Weemes, won the October lesson plan contest for his Halloween lesson with his second grade student. He first began the lesson talking about Halloween, the students’ costume ideas, and everything they knew collectively about the holiday. Luis then presented a cutout of a pumpkin KWL chart (Know/Want to know/Learned). His student then filled out the K with information from the start of the lesson they discussed together. Next, his student filled out the W section of the pumpkin chart, with Luis prompting his student with questions like “Why do you think kids dress up for Halloween?” or “Why is candy and trick-or-treating part of the day?” To fill in the L section of the chart, together they read *The Tricks and Treats of Halloween* by Angela Murphy, a book donated by the Ella Fitzgerald Charitable Foundation. Based on their readings, the student recalled what the book was about and what they learned, filling out the L section of the pumpkin chart. Together, they learned about the past and present traditions of Halloween, while also learning about the differences of the fables and facts of the holiday. Luis says, “My student really loved the activity so he wanted to keep the charts and take them home. Usually whenever I do any arts and crafts with him, I let him keep it.”

—Luis Loza, Literacy Tutor at Weemes and Alyssa Rubio, Central Coordinator
Afterschool Programs

As a tutor in my fifth semester with Readers Plus, I have led and supported each after school activity our program offers. Currently it is my second semester working Little Yoginis, which are some of my favorite days during our after school program. Most people my age understand the benefits of yoga, and the benefits of taking time for relaxation and reflection. To a bunch of sugar-infused seven-year-olds, however, the teachings of yoga are pretty novel. It is fun to see them get excited when they know the name of a pose we have learned before, or when they are able to do a particularly tricky one. (Their balance may not be the best, but these kids are insanely flexible!) They often do not have the understanding or attention span to think about the higher concepts of yoga as we go through the poses, but the concepts come across in the books that Tina selects to accompany the lessons. The students are always eager to participate during the reading, and they always chime in with adorable anecdotes about times that they shared their things, or had a bad day, or helped a friend.

One of my favorite Yoginis lessons was one that Tina taught during our after school program last spring. It contained a few poses that had to be done with partners or in a group—most notably the Partner Boat Pose. The students did not want to stop doing it! They partnered with each other, with Tina, and with the tutors – which was no easy feat for us, since our legs were about twice the length of some of theirs. The returning students still slip in requests for boat pose all the time, months after they first learned it. To me, this shows that some of the things they have learned in yoga have stuck with them, and it makes me hopeful that they will remember the values we have tried teaching through Yoginis, just like they did with the boat pose.

—Katie Theel, Literacy Tutor at 32nd St.

Turn the Page

Turn the Page is a freeform book study sponsored by undergraduate student and USC Junior Associate, Frances Carey. It has been part of 32nd Street’s after school program this semester. The activities introduce first through third grade students to reading and responding to text. After listening to a book read aloud by a Readers Plus tutor, students engage in discussion about the story before writing a reflective response and drawing an illustration inspired by the story in their Turn the Page journals. The intention of these journals is for the student to log in a very personalized way what they have learned over the semester and what they have accomplished. On each page, the students write the name of the book they are reading, the author, and the date they wrote/drew their responses. Older students writing a reflective response can be prompted by critical thinking questions, such as: “What was your favorite part of the story and why?” or “If you were a character in the book, is there anything you would have done differently that might have changed the story?” For tutors, the Turn the Page journals help indicate the personal progress of each student over the course of the semester, comparing the beginning entries to the last ones. Turn the Page has been a success at 32nd Street, and will continue into the next semester.

—Alyssa Rubio, Central Coordinator
Afterschool Programs

**Wonderkids**

The Neuroscience Graduate Program (NGP) provided a neuroscience unit to the 1-3rd grade students at 32nd Street Elementary. They did a jello brain dissection after graduate students Rita Barakat, Ilse Flores, and Shai Porat dissected a real sheep brain. Students learned from graduate student Sadhna Rao how to make a neuron, how the five senses interact with the brain, and how that can be changed with a Miracle Berry. The NGP later used a Backyard Brains device (an electrophysiology setup) in which one can learn exciting neuroscience concepts first-hand, such as how the brain sends electrical impulses to the arm’s muscles telling them to move. When the muscles move, this generates an even larger electrical signal which can be seen on an iPad. Special thanks to Alicia Quihuis, Sadhna Rao, Lisa Dokovna, Rita Barakat, Andres Camarena, Christopher Ventura, Jocelyn Argueta, and Brian Leung for coordinating this neuroscience outreach opportunity.

A photonics and optics unit was funded by SPIE, the International Society for Optics and Photonics. The USC chapter provided volunteer Andre Kovach and his team. Darin Gray, Director of Science Outreach at USC Viterbi School of Engineering, spoke about lasers and how they travel through different materials in various ways. Students created telescopes, periscopes, and color wheels, while also learning about light absorption and reflection through gumballs.

The osteology unit revolved around designing a human skeleton and making a model of a bone and spine. The guest speaker was undergraduate student Jason Hsieh, who created an activity that included a bone remodeling and osteoporosis simulator with a 3D-printed model and sand.

—DJ Kast, Director of the Wonderkids program

**Mid-Semester Extravaganza**

Extravaganza is a training session that happens mid-semester in order to provide additional support to all of our tutors, whether they are new or veterans. Hosted this semester on October 23rd and 25th, tutors arrived ready to learn about how to improve their tutoring sessions. To start of the night, guest speaker Crystil Quiroz from OWHP (The Office of Wellness and Health Promotion) discussed tips in stress management as a working college student. As a group, tutors then collectively did some problem solving around behavior issues that they might encounter on-site, both in their one-on-one sessions and in the afterschool programs. Later, the team split up by subject and learned about individual practices for either Math or Literacy. They learned about creative lesson plan ideas provided by our Math and Literacy directors, Phebe and Kiara, respectively. For Math, tutors learned how to best incorporate books into their lessons in their “Mathematizing Literature” session. For literacy, tutors learned more about Common Core Standards and how to incorporate those into their lessons. Overall, Extravaganza proved to be helpful for our tutors, leaving them with tips and tricks on how to end the semester successfully.

—Alyssa Rubio, Central Coordinator
About Us

USC ReadersPlus is an “America Reads/America Counts” literacy and math tutoring program housed within the USC Dana and David Dornsife College of Letters, Arts, and Sciences.

In 1997, President Clinton launched legislation that would provide additional work-study money to colleges and universities with the condition that a large portion of it go to one-on-one literacy programs for children grade K-6. The JEP version of America Reads was the first in the nation to begin working under these guidelines, launching in May 19, 1997. In May of 1999, America Counts was added to include math education and it was at this time that the USC Readers program was changed to USC ReadersPlus.

The Program is administered by the Joint Educational Project and funded in part through the USC Good Neighbor’s Campaign with the support of the USC Financial Aid Office. Our tutors work with seven of the “Family of Schools” surrounding USC.