



Adult Literacy Quick Facts

Low literacy in adults: a national and local crisis

- ✓ In the U.S., more than **30 million** adults are at or below the third grade level in reading, writing, and math.
- ✓ **Well over half a million** adults in Chicago lack the literacy skills necessary to meet their goals related to employment, parenting, and community participation.
- ✓ **Over one-third** of Chicago Public School students who enter as freshman do not graduate within five years.
- ✓ Adults who did not graduate high school are more than **twice** as likely to be unemployed as their graduating peers. They will earn **half** of what their peers earn over a lifetime.
- ✓ Adults with low literacy are **four** times as likely to have poor health compared with their more highly educated counterparts.
- ✓ In the U.S., children from families with low levels of education are **ten** times more likely to have low literacy skills than their peers from more highly educated families.

Adult literacy services in the Chicago area

- ✓ Community-based organizations in local neighborhoods offer instruction in English as a Second Language (ESL); Adult Basic Education (ABE) for adults with below basic skills in reading and math; and High School Equivalency (HSE) preparation.
- ✓ Each year, thousands of Chicagoans turn to local adult literacy programs to acquire the skills they need to accomplish their goals. These programs operate with very small budgets and rely on partnerships with non-profits like Literacy Works to provide high-quality services.

Who accesses adult literacy services?

- ✓ The average age of students enrolled at Literacy Works member agencies is 35. Their average reading level upon enrollment is 5th grade.
- ✓ More than half of the learners served by our members are enrolled in ESL classes; many are immigrants and refugees who received very little education in their native countries.
- ✓ ABE students are often native English speakers who never graduated from high school due to significant barriers including poverty, family health issues, violence, and learning disabilities.
- ✓ Nearly all learners served by our members have low incomes.

Benefits to the learner and the community at large

- ✓ The average learner at Literacy Works member organizations improves by a grade level in reading after six months of instruction.
- ✓ At each increasing level of prose literacy, more adults are employed full time, and median weekly earnings go up.
- ✓ When a mother's literacy level improves, her young child's development and learning significantly improves.
- ✓ Single mothers with high school degrees are 24% less likely to receive public benefits than those who dropped out of high school.
- ✓ A 1% increase in the adult literacy rate yields a 1.5% increase in the GDP, amounting to \$2.3 billion.