



Washtenaw Literacy



Washtenaw
Literacy
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I HAVE BEEN ON THE BOARD OF WASHTENAW LITERACY (WL) FOR 3 YEARS. THEY HAVE BEEN VERY EFFECTIVE IN HELPING OUR OPERATION WITH OUR ESL PROGRAMS. THE STUDENTS AS WELL AS THE TUTORS ARE LEARNING FASTER BECAUSE OF THE TRAINING AND SUPPORT PROVIDED BY WL. I HAVE BEEN IMPRESSED BY THE PROFESSIONALISM OF THE WL STAFF AS WELL AS ITS ABILITY TO DO SO MUCH WITH SO FEW RESOURCES.

John Edwards, CEO, Edwards Brothers, Inc.

The Illiteracy Crisis

In Washtenaw County over 27,000 adults lack the literacy skills needed to succeed in our society. Nationwide, 43% of adults lack these skills. For every adult who can't communicate, we lose an opportunity for better schools, workplaces and communities.

National Trends: The Latest Statistics

The National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL) is the first survey in 10 years to measure adult literacy skills nationwide. The results, released in December 2005, are disheartening. Although the number of adults with less than a high school degree or GED/Equivalency decreased since 1992 and the number attaining associate's degrees or higher increased, illiteracy rates showed little improvement.

Literacy is much broader than the traditional definition of reading and spelling.

The National Assessment of Adult Literacy defines literacy as "the ability to use printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential."

Adults at the below basic and basic levels cannot function adequately in our society. Fourteen percent of adults scored in the below basic level for prose literacy, 29% in the basic level. An additional 2% could not participate because they could not communicate with the interviewer.



WASHTENAW LITERACY'S ONE-ON-ONE TUTORING SESSIONS USE THE ADULT LEARNER'S STRENGTHS AND INTERESTS TO CREATE A LEARNING ENVIRONMENT THAT BOTH ENGAGES AND EMPOWERS THE LEARNER. NOT ONLY DOES THE INDIVIDUAL GAIN IMPROVED LITERACY ABILITIES, BUT SOCIETY BENEFITS AS WELL THROUGH THE NEW, POSITIVE CONTRIBUTIONS THAT THE INDIVIDUAL CAN NOW MAKE.

Joanne Marttila Pierson, Ph.D., Associate Director, University Center for the Development of Language and Literacy, University of Michigan

Local Solutions: Washtenaw Literacy

The national statistics reinforce what we are seeing in Washtenaw County: illiteracy persists even when area education levels are high. In 1992, the last year for which local statistics are available, 12% of our county's adult population was at the lowest literacy level. If gathered together, these adults would fill a quarter of Michigan Stadium.

There are many reasons why adults lack literacy skills.

- **System Failure:** An estimated 30-80 percent of low literate adults have learning disabilities. Often K-12 schools lack the resources to provide the necessary support for learning and these students are put into special education or passed along through the system. Over 60% of Washtenaw Literacy's basic literacy learners have their high school diploma.
- **Unstable Lives:** Many Washtenaw Literacy learners report an unstable childhood. They spent their years moving from place to place, running away from home, or leaving school to support their families.
- **Starting Over:** Immigrants do not always have the opportunity to learn English before moving to the U.S. Learners in our program often arrive with a family member who can speak English, but lack communication skills themselves. Some ESL learners are professionals in their home countries. Others never attended school. Either way, they are ill equipped for life in our community.

Washtenaw Literacy has seen the improvement our tutoring programs make in the lives of our learners and in our community. Adults in our program apply their literacy skills to get better jobs, maintain safe homes for themselves and their families and enable their children to succeed in school. We have heard from local employers and educators that their organizations are improving as a result.



WASHTENAW LITERACY PROVIDES AN ESSENTIAL SERVICE; FOR MANY OF THE HOMELESS MEN AND WOMEN WE SERVE, BASIC READING AND WRITING SKILLS ARE CRUCIAL TO SECURING EMPLOYMENT AND MAINTAINING ECONOMIC STABILITY.

Ellen R. Schulmeister, Executive Director, Shelter Association of Washtenaw County

Washtenaw Literacy fine-tunes its services each year better meet the literacy needs of our community. We work with over 650 volunteers and a large network of community educators, employers and human service agencies to make this happen. In 2005-2006, 1,400 men and women participated in our tutoring programs. Whether attending a work-place English as a second language group, meeting a volunteer tutor in a church or using our literacy software in the Ypsilanti District Library or on WCC's campus, each of these adults is contributing to a better community for us all.

Highlights 2005-2006

- A new ESL group at Maple Meadows Outreach Clinic teaches health literacy skills. An ESL book group is launched at the Ypsilanti District Library Michigan Ave. Branch.
- Washtenaw Community College groups expand to 4 ESL and a basic literacy (BL) computer lab.
- Tutoring programs continue at the Delonis Center, Washtenaw County Jail and Dawn Farm. Tutors are trained at Ozone House to reach teenagers in need of literacy services.
- New outreach initiatives include developing a referral network for women basic literacy learners (sponsored by James A. & Faith Knight Foundation) and a bumper sticker campaign to recruit parents and promote reading to children (sponsored by Ypsilanti Area Community Fund).
- New members are welcomed to our Changing Lives Society and to our newest multi-year donor society, Opening Doors.
- Technology improves at our office with a new database and updated computers.
- Relationships are strengthened with our community partners: Ypsilanti District Library, Washtenaw Community College, Washtenaw Technical Middle College, Ypsilanti Head Start, U-M Nurse Managed Clinics, Washtenaw County ETCS, Dawn Farm, Shelter Association of Washtenaw County Delonis Center, Washtenaw County Jail, Ozone House, Neutral Zone, Ann Arbor Book Festival, Willow Run Adult Education, U-M School of Information, Ann Arbor District Library, NEW Center, Comcast, The Ann Arbor News, Reach out and Read, U-M Center for the Development of Language and Literacy.

In Review

Revenue Sources

Businesses	\$52,872
Events	\$67,165
Fees	\$1,875
Grants	\$53,200
Individual gifts	\$53,834
Interest	\$1,481
Organizations	\$59,435
Health Care Co-Pays	\$3,403
Subcontracts	\$7,500
Other	\$237
Total	\$301,002

In-Kind Support

Advertising	\$18,193
Benefit Auction	\$63,700
Books, services, supplies	\$6,094
Office and storage space	\$26,265
Scholarships	\$250
Volunteer Service	\$828,703
Total	\$943,205

Cash v. In-Kind Support

Cash Support	\$301,002
In-Kind Support	\$943,205

Learners by Program

BL 1:1	180
ESL 1:1	220
Group learners (BL and ESL)	1,001
Total	1,401

Volunteers by Type

1:1 tutors	400
Group tutors	125
Fundraising/Administration	153
Total	678

Learner Accomplishments

Reported in our year-end survey:
100% I am improving my literacy or English skills.
100% I am making progress toward my goals.
94% I feel more confident.
66% I feel better about my family life.
63% I am more successful at work.
38% I am more involved with my community.

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Mission Statement

Washtenaw Literacy is a volunteer-based organization providing free literacy instruction customized to the needs of adults throughout Washtenaw County. Volunteers provide individual and group tutoring in reading and writing skills and in English as a second language so adults can improve their personal, family and community lives.

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