



## Literacy Works

### QUICK FACTS: The urgent need for adult and family literacy services in the U.S. and Chicago

#### A NATIONAL NEED

- ***In the U.S., 36 million adults have basic literacy deficiencies.*** This impacts their own stability and that of an economy that demands a skilled workforce.
- ***The U.S. scored below average on an international adult literacy assessment,*** ranking 16th out of 24 countries. The U.S. had the highest levels of income inequality and literacy skills inequality.
- ***Low literacy is a barrier to employment.*** Adults with low literacy are more than twice as likely to be unemployed than their better educated peers. 32% of employers surveyed nationwide cited inadequate literacy skills as a significant reason for rejecting applicants; the same percentage viewed low literacy skills as a barrier to success among their entry-level workers.
- ***Adults with low literacy are four times more likely to have poor health*** compared with their better educated peers.
- ***A child from a low-educated family is ten times more likely to grow up to have low literacy skills.***
- ***Children growing up in poverty may start kindergarten lacking basic skills – and often do not complete high school.*** Young children growing up in poverty hear *millions fewer words* than children from middle-income backgrounds; they are more likely to start school with a vocabulary gap that can hinder their growth in vocabulary, knowledge, and academic performance throughout their schooling.

#### CHICAGO'S CRISIS

- ***Half a million adults in Chicago cannot read and write well enough to realize their goals of education, community involvement, and employment for themselves and their families.*** Over 25% of Chicagoans age 25 or older have less than a high school education; 12% have less than a 9<sup>th</sup> grade education.
- ***Low-literate Chicagoans struggle with poverty.*** For example, in the Lawndale neighborhood (including North Lawndale and Little Village), more than 1 in 3 families live below the poverty level and more than 1 in 3 adults have less than a 9<sup>th</sup>-grade education.
- ***Close to 500,000 people in Chicago speak English less than very well,*** representing 16% of the city's population over 5.
- ***Nearly 25% of immigrants and refugees in Chicago have an 8<sup>th</sup>-grade education or below.*** Among certain populations, as many as 45% may have left school before the 9<sup>th</sup> grade.
- ***Chicago's low-income children are not able to read and write well enough to succeed in elementary school.*** In Chicago elementary schools with the greatest concentrations of low-income students, fewer than 1 in 4 students meet reading or math standards on statewide tests.

**SOURCES:** The Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIACC); US Census; Roosevelt University/Institute of Metropolitan Affairs; Catalyst Chicago; National Association of Manufacturers; Chicago Public Schools; Todd Hart and Betty Risley, *The 30 Million Word Gap by Age 3*.

## How Literacy Works Helps

**Founded in 1995, Literacy Works is a member-based non-profit that offers training and other services to adult literacy, parent education, and workforce development programs across Chicago.** Each year, we train over 600 volunteers to become confident and effective adult literacy tutors. We provide professional development and networking opportunities to over 200 professionals at more than 70 Chicago agencies and schools, which in turn serve thousands of adults with low levels of formal education. In addition, we work directly with more than 100 adult learners each year.

### Training for Adult Literacy Volunteer Tutors

For volunteer tutors, Literacy Works offers monthly *12-hour initial training sessions* in teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) and Adult Basic Education (ABE); annual *Spanish Language Literacy* training; bimonthly 2-hour *Special Topics Training* sessions; the *Annual Literacy Forum*; and the *Annual Literacy Roundtable*.

### Training for Adult Literacy Educators

For program coordinators and classroom instructors, Literacy Works offers training, networking, and knowledge-sharing opportunities through *Member Network Meetings*; *Peer Learning Groups*; the *Annual Literacy Forum*; and the *Annual Literacy Roundtable*. We offer *on-site services* by arrangement with literacy programs and share *resources* via our website, social media, and e-lists.

### Literacy Connect: Training for Workforce Development and Other Professionals

Literacy Works' *Literacy Connect* training services help workforce development professionals tailor instruction and other services to the needs of adults who struggle with literacy. We now extend training to other sectors that frequently encounter low-literate populations, including healthcare organizations, social service providers, and libraries.

### PACE: Parents Active in Children's Education

Literacy Works' PACE program provides staff training and parent workshops at public schools, community-based organizations, and other sites. Our *OK Learn parent workshops* help adults learn ways to promote their young children's literacy and language development. Our *Family Literacy Opportunities (FLO) staff training services* help educators and paraprofessionals work effectively and inclusively with parents who may have low literacy skills.

### Writers' Circle: Writing Workshop Residency Program

Through the Writers' Circle residency program, Literacy Works offers on-site writing workshops for adults in education programs, workforce programs, and other agencies in low-income communities. *Writers' Circle* offers a rare chance for adults to focus on their personal stories and life experience while developing their writing skills.

### Literacy Works – [www.litworks.org](http://www.litworks.org)

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