

# A Community Initiative To Improve Adult Literacy

## Recognizing Our Challenges and Addressing Them Head-On!

*Message from Susie Schechter, Ex. Director*

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Last week I was waiting in my doctor's office when another patient was called in. Asked if she had filled out the paperwork, she responded, "I can't read." I should not have been surprised, right? I know all the statistics. And, yet, when I heard these three words, I could not believe it.

Clearly, adult low literacy is all around us. Many of our neighbors struggle with basic tasks, like filling out a 1-page medical form. In our quest to change these statistics, I believe we face these challenges: (1) how do we make sure that adults,

like the woman sitting at my doctor's office, know there is reading help close by; (2) how do we make sure that adults who find the courage to get help can actually stay in a literacy program; and (3) how can we accelerate the process to make sure that adults do not need to invest *years* of their lives to improve reading skills?

As you read this quarter's newsletter, you will see how we are addressing these challenges. To help spread the word, we continue to increase our community partners and promote the United Way's 2-1-1 referral

source. To improve retention, we are providing more transportation support (Thank you AAA Michigan!) and more support for vision screening and eye glasses. And to speed up the learning process, we are exploring innovative ways of learning, like EBLI.

Thank you for taking the time to read about these efforts. It is our belief that by addressing these real challenges head on, we will finally, *as a community*, make a dent in this serious issue of adult illiteracy.



### Our Adult Literacy Partners!

ACCESS  
Another Chance  
Beyond Basics  
Detroit Literacy  
Coalition  
Dominican Literacy  
Center  
Macomb Literacy  
Partners  
Mercy Education  
Project  
Oakland Literacy  
Council  
Siena Literacy Center

## Welcome New Partner: AAA Michigan

Reading Works is pleased to welcome our newest corporate partner, AAA Michigan.

AAA Michigan is part of The Auto Club Group, the second largest AAA club in North America. AAA Michigan has 1.5 million members. Since its founding nearly a century ago, AAA Michigan has had a proud heritage of giving back to local communities.

AAA Michigan has been very involved in partnering with civic and community groups and traffic safety organizations to enrich the lives of

residents, improve neighborhoods and help promote traffic safety through such programs as the AAA School Safety Patrol.

Given its background, it is not surprising that AAA Michigan was inspired to help us break down a common barrier that keeps a learner from sticking with a program: transportation!

The sad reality is that most learners simply do not have a reliable way of getting to and from their literacy programs. For example, they can't pay

for gas or can't afford the cost of a bus pass. Through the generosity of AAA Michigan, we now have a separate stream of funding in our Pathway to Literacy Fund that will cover these transportation issues. Deserving learners will now have the transportation support they need.

Thanks AAA Michigan and welcome to our community effort to boost adult literacy in metro Detroit!

## Focus on Community Outreach

### America's Best Offers Discounted Service To Our Adult Learners



As a part of this collective effort, Reading Works is dedicated to increasing retention rates. Once an adult learner gets the courage to walk into a center, we want to do all within our power to make sure he can stay!

Thanks to input from our literacy partners, we realized that we can impact retention rates by helping learners get vision screening and proper eye glasses. With this goal in

mind, we are excited to announce our partnership with America's Best! Providing vision screening, glasses and contacts at stores located throughout metro Detroit, America's Best has agreed to provide vision screening to our adult learners at no cost. Adult learners will then be able to apply for a Pathway to Literacy grant from Reading Works so that they can purchase their new glasses right at the same location at absolutely no cost to them!

### Nutritional Literacy Pilot Underway

One of our community partners, Forgotten Harvest, approached us with a concern: many of its food bank customers had a difficult time filling out forms and were clearly struggling with reading. So, we had a thought... what if we combined our efforts, educated Forgotten Harvest's clients on the basics of nutrition, created some relationships, and, ultimately, encouraged those adults who needed

extra help to visit one of our partner literacy agencies.

Oakland Literacy Council graciously agreed to participate in this pilot. Our Community Outreach Director, Monique Norfus, and Julie Hoensheid of Oakland Literacy prepared several presentations that focused on basic nutrition and the services offered by Oakland Literacy. This workshop was presented to food bank participants

on several occasions at the Silver Lake Church of the Nazarene in Pontiac. There were over 75 participants at each of the presentations.

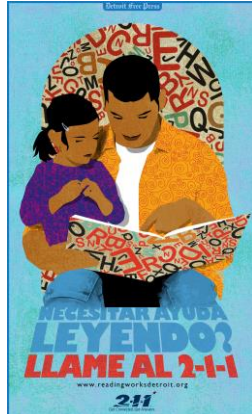
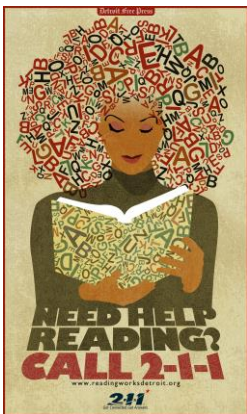
After the presentation, attendees had time for private conversations and to retrieve contact information.

We plan on replicating this program with other literacy partners at other Forgotten Harvest food banks. Our

ultimate goal: continue to spread the word that if you struggle with reading, you are not alone and there is a place ready to provide you with some help!



### Posters Available: Call 2-1-1!



Detroit Free Press artist, Rick Nease, created a series of eye-catching posters to encourage adults needing reading help to call 2-1-1! By now, we hope that you have spotted one of these outreach posters in our community.

If not, don't worry: We have plenty to share. All versions come in English, Spanish and Arabic. Please contact our Director of Community Outreach, Monique Norfus at 313.222.2561 if you would like some posters.

We are pleased to let you know that calls for reading referrals continue to come in through the 2-1-1 hotline. Thanks to United Way for Southeastern Michigan for its continued support!

## EBLI Update

Readers of our newsletter will recall previous stories on an exciting pilot program that is currently happening at two of our partner agencies, Dominican Literacy Center and Siena Literacy Center.

Thanks to our friends at Charter One bank, we were able to train tutors at these two centers in EBLI, a way of teaching reading unlike any curriculum currently being taught at our partner agencies. We moved 30

adult learners into EBLI and had another 30 learners continue using the Laubach Way to Reading. The exciting part: Students were assessed for advancement after *just 12 hours* of one-to-one training!

While the pilot is still wrapping up, WSU prepared a preliminary report for us. Here are some of the findings:

- Over one-third (38%) of the EBLI learners

demonstrated improvement of *1 to 2.6 grade levels* in reading and writing skills.

- 100% of the EBLI students perceived changes in their reading and writing skills.
- Approximately 85% of the EBLI students perceived that they had met their goals about improving reading and writing skills.
- 100% of the EBLI students perceived a

difference in how they felt about their ability to read and write.

- Approximately 62% of the EBLI learners expressed a preference to continue with the EBLI program.

WSU plans on issuing a final report once all 60 students have completed their 12 hours. We can't wait to share the final report!

## My EBLI Story: How "Chef" Taught Me A New Lesson

*Message from Monique Norfus, Director Community Outreach*

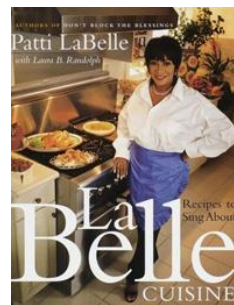
As a part of our EBLI pilot, I was trained in how to use this new curriculum and assigned a learner. I considered myself an experienced educator and felt confident that my new learner would immediately be engaged in EBLI.

After our first meeting, I knew that my learner was not like the students I had previously mentored. My learner had just been released from prison and had no schooling beyond 7th grade. A pretest revealed that he was

reading at a first grade level. While I had to wipe away my initial goals after our first meeting, my views of this adult learner quickly transitioned to respect. I saw that he had an ambitious attitude and I was impressed with his brave decision to change his life.

I took the time to explore how I could make an immediate impact. During our first meeting, we discussed his academic goals. Being somewhat limited, I decided to take

a different approach and access his personal goals. Much to my surprise, my learner was interested in cooking. I searched my kitchen for my favorite Patti Labelle cookbook.



All of the recipes included soulful stories, describing how each recipe originated. I decided to call my learner "Chef." Based on his big smile, I knew that he liked his new nickname and the book selection. We built a strong bond over imaginary meals. At the end of our 6 weeks of tutoring, my "Chef" increased his reading level beyond our expectations.

What "Chef" didn't realize is that he taught me a new level of humility that will last a lifetime.

## Agency Works: Spotlight on ACCESS

Welcome to our new column, Agency Works. Each quarter we will highlight some of the exciting happenings at our literacy partners.

This quarter, we share a story from ACCESS, our partner in Dearborn that works primarily with ESL students. Recently, the ESL Program had an amazing

event called Cultural Day. Students used their newly acquired knowledge and skills to create an interesting and informative event that was presented entirely in English. Many aspects of culture were explored and celebrated, including food, customs, traditional clothing, dance, celebrations and holidays.



## A HUGE Thank You To Our Supporters

We will never tire of thanking our supporters. You allow us to do the work we do to make sure *adults struggling with reading get the help they need!*

AAA Michigan, A. Alfred Taubman, Alex & Marie Manoogian Foundation, Belcan Corporation, Charter One Bank, Comerica Bank, Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan, Deloitte LLP, Detroit Free Press & Detroit Free Press Charities, Detroit Media Partnership, DTE Energy Foundation, Ernst & Young, Essilor and Oakland Optometry, Forgotten Harvest, Gannett Foundation, Ilitch Charities, Kroger, McGregor Fund, Mercedes-Benz Financial Services, PNC Bank, PVS Chemicals, Inc., Quicken Loans, Strategic Staffing Solutions, Trading Pub, The Keith Center, The Knight Foundation, The Law Firm of Miller Canfield, University Michigan Dearborn, United Way for Southeast Michigan, Verizon Foundation, Wayne State University, WXYZ-Channel 7 and Scripps-Howard Foundation, Skidmore Studio, 100% Reading Works Board Support, Generous Detroit Free Press Readers

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### About Our Organization...

Reading Works is a backbone organization leading a collective effort to boost adult literacy in metro Detroit. We recognize that large social change requires a collective approach. If we truly want to have any impact in improving adult literacy, we must approach this issue as a community. And that is exactly what Reading Works is doing. We are not trying to re-invent the wheel or create a new educational program. Instead, we are asking "what will it take to move the community forward?" Reading Works wants to be an accelerator. Our goal is to reduce the amount of time it takes to move adults up literacy levels to ensure that they can be involved in their children's education and that they possess the minimum qualifications for workforce development opportunities. Our focus is to provide tools and resources to our literacy partners to allow for this acceleration.

