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IT TAKES A VILLAGE: VOLUNTEERS AND COMMUNITY PARTNERS ENHANCE THE PRINCETON YOUNG ACHIEVERS PROGRAM

PRINCETON - Every week during the school year, children enrolled in the Princeton Young Achievers (PYA) program in Kindergarten through second grade enjoy special time with a personal reading buddy – courtesy of the volunteers who make up the *Literacy for Life* program. Students practice reading aloud with an adult partner and together they enjoy stories that take them on a variety of adventures.

Ann Vershbow, the Princeton Family YMCA's Education Director who leads the PYA program said, "Our reading buddies enhance our students' PYA experience immensely. We know from research that reading to and with a child early in life correlates directly to his or her success in school and in life. These volunteers inspire a love of learning – and I might add that they are wonderful friends too. We are very grateful to them."

The Princeton Young Achievers program, "adopted" this year by the Princeton Family YMCA, operates three learning centers for children who reside in Princeton's subsidized housing communities. The centers provide daily homework assistance to prepare the children for the next school day.

In addition, the PYA students benefit from a variety of enrichments provided by several community partner groups. They include the Arts Council of Princeton who donates artists and materials for the perennial favorite *Creative Fridays* weekly series, free of cost to PYA participants.

Other partnering organizations this year included the Stonybrook-Millstone Watershed Association that conducted a literacy program using nature as a source of inspiration, and the Princeton School Gardens Cooperative which delivered the "Garden State on your Plate" workshops. Their farm-to-school program, funded by a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, brought fresh produce and products from local farms into the learning centers, where local chefs prepared recipes for tastings for the students and teachers.

"Our community partners and volunteers bring depth and add richness to the PYA experience for our kids," added Kate Bech, CEO of the Princeton Family YMCA. "We are sincerely grateful to them for their extraordinary contributions."



Enjoying some cake to celebrate their year together are volunteers Connie Ban of Princeton (left) and Marsha Novick of Princeton (right) with Princeton Young Achievers students Richard Valme and Steve Mahiri, both of Princeton. Connie and Marsha are volunteers with the *Literacy for Life* program that provides weekly one-to-one reading sessions for children (grades K to 2) enrolled in the Princeton Young Achievers afterschool program.

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About the Y

The Y is one of the nation's leading nonprofit strengthening communities through youth development, healthy living and social responsibility. Across the U.S., 2,687 Ys engage 21 million men, women and children – regardless of age, income or background – to nurture the potential of children and teens, improve the nation's health and well-being and provide opportunities to give back and support neighbors. Anchored in more than 10,000 communities, the Y has the long-standing relationships and physical presence not just to promise, but to deliver, lasting personal and social change. Locally the Princeton Family YMCA has been serving the community for more than 100 years. www.princetonymca.org