

Promising Literacy Practices in Florida's Public Libraries



State Library and Archives of Florida.
Florida Literacy Coalition, Inc.

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Introduction

Many of Florida's adult face special challenges in their lives do to limited reading, writing or English language skills. The 1993 National Adult Literacy Survey estimated that one on four Floridians lack fundamental literacy skills.

Florida is fortunate to have a wide selection of adult education and literacy programs that provide free or low cost instructional services. Public libraries, community based literacy organizations, public schools, faith based organizations and community colleges work together to provide a continuum of services that range from reading and English language tutoring to classes and on-line adult high school and GED instruction.

Libraries and library based literacy programs have been an important partner in this educational system, often serving as a catalyst in establishing literacy programs and support services in underserved communities. All libraries in Florida support literacy efforts, and they provide direct services in thirty of Florida's 67 counties. Ninety-three per cent of them provide one-to-one tutoring. Eighty-nine percent provide small group instruction, and eighty-nine per cent use volunteers for instruction. Seventy per-cent use computers for instruction.

This publication profiles five library based literacy programs that have established successful instructional initiatives in different program areas.

1. **Conversational English**
Broward County Library's English Café
2. **Workplace Literacy**
Collier County Public Library
3. **Rural Literacy Programs**
Literacy Volunteers of Gadsden County
4. **Adult Learner Involvement and Leadership**
Palm Beach County Library Adult Learner Leader Program
5. **Deaf Literacy**
Deaf Literacy Center, Pinellas Public Library Cooperative

These programs reflect how libraries play an important role in developing specialized programs that address community needs, while providing a model for innovative practices. A brief outline of the complete literacy services provided by each library is at the end of this publication.

These interviews were compiled by the Florida Literacy Coalition. This project was funded in part by a Library Services and Technology Act Grant administered by the State Library and Archives of Florida. Our special thanks to these programs for freely sharing their experiences and lessons learned. We hope you will find this information helpful to your literacy efforts and invite you to contact the programs if you have questions or would like additional information.

English Café

Broward County Library

1. Please describe your program.

English Café' is designed for people who speak English on an intermediate level and have the equivalent of a high school diploma from their native country. In a casual, non-threatening classroom environment participants are encouraged to practice English conversation. The conversation themes are American culture and customs, citizenship, job readiness, family, parenting skills, continuing education, health, and finances. These sessions also focus on vocabulary development, pronunciation and grammar. English Cafe' won a National Association of Counties Achievement Award in 2004. Broward County Library English Cafe' is being held at approximately twenty locations of the 38 branches. The attendance per month is well over seven hundred. There are more than 20 different countries represented, mostly the Caribbean and South America. The predominate languages spoken by these participants is Spanish, Haitian-Creole and Portuguese.

2. Please share your recent accomplishments.

- a. English Cafe' won a National Association of Counties Achievement Award in 2004. This award is given annually to a program that distinguished itself by enhancing county government. In a community as diverse as Broward County, this initiative has helped thousands of individuals build a better life for themselves. English Café students have become US citizens, purchased homes, gotten jobs and learned to help their children achieve in school.
- b. Some of the English Café's best volunteers are their own students and former students. Eager to give back to a program, a number of adult learners have returned as volunteers helping in areas such as: running the library coffee shop, serving as reading tutors and teaching computer skills.

3. What are the key factors that have contributed to the success of your program?

The key factors that have contributed to the success of this program are dedicated staff and volunteers, the need for English conversation practice and the support of the County and Library administrators.

4. How do you measure success?

Unlike many other ESOL programs, English Café does not use standardized tests. Instead they measures progress in ways that are student centered and non-threatening to their participants.

These include:

- A. Classroom attendance. This program serves adults who voluntarily participate for their own benefit. Student retention is therefore a significant measure of success.
- B. Tracking the number of referrals made by other students in the program. Students recommend programs that are serving their needs.
- C. Student surveys/evaluations. Students are asked to provide feedback of what they have learned, the materials they have used and their overall classroom experiences.
- D. The Learning Services Coordinator observes classes periodically to help insure quality.

5. How is the program funded?

The program's funding is provided by Broward County Board of County Commissioners to the Broward County Library's Learning Services Department.

6. Please describe challenges or barriers that you had to address in the development of your program.

The primary challenges have involved issues of cultural sensitivity. The program continually addresses this with volunteers and staff by providing training on the importance of understanding and respecting people with different cultural backgrounds and prospective.

7. What are your future plans for this initiative?

The English Café program plans to expand its efforts by offering additional theme based classes focused on citizenship, health literacy, workforce readiness and emerging literacy. They are currently working on developing curriculum in all these topic areas.

The Program also has plans to publish a cookbook of recipes contributed by their students as well as sponsor a crossroads cultural event that will allow students to showcase their own cultures to the community.

8. Do you have any words of advice for organizations that may wish to emulate what you have done?

It is important to survey your community, get your staffing in place and recruit volunteers before you market the program to prospective students.

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Workplace Literacy Program

Collier County Public Library

1. Please describe your program.

This is a volunteer-based literacy program that trains volunteers or employers to provide on-site workplace literacy training. Examples of businesses who utilize this service include hotels, service industries, gated communities, and assisted-living facilities. Literacy classes are held on-site in close partnership with the employer.

2. Please share your recent accomplishments.

One of the most recent accomplishments was teaching the permanent residents at an assisted-living facility to tutor their caregivers in English and literacy. By working closely with the employer, the workplace literacy program held classes to train residents on how to tutor English. After being trained, the residents then were able to improve the communication between resident and caregiver. This improved communication increases the bond between resident and caregiver and also minimizes communication errors or misunderstandings.

3. What are the key factors that have contributed to the success of your program?

The most important factor is establishing a close partnership with the employer/business. The more an employer understands the importance of employee literacy and how improved literacy equals improved profits, the more likely an employer is to be supportive of the workplace literacy program. The workplace literacy program approaches these partnerships in a formal business manner by using contracts and agreements with employers. It's important that the employer understands what's in it for them and how their bottom line will be improved.

4. How do you measure success?

One sign of success for the workplace literacy program is that the same businesses keep asking us to come back every year. Another way success is measured is by tracking comment cards. For example, after the workplace literacy program teaches a session at a hotel, guest comment cards often reflect the increased communication abilities of the housekeeping staff. Also, letters sent from supervisors to the workplace literacy program often comment on the improved work environment. It is difficult to measure formal assessments or accomplishments.

5. How is the program funded?

The workplace literacy program is funded by the library outreach portion of the Collier County Library System budget with assistance from the Friends of the Library.

6. Please describe challenges or barriers that you had to address in the development of your program.

One of the biggest challenges is convincing businesses that a workplace literacy program could greatly benefit their productivity. The workplace literacy program tries to reach people that have been left out of other training programs.

7. What are your future plans for this initiative?

The workplace literacy program is continuing to solidify its existing business partnerships. In addition, they are currently expanding their assisted-living program to more communities in the county.

8. Do you have any words of advice for organizations that may wish to emulate what you have done?

Treat your non-profit or volunteer organization like a business. Think like a business.

For more information contact:

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Literacy Volunteers of Gadsden County

Gadsden County Library

1. Please describe your program.

Literacy Volunteers of Gadsden County (LVGC) was established and made an affiliate of Literacy Volunteers of America in 1991. Since then the program has continued to expand into new areas. LVGC now offers English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), Family Literacy, Workplace Literacy, Literacy Cyberspace, Pre-GED, Health Literacy, Correctional Literacy programs.

LVGC is based on the idea that well trained and supported volunteers can be effective tutors of adults. Volunteers are required to complete a 15 hour training course before tutoring. Specific workshop content varies depending on whether the training is for Basic Reading or Conversational English. In both workshops, volunteers learn a variety of teaching techniques. They also learn how to determine students needs, interests and strengths. Once a volunteer is trained, he or she must commit to tutoring a student two hours a week for one year. Tutoring sessions are scheduled at a time and place convenient to both the volunteer and student.

Gadsden County Public Library is very supportive of Literacy Volunteers of Gadsden County as its principle supporter. The library provides half the salary and benefits of the full-time program coordinator as well as office and training space for the organization.

2. Please share your recent accomplishments.

Literacy Volunteers of Gadsden County's "One Church, One Tutor" program is a successful initiative now in its 6th year. This project's most recent partner, Greensborough United Methodist Church, recruited 7 volunteers from their congregation who were trained as ESOL tutors by LVGC. The partners then worked together to establish classes to serve the migrant worker community near the church. Working in small groups, the volunteers taught English to 72 adults in weekly classes held at the church.

3. What are the key factors that have contributed to the success of your program?

- a. Recognition within the community that there is a need to become involved in this important issue.
- b. The County has recognized the need to run this program and has provided consistent support through the library. This support along with grants from the local United Way and several churches has provided reliable funding which has enabled LVGC to sustain and build its programs over time.

4. How do you measure success?

LVGC measures success through evaluating student progress. They have a learner centered approach to instruction in which students set learning goals that they can address in their tutoring.

5. How is the program funded?

While LVGC's principle funders are Gadsden County, the United Way and several local churches, they have also received support from local corporations, civic groups and individual donors.

6. Please describe challenges or barriers that you had to address in the development of your program.

Gadsden County is geographically large, mostly rural community. The lack of public transportation has been a major barrier to accessing literacy services. This was one of the main reasons why LVGC has been working to develop partnerships with local churches.

Another barrier is the lack of self confidence and family support among students. Through the support of the Program Coordinator and Americorps*VISTA volunteers, LVGC actively works to address these issues by providing encouragement, support and resources to students and volunteers.

7. What are your future plans for this initiative?

LVGC is very interested in expanding partnerships with housing programs and apartment complexes. They recently established a family literacy program with Tallahassee Community Collage (TCC Quincy House) which is combined with career education. They offer regular family literacy/ career nights in which participants are introduced to careers that don't require a 4 year college degree

8. Do you have any words of advice for organizations that may wish to emulate what you have done?

Keep an open mind. Don't become discouraged by the challenges that you may face. Literacy opens so many doors. When you see a need, you want to give part of yourself to help others. Volunteer literacy programs help people do just that.

For more information contact:

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Adult Learner Leader's Program

Palm Beach County Library

1. Please describe your program.

Palm Beach County Library Adult Learner Leader Program is open to any adult learner in Palm Beach County currently working with a tutor. The Learner Leaders hold workshops led by other students that emphasize public speaking, reading skills, and other things. They publish a quarterly newsletter written by students called "Between Us." One student from the Learner Leader Program is elected to represent the students on the board. The elected learner leader serves on the board with full voting privileges. Learner leaders also attend tutor training workshops where they meet and greet prospective tutors. Usually between 12-20 students attend the learner leader meetings.

2. Please share your recent accomplishments.

Recent accomplishments include learner leaders conducting workshops for both students and also for tutors.

3. What are the key factors that have contributed to the success of your program?

Offering student workshops on a consistent basis helps build social bonds among the students and also improves the ability of the program to meet student needs.

4. How do you measure success?

Success is measured by meeting individual student goals. Student portfolios are updated on a consistent basis to measure the progress of the student. Progress is success.

5. How is the program funded?

The adult learner leader program is funded by the county although they have also received grants through the state. AmeriCorps also has allowed them a site recipient grant.

6. Please describe challenges or barriers that you had to address in the development of your program.

The biggest problem is keeping the waiting time for students to be matched with a tutor to a minimum. Also, the geographic distance between potential tutors and potential students can be a problem. It can be difficult to bring them together.

7. What are your future plans for this initiative?

The county is building a new library which will also house the adult literacy program. This will give the program more space. They hope to expand the computer program for students. Also, they hope to increase their visibility in the community and to get out into the community more.

8. Do you have any words of advice for organizations that may wish to emulate what you have done?

“Don’t overlook the talent of the students in your program.” Communication between tutors and students and staff is important. Set goals and realize that goals can be very small steps that led to big steps in the long run.

For more information contact:

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Deaf Literacy Center

Pinellas Public Library Cooperative

1. Please describe your program.

The Deaf Literacy Center is a library based literacy program for Deaf individuals and their families who need basic literacy skills, life skills training and general integration into the hearing world. The Deaf Literacy Center provides basic literacy instruction as well as quality library and information services that will lead our Deaf students and their families to productive, active and informed lives. We believe that the comprehension of printed and written information is necessary to function in society, to achieve goals, to develop knowledge, and to interact with the environment in which we live and function.

2. Please share your recent accomplishments.

“Library Service and Technology Act” Exemplary program recognition by the Florida Department of State 1998 and 2001 and Florida Literacy Coalition Excellence in Education 2004 award winner.

3. What are the key factors that have contributed to the success of your program?

This program identified an underserved constituency and works to fulfill that need. Partnering with other libraries and agencies serving the Deaf community has greatly contributed to the success of our program. Our volunteers are also a great part of our success, without their time and commitment we would not be able to reach as many participants. Working with committed, caring people that work to break some of the misconceptions/misunderstandings surrounding the deaf community have also lead to the success of the program.

4. How do you measure success?

Success is measured by program participation, student surveys and questionnaires, and Brigance Diagnostic testing.

5. How is the program funded?

During its first two years, the program was funded by a state Library Service and Technology Act Grant. In 2000, Pinellas Public Library Cooperative began funding the program. We also write yearly grants to provide additional services and special workshops for the Deaf community.

6. Please describe challenges or barriers that you had to address in the development of your program.

The first challenge was overcoming preconceived notions hearing persons have about the deaf community and vice versa. Educating the library staff

and the community was a key factor to getting funding and county support. Other challenges include program staff. Staff retention and training can be a challenge because of the skills and knowledge required in working with this community. Nationally, the average deaf high school graduate reads at a fourth grade level.

7. What are your future plans for this initiative?

The Pinellas County Deaf Literacy Center hopes to grow and expand in the future. We hope to reach as many Deaf people in county as we can. We also hope to become a National model and that many more libraries would follow our lead. Having an entire library geared toward deaf people would be the ultimate goal.

8. Do you have any words of advice for organizations that may wish to emulate what you have done?

First of all, there must be a need in the community for a deaf literacy center. If there is not a significant population of deaf persons in your community, a deaf literacy center would not succeed. Know your Deaf community and find leaders within it. Partnering with other agencies serving the Deaf is also key to the success of a program. Educate (sensitivity training) your community and your staff so that they may understand the Deaf community's needs and potential. Patience is also needed because deaf literacy services might be one of the only windows to the world of information that some deaf people may have.

For more information contact:

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Directory

Broward County Main Library

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Locations: African-American Research Library and Cultural Center, Beach Branch, Broward County Main Library, Carver Ranches Branch, Century Plaza Branch, Dania Beach Paul DeMaio Branch, Davie/Cooper City Branch, Deerfield Beach Percy White Branch, Fort Lauderdale Branch, Galt Ocean Mile Reading Center, Hallendale Branch, Hollywood Beach Bernice P. Oste Reading Center, Hollywood Branch, Imperial Point Branch, Jan Moran Collier City Learning Library, Lauderdale/Mall Branch, Lauderdale Lakes Branch, Lauderhill/City Hall Complex Branch, Margate Catharine Young Branch, North Lauderdale Branch, North Regional/BCC Library, Northwest Branch Library, Northwest Regional Library, Nova Southeastern University/Alvin Sherman Library, Pembroke Pines/Walter C. Young Resource Center, Pompano Beach Branch, Riverland Branch, South Regional/BCC Library, Southwest Regional Library, Stirling Road Branch, Sunrise Dan Pearl Branch, Sunset Strip Branch, Tamarac Branch, Tamarac Popular Branch, Tyrone Bryant Branch, West Atlantic Branch, West Regional Library, and Weston Reading Center

Funding: Local City/County funds (Regular Library Funding), Donations (private/corporation/foundation), and Friends of the Library

Direct Services Provided: Adult Basic Education Instruction, Citizenship Instruction, Computer - Assisted Instruction for adults with less than a high school diploma, Computer Instruction (how to use the computer/find resources), ESL Literacy Instruction, Family Literacy – Adult Education Component, Family Literacy – Parent And Child Together (PACT) Time Component, Family Literacy – Parent Education Component, Family Literacy – Child Education Component, GED Preparation, Video-Based Instruction, Workforce Education/Workforce Readiness Skills, Volunteer Literacy Basic Reading Instruction, Volunteer Literacy English as a Second Language Instruction, and Volunteer Literacy for Family Literacy

Collier County Public Library

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East Naples Branch Library

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Locations: East Naples Branch Library, Golden Gate Branch Library, Immokalee Branch Library, Marco Island Branch, and Naples Branch Library

Funding: Local City/County funds (Regular Library Funding), Donations (private/corporation/foundation), and Friends of the Library

Direct Services Provided: Citizenship Instruction, Computer Instruction (how to use the computer/find resources), ESL Literacy Instruction, Family Literacy – Adult Education Component, GED Preparation, Workforce Education/Workforce Readiness Skills, Volunteer Literacy Basic Reading Instruction, and Volunteer Literacy English as a Second Language Instruction

Gadsden County Public Library

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Locations: Chattahoochee Public Library, Gadsden County Public Library, and Havana Public Library

Funding: Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) Grants, Florida Department of Education Grants, Local City/County funds (Regular Library Funding), State Aid Grants, Donations (private/corporation/foundation), Friends of the Library, United Way, and VISTA/Americorps

Direct Services Provided: Adult Basic Education Instruction, Citizenship Instruction, Computer - Assisted Instruction for adults with less than a high school diploma, Computer Instruction (how to use the computer/find resources), ESL Literacy Instruction, Family Literacy – Adult Education Component, Family Literacy – Parent And Child Together (PACT) Time Component, Family Literacy – Parent Education Component, Family Literacy – Child Education Component, GED Preparation, Health Literacy, Video - Based Instruction, Workforce Education/Workforce Readiness Skills, Volunteer Literacy Basic Reading Instruction, Volunteer Literacy English as a Second Language Instruction, and Volunteer Literacy for Family Literacy

Palm Beach County Library System

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Locations: Allapattah Branch Library, Civic Center Station Branch Library, Coconut Grove Branch Library, Coral Gables Branch Library, Coral Reef Branch Library, County Walk Branch Library, Culmer/Overtown Branch Library, Doral Branch Library, Edison Center Branch Library, Fairlawn Branch Library, Grapeland Heights Branch Library, Hialeah Gardens Branch Library, Hispanic Branch Library, Homestead Branch Library, Kendall Branch Library, Key Biscayne Branch Library, Lakes of the Meadow Branch Library, Lemon City Branch Library, Little River Branch, Miami Beach Regional Library, Miami Lakes/Palm Springs North Branch Library, Miami Springs Branch Library, Miami-Dade Public Library System – Main Library, Model City Branch Library, Naranja Branch Library, North Dade Regional Library, North Central Branch Library, North Shore Branch Library, Northeast Branch Library, Shenandoah Branch Library, South Dade Regional Library, South Miami Branch Library, South Shore Branch Library, Tamiami Branch Library, West Dade Regional Library, West Flagler Branch Library, and West Kendall Regional Library

Funding: Local City/County funds (Regular Library Funding), and VISTA/Americorps

Direct Services Provided: Adult Basic Education Instruction, Computer-Assisted Instruction for adults with less than a high school diploma, Family Literacy – Parent And Child Together (PACT) Time Component, Family Literacy – Parent Education Component, and Volunteer Literacy Basic R

Pinellas Public Library Cooperative, Inc.

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Locations: Clearwater Public Library System, Dunedin Public Library, East Lake Community Library, Gulf Beaches Public Library, Gulfport Public Library, Largo Public Library, Oldsmar Public Library, Palm Harbor Library, Pinellas Park Public Library, Safety Harbor Public Library, St. Petersburg Public Library, St. Pete Beach Public Library, Seminole Community Library/St. Petersburg College, and Tarpon Springs Library

Funding: Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) Grants, Governor's Family Literacy Initiatives Grants, State Aid Grants, Donations (private/corporation/foundation), and Friends of the Library

Direct Services Provided: Adult Basic Education Instruction, Born to Read, xComputer-Assisted Instruction for adults with less than a high school diploma, Computer Instruction (how to use the computer/find resources), ESL Literacy Instruction, Family Literacy – Adult Education Component, Family Literacy – Parent And Child Together (PACT) Time Component, Family Literacy – Parent Education Component, Family Literacy – Child Education Component, GED Preparation, Health Literacy, Video-Based Instruction, Volunteer Literacy Basic Reading Instruction, Volunteer Literacy English as a Second Language Instruction, and Volunteer Literacy for Family Literacy