

# Reading Center turns 60 years old: Non-profit group celebrates 60 years of tutoring students with dyslexia

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- In 1951, the year that Paula Rome formed the Reading Center, Jonas Salk was a year from completing his polio vaccine, and the nation was still 10 years from manned space flight. In 2011, the Reading Center will celebrate 60 years of helping struggling students succeed in Rochester and surrounding communities.

The Orton-Gillingham Method, a teaching approach designed to help people with reading and spelling disabilities, was developed in the 1930's by Dr. Samuel T. Orton, a neuro-psychiatrist and Anna Gillingham, a visionary educator. Paula Rome learned this teaching technique from Dr. Orton in the 1940's in Pennsylvania. When she moved to Rochester with her husband, Dr. Howard Rome, in 1947, she began to use this teaching technique with private students. In 1956, Paula Rome recruited Jean Osman from Aldrich Nursery School and trained her in the Orton-Gillingham approach.

The Reading Center was started in the basement of the Rome's home in southwest Rochester. The early, informal mission of the Center was to "provide help to anyone who needed it, at a cost that any family could afford." In the early years, this often meant that Paula Rome would provide all of the free tutoring and give paying tutoring students to the other tutors who were trained by her and Jean.

In 1989, Rome and Osman decided to transform the Reading Center from a private tutoring service into a non-profit organization in order to provide tutoring and training as a community service. The organization turned over its governance to a Board of Directors from the community and its official motto became, "Toward Literacy for All." The official name of the non-profit became the Dyslexia Institute of MN, but the organization retains its more familiar name, The Reading Center as well.

Over the years, the Reading Center has tested and tutored more than 7,000 students. Independent evaluation has shown that the Reading Center's students increase their skills at rates that "exceed outstanding gains." The Center has trained more than 1,200 adults in the Orton-Gillingham approach, ensuring that new generations of students with reading difficulties will have the instruction they need.

Paula Rome passed away in late 2008. Co-founder Jean Osman retired from the helm of the

Reading Center in 2005, but she continues to be one of the center's most prolific tutors for children and adults. Jean Osman has personally tested nearly 3,000 students, tutored 113 students and trained 1,200 adults in the Orton-Gillingham approach used by the Reading Center.

Both Rome and Osman are recognized nationally and internationally as leaders in the field of dyslexia. With Paula Rome, Jean Osman co-authored groundbreaking publications, The Language Toolkit, and The Advanced Language Toolkit. Both publications remain the "go-to" books on how to teach people with language learning difficulties. Rome and Osman provided leadership in national organizations that are committed to helping those with dyslexia, including the International Dyslexia Association and the Academy of Orton-Gillingham Practitioners and Educators. Both women were instrumental in founding the International Dyslexia Association of the Upper Midwest...The Reading Center is the only center west of the Mississippi accredited by the Academy of Orton-Gillingham Practitioners and Educators for its training programs and high quality tutoring.

### **About the Reading Center**

The Reading Center is a non-profit organization that has been helping struggling students learn to read since 1951.

A United Way partner agency, the Reading Center provides educational testing, one-on-one Educational Therapy and summer Best of Basics program for children.

The Reading Center also teaches adults in a multi-sensory, structured approach to teach reading through Basic and Advanced Institutes and training for school district teachers.

In 2010, the Reading Center provided 8,700 lessons to 147 students one-on-one, 70 children were tested for reading disabilities, 123 were screened, and 50 educators and parents were trained.

In 2010, \$55,000 in scholarships was provided to 69 children whose families could not afford the cost of testing and tutoring.

For more comprehensive background information on the Reading Center go to [www.TheReadingCenter.org/About Us/Media Information](http://www.TheReadingCenter.org/AboutUs/MediaInformation) or call the above contact person to arrange interviews.