Adult Student Support:
Increasing Student Involvement and Expanding Learning Opportunities

Florida's Adult Literacy Resource Center

Funded by the Florida Department of Education, Division of Workforce Development

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Table of Contents

Section One

Introduction

Part One: A ripple in the water…

One drop of water moves quickly to make change all around it.

The efforts of one individual or organization can have a rippling effect on the lives of many. Florida's literacy providers offer educational programs that emphasize personal achievement and growth-- making a lasting impact on countless numbers of families, businesses, and communities. The Florida Literacy Coalition, too, has been supporting adult students and their quest for knowledge and success for years, by offering motiviation and leadership seminars, and by connecting interested adults with literacy programs statewide.

We invite you to take your program one step further by investigating how you may create a positive environment that facilitates empowerment **by** adult students, **for** adult students.

The information contained herein, as well as in accompanying resources, is intended to provide you with ideas and some starting points for student-led activities and initiatives. This document will provide information and recounts of personal experiences shared by adult students in Florida and throughout the nation. We will refer you to accompanying resources as appropriate, because there are a few great materials "out there" that only need to be shared, not duplicated! We believe that you will find at least one item of interest that you can begin

implementing in your program. And, as always, the Florida Literacy Coalition is here to help you as needed.

Part Two: Acknowledgements

Many individuals contributed to our efforts in gathering information related to support for adult students and developing student involvement. Specifically, we would like to thank the following people without whom this information would not be possible:

Donna Swain, Adult Student, Massachussetts

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Yves Joseph, Adult Student, New Learners Club, Palm Beach County Library Adult Literacy Project

Phil Rose, LVA, New York State

Nancy Shield, OAASIS, Organization of Adult and Alumni Students in Service

Emma Torez, Board Member, VALUE (Voice for Adult Literacy United for Education)

Joyce Whidden, Executive Director, Adult Literacy League; Board Member, Florida Literacy Coalition

Jose Cruz, Associate Director, San Diego Council on Literacy

Mark Cass, Laubach Literacy Action, National Office

Peggy McIntyre, The New Learners of the Palm Beaches

Part Three: About Florida Literacy Coalition, Inc.

Florida Literacy Coalition, Inc. is a non-profit, 501(c)(3) organization, funded through private and corporate donations, grants, and a diverse membership. Florida Literacy Coalition serves as the umbrella organization for all literacy providers in the state, serving agencies such as libraries, adult education providers that operate through the public school systems and community colleges, corrections-based providers, and the community-based organizations that use volunteers as their workforce.

The Florida Literacy Coalition is:
- **Recruiting and referring volunteers and students** through The Florida Literacy Hotline, (800) 237-5113.
- **Developing a skilled corps of volunteer tutors and adult educators** through professional development and tutor training, including the annual Florida Literacy Conference.
- **Supporting adult students in their pursuit of lifelong learning.** Our Leadership Institutes focus on building self-esteem, personal excellence, and motivation. Statewide awards recognize adult students who have perservered and succeeded. The new Adult Student Web Space at www.floridaliteracy.org provides enrichment and learning opportunities.
- **Producing resources that benefit literacy providers statewide** such as tutor guides, statistics handbooks, and the Florida Literacy Directory.

- **Promoting communication and collaboration in the literacy field** by disseminating news, materials, resources, and offering information at our LINCS-partner website at http://www.floridaliteracy.org.
- **Contributing to statewide policy and resource development** by actively participating on advisory boards and special task forces.
- **Promoting the awareness of literacy efforts** and educating the public on how they can get involved.
- **Administering The Governor's Family Literacy Initiative and serving as its fiscal agent.** Through the Initiative, we are able to connect literacy providers with monetary resources and technical assistance to enhance the reach and quality of their family literacy programs.

Part Four: Contact Information

For more information on how you can use this resource, for assistance in implementing the referenced activities, or to provide us with information about your adult student support group, efforts, or interests, please contact:

Florida Literacy Coalition, Inc.
934 N. Magnolia Avenue, #104
Orlando, FL 32803

Phone	(407) 246-7110
Toll Free	(800) 237-5113
Fax	(407) 246-7104

Website	www.floridaliteracy.org
E-mail	info@floridaliteracy.org

Section Two

Levels of Student Involvement

Part One: From Customer to Partner

When an adult enters an adult and family literacy programs, he or she earns the title of "student". While the academic, educational needs of a student cannot be ignored, the literacy provider can offer the student more opportunities to become involved in shaping the program, which ideally will result in providing broader perspectives and thus a more valuable education. Further, actively involved students can provide valuable input toward program development and achieving "customer satisfaction". Focus groups and surveys will never result in providing the level of feedback that fully engaged adult students can provide!

Part Two: Individual Obstacles to Involvement

Obstacles to involvement may exist, which will vary based on the individual. Examples of such obstacles are:

Poverty or low income

Transportation limitations

Responsibilities at home with children

These obstacles, however, do not eliminate the opportunity for involvement! A creative literacy provider, and/or student support group leader, can find all kinds of activities for involvement based on what the individual is capable of doing.

Part Three: Organizational Obstacles to Involvement

Obstacles to involvement may also exist for the organization. The two primary obstacles are:

Availability of human resources to facilitate and/or coordinate student involvement initiatives at the level necessary for success

Availability of financial resources to cover the expenses of student involvement initiatives at the level necessary for success.

As with the obstacles faced by an individual, these can be overcome by using creativity and by directing efforts toward finding the resources necessary to initiate the types of activities desired by your students.

Overcoming obstacles to involvement:

The overall goal to empowering through involvement is that you provide the environment to allow for independent student involvement facilitated by the students themselves. Ideally, human resources required for facilitation and/or coordination of student involvement activities will be more intense in the beginning, and should taper off as the group or activity becomes more student-led.

To assist your organization in "getting started", consider submitting a funding request in the form of a grant or outright donation for initial start up costs and for the cost of a paid coordinator. Ideally, at the end of your start-up period the activities can be up and running, and the coordinator would have generated interest and identified enough students for leadership roles. The level of administrative support would be reduced as the student leaders take on more responsibility.

Another option is to establish a volunteer position for coordinating student involvement activities. You may already have a volunteer who would be interesting in serving this role. Remember, the sure way for not getting this type of support is by not asking!

The following Student Involvement Grid provides a visual representation of the level of student involvement that results from the relationship between the level of administrative support and the level of student interest and activity.

Section Three

Student Involvement Options

Part One: Getting Involved in Student Involvement

There are a variety of initiatives, activities, and roles that your organization can support to promote student involvement.

A great resource for more specific "how-to's" on getting started with student involvement initiatives and activities is "Growing Together: Improving your Literacy Program Through Student Participation", by Craig Riecke. This resource, published in 1994 by Literacy Volunteers of America, provides an excellent overview of the different activities you can support.   Refer to the Resources section of this document for more information on how to obtain the booklet.

"Growing Together" includes some of the activities we describe in the next section. We have also added activities based on feedback we have received in Florida from adult students.

Scanning this list, you will undoubtedly say to yourself, "Our adult students are involved in that activity already... and that one…" -- terrific! You are providing a valuable service to your students by offering them a literacy education that touches various life settings. Looking back, why have you offered some activities and not others? Chances are that available resources in terms of administrative support (money, a paid or volunteer coordinator) or programmatic priority were factors in determining which activities were feasible for your organization. Further, your students' interest must be present in order for these activities to take root and become a part of the organization's support efforts.

At the point when your organization is determining which activity or initiative to pursue with your adult students, the Student Involvement

Grid from the previous section can provide you some clarity in your decision-making.   It can help you visualize answers to the following questions:

Is there student interest in this event or initiative?   Have you noticed that students have already been developing informal groups that could "blossom"? Have you received requests from students for certain events? If so, do any of them have potential to be student-led? Are there students who may take the lead if supported?

What level of administrative support is required for the event or initiative? Realistically, how much support are you able to offer?

Does the amount of support required and the amount available match? If so, begin checking for actual interest! If not, what is needed? What will fill the gaps?

Part Two: Student Involvement Options

Following are a variety of options for student involvement. The average anticipated level of involvement, from both the student and the administrative perspectives, are provided as well.   This is certainly not an exhaustive list, but merely one to get you started in thinking about how you can expand the involvement options for your adult students.

Advisory Group: Membership and participation in the Board of Directors, advisory board, or committee; to provide feedback and guidance to a literacy program from the adult student's perspective.

Level of Involvement:

Student Interest and Activity: Low to High

Administrative Support: High to Low

Advocacy: Adult-student generated support for adult education, either in person or writing (such as a letter-writing campaign).

Level of Involvement:

Student Interest and Activity: Medium to High

Administrative Support: High to Medium

Awards Events: Participation in, and/or coordination of events to recognize adult student achievement.

Level of Involvement:

Student Interest and Activity: Low to High

Administrative Support: High to Medium

Book Club: A discussion group centered around the discovery of new books, and sharing with other group members. A book club can serve as the "introductory" or "test" group that has the potential of evolving toward a broader adult student support group.

Level of Involvement:

Student Interest and Activity: Medium to High

Administrative Support: Medium to Low

Learning and Enrichment Events: Learning and enrichment events, such as workshops or conferences designed for the benefit of adult students. Range of student involvement extends from students attending an event that is completely coordinated by the administrative staff, to a conference fully directed by adult students with support from administrative staff.

Level of Involvement:

Student Interest and Activity: Low to High

Administrative Support: High to Medium

Contribution of website content: Contribution of articles, poems, essays, or other works of interest to other adult learners for posting on the Internet. Can be an individual involvement activity or used as a group activity. Range of involvement extends from merely submitting the material to the appropriate entity, (such as the Florida Literacy Coalition's Adult Student web pages at www.floridaliteracy.org) to generating a student support group newsletter, to converting materials into appropriate electronic format or even coding/programming prior to submission.

Level of Involvement:

Student Interest and Activity: Low to High

Administrative Support: High to Low

Focus Groups: A functional cross between the book club concept (discussion group) and an advisory board. Focus groups are typically one-time events designed to generate feedback about on a specific topic

or issue; generally conducted for program or product development purposes.   Focus groups are an excellent way for an organization to identify student involvement interests, or even potential advisory board or support group candidates. Additionally, focus groups can also be student-planned and led.

Level of Involvement:

Student Interest and Activity: Medium

Administrative Support: Medium

Fund-Raising: Student efforts at generating revenue for an adult education program. Activities can range from bake sales and car washes to in-person corporate donation requests.

Level of Involvement:

Student Interest and Activity: Low to High

Administrative Support: Medium to High

Internet "Virtual Communities": If your students have access to the Internet, we encourage you to provide to them information about communication and involvement options available through the World Wide Web. At **www.floridaliteracy.org** (click on button labeled "students"), students can access a web space designed just for them.

Based on input from students across the state, the student web space includes features that can enhance your students' involvement beyond instruction. This virtual community contains features such as a bulletin board, a survey area, and a "Wall of Fame".

The bulletin board is where students can take part in conversations on topics they suggest and select. Registration is an easy process, and students can un-register anytime they like. Registration, and participating in initial conversations, could be a great educational lesson either individually or on a group basis. After that, students can determine their own level of involvement in this new activity.

Surveys will be posted periodically for student feedback on issues important to them, including providing insight on "what works and what doesn't" from their own literacy experiences.   As with the bulletin board activity, the survey area offers the opportunity for a technology lesson, as well as potential for continued involvement and affirmation that the opinions of adult students are very important to providers.

The "Wall of Fame" is a terrific student recognition and involvement opportunity.   This is a place where students will be invited to submit their original works-- essays, poems, articles, etc.-- to be published on the Internet. The level of involvement here can be as low as the student sending in their work to the Florida Literacy Coalition for scanning, to a student-group newsletter edited and contributed by a group of students or a full-text multimedia presentation created by one or more students. Our adult students are ready to shine-- here's their chance for fame!

Support for your organization, your tutors/teachers, and your students is available from the Florida Literacy Coalition. If you need assistance with

any of these services, call (800) 237-5113 or email
info@floridaliteracy.org.

Level of Involvement:

Student Interest and Activity: Low to High

Administrative Support: Low to High

New Student Orientation: A perfect activity to introduce new students to opportunities for involvement beyond their academic pursuits, and to reinforce the involvement of current students. Current students who are pleased with their achievements in the literacy program are excellent motivators of others.   This can also be an opportunity to link a new student with a student "mentor" who can agree to help the new student get adjusted and familiar with the program.

Level of Involvement:

Student Interest and Activity: Medium to High

Administrative Support: Medium

New Tutor Orientation: Similar to the concept of new student orientation, this activity is a great way for the organization to actively demonstrate how students are valued as contributors to the literacy program. Students can talk about their personal experiences, and some suggestions for "do's and don'ts".   They can also discuss with new tutors confidentiality policies and other organizational guidelines.

Level of Involvement:

Student Interest and Activity: High

Administrative Support: Medium to High

Office Volunteers: Show appreciation for adult students' skills and help them develop new ones by utilizing your adult students in the program office. Volunteering can range from periodic help to more frequent assistance with a set schedule and recurring duties.

Level of Involvement:

Student Interest and Activity: Medium to High

Administrative Support: High to Medium

Pen Pals: Give adult students an easy way to support each other and learn at the same time. Some ideas for the types of pen pal relationships you can help establish are listed below. As the pen pal relationship moves farther outside your organization, the level of administrative support will likely increase.

- within your organization between adult students

- outside your organization with adult students from other communities

- outside your organization between an adult student and a community member, such as a business person or legislator.

Level of Involvement:

Student Interest and Activity: Low to High

Administrative Support: High to Low

Public Speaking: Public speaking not only increases marketable work skills, but can also serves an important purpose. Many students are willing to help spread the word to help raise awareness, funding, and to recruit students and volunteers. Initial support will most likely be high, depending on the level of public speaking skills and the personality of your student, as well as the event for which the student is speaking. However, as time goes on, less support may be required after students acquire experience. Further, students may begin to help one another--especially in an Adult Speaker's Bureau initiative.

Level of Involvement:

Student Interest and Activity: High

Administrative Support: High to Medium

Student Recruitment: Student recruitment is one of the easiest activities in which to involve adult students at varying levels. Many students recruit others without prompting, simply because they are pleased with their own results.

To assist with word-of-mouth efforts, an organization can provide basic program information materials that students can give to friends, family, etc.-- and can even offer "rewards" to current students who recruit others. The rewards, of course, do not need to be monetary rewards; but recognition through certificates, donated items from area businesses, etc.   Use your creativity to find the incentive that adequately shows your appreciation. Providing supporting materials and rewards not only has the potential of increasing the number of students involved (and the number recruited to your program), but also enables your organization to keep track of who is involved.

Level of Involvement:

Student Interest and Activity: Low to High

Administrative Support: Medium to Low

Support Group: A way to increase student involvement and retention by providing support from others in similar situations and to offer more interaction with other adult students. More about this in Section Four!

Level of Involvement:

Student Interest and Activity: Medium to High

Administrative Support: High to Medium

Training Workshops: Student-planned and led training workshops are an extremely effective way to support student involvement. From a one-hour presentation, to planning and leading an adult student conference, students can become a cornerstone of your program. The range of involvement varies widely, based on the type of event being organized as well as the skills of your students. Several handouts are located in the Resources section of this document for students to use in planning and execution. (Source: Literacy Volunteers of America)

Interested in trying an adult-student-led training workshop? Here's a resource that you may want to try: a workshop guide and materials called, Talking to the Media, published by Laubach Literacy Action. This is a step-by-step training workshop kit, designed to be led by adult students with teacher/tutor assistance, all-inclusive for information about public speaking and in-person advocacy. Included with the first generation of this presentation packet. Loan copies are available for check-out from the Florida Literacy Coalition. Call (800) 237-5113 or send email request to info@floridaliteracy.org.

Some of your students may be interested in only *attending* a training event or conference. This is a great way to introduce them to the types of involvement opportunities available.   The Florida Literacy Coalition offers free Adult Student Leadership Institutes, as well as offers scholarships to adult students who are interested in attending the national VALUE conference. For more information contact the Florida Literacy Coalition at (800) 237-5113 or request information via email at **info@floridaliteracy.org**.

Section Four

Focus on Student Support
Groups

Part One: Tips for Building a Strong Student Group

Ms. Peggy McIntyre, Advisor, for New Learners of the Palm Beaches at the Palm Beach County Library, Adult Literacy Project (Ms. Kathleen Murphy, Literacy Coordinator) was kind enough to provide the Florida Literacy Coalition with her "words of wisdom" for building a strong student group. Our thanks to Ms. McIntyre and to New Learners of the Palm Beaches for the valuable input.

There are three basic questions to consider when starting a student group:
- **Why do you need it?**
- **What do you to get it started?**
- **How do you keep it going?**

Why do you need it?

The New Learners of the Palm Beaches, a student support group, was born from the need to increase retention of adult learners by providing support from others in similar situations. The idea for the group came from a couple of adult learners who had a desire to have more interaction with other new readers. One student in particular had started the process of literacy twice before and had dropped out. Since this student had two unsuccessful attempts, she knew her one-on-one relationship with her tutor did not offer enough to ensure successful completion. She felt a support system with others who faced the similar struggles would be beneficial. It would also help them through the long and difficult process.

Student retention is the goal. It let's others now they are not alone and it also helps to remove the shroud of secrecy and shame.

What do you do to get it started?

As we know, the student-tutor relationship is strong and intimate. You need tutor "buy-in". Once you embrace the idea of need, it is important to get tutors involved. If the tutor believes the student group is important, they will encourage their student to come. Tutors need to understand that group functions are equally important to a student's growth. Lessons teach basic language skills; group activities build social skills and help increase self-esteem.

It is important to plan events that would interest students and make them want to attend. An informal poll revealed some topics that were of interest to them. The results of the poll proved successful through workshops on interviewing skills, career advancement, computer basics and speaking in public.   The group also hosted a picnic and holiday party with a disc jockey.

"I am constantly amazed at the depth and breath of our Learner Leaders. What a great group of individuals. Working with them is truly the joy of my life."

-Peggy McIntyre, Advisor

Getting students to come together is not especially easy. Time is a big issue for adult learners. When group functions occur on lesson nights, it helps to encourage tutors to allow students to attend the group meeting rather than have a lesson. Many of the tutors attend group meetings with their students.

To announce meetings, send out fliers. However, it's not a good idea to depend solely on the written word. Very often students can receive the flier in the mail but have no idea what it is about. Let students know when they receive a flier in the mail to seek ask their tutors for help.

A few days before the meeting, try a calling campaign. Call each student and ask if they plan to attend. Speak only to the student, and if you leave a

message, discretely ask about their plans to attend a meeting at the library (or your regular meeting place).

Follow-up calls are critical. You can expect better attendance when you call students and ask if they plan to attend.

How do you keep it going and growing?

The New Learners of the Palm Beaches is extremely fortunate to have, in Kathleen Murphy, a project coordinator that believes a strong student group is important for student retention and growth. It's important to identify committed students and allow them to develop as leaders.

The group has a committee that comes together to plan events and make decisions about what they are going to do. The project coordinator is very good at identifying students who are ready to develop as Learner Leaders. Then you can attempt to recruit them to be a part of the committee.

Choosing an advisor is key. You need someone that will get out of your way and let you drive the direction of the group. You want someone that will support you and provide technical assistant to help you accomplish your goals, yet allow it to be your group. The job of the advisor is simply to facilitate committee brain storming meetings and act as a liaison between the adult learners and the literacy provider.

A good advisor is also a student advocate. This person needs to believe in the abilities of the students and respect them as them as capable, talented, creative and committed adults who never learned to read. This is important because there will be times an advisor will have to justify and fight for student enrichment activities for which people holding the purse strings may not understand the benefit.

Part Two: Adult Student Support Groups- A Growing Interest

During our research, we found that formal, established student support groups exist in low numbers. After realizing the level of involvement of both the students and administrative staff, and the potential resource-intensity during start-up, it's not surprising.

We did identify that there is a definate interest for these groups, as indicated by at least 80 literacy providers requesting information from Florida's State Adult Literacy Resource Center during this year. And, there is a trend nationally that states and local communities are increasingly starting adult student support groups.

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Section Five

Shared Knowledge,
Words of Advice, and
Resources

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Shared Knowledge: Library Literacy Friends, Inc.

Palm Beach County, Florida

http://www.gopbi.com/community/groups/friendsofliteracy/index.html

The Library Literacy Friends is comprised of volunteers, students, and other concerned citizens committed to the continuation of the Palm Beach County Library's Adult Literacy Project and to the elimination of illiteracy in the County. They were organized in 1993 to protect and continue the Adult Literacy Project when it was in jeopardy of being eliminated. It is a unique, 1-on-1 adult reading program provided by the P.B.C. Library System.

The purpose is to: create public interest in literacy; support and fund educational and social activities for students and tutors; provide a voice for non-readers; assist in the promotion and development of adult literacy facilities and programs; foster public support for the Library's Adult Literacy Project; and to encourage gifts of funds, endowments, time and talents from individuals and organizations.

STUDENTS: Students come from all over Palm Beach County. They receive referrals and requests for help from the Palm Beach County Literacy Coalition, the Private Industry Council, The Florida Literacy Coalition, the school system, and individuals who hear about the program through word of mouth. Students coming into the program read below the fifth grade level, must be over 18, speak English, and have the desire to improve their reading skills. Students blossom as they gain confidence and self-esteem from learning to read.

Shared Knowledge: New Learners Club

Palm Beach County, Florida

http://www.gopbi.com/community/groups/friendsofliteracy/New_Learners_Club.html

In 1997 the Library Literacy Friends introduced a significant and unique organization, aptly named the New Learners Club. It consists of students only, with student officers. The basic objective is to bring together students in a forum providing socialization, education, and to enable appropriate "feedback" to the Friends Board of Directors.

The group meets every two or three months, offering programs determined by the New Learners officers (student council). Attendance

has increased from an original 5-10 to an average of about 25. This increase is the direct result of the introduction of real-life programs and the presentation of qualified lecturers.

Current programs include:

The Job Series
Career decision-making.
Methods and organizations providing job openings.
Interviewing techniques.
Resume preparation.

Speaking in Public
A small group, (6-12), meet separately to practice speaking before others. Each speech is critiqued, and group discussions ensue.

Spell for Success
This dynamic program is presented to the entire group several times yearly and has gone one step further by recently introducing "Writing for Success."

Special Programs
A Better Job Series which includes - practice on filling out job applications, successful job interviewing skills and tips on how to advance in the workplace.

A student newsletter is published quarterly.

The social side includes an annual holiday party, door prizes, refreshments and individual presentations.

Future plans include a Fall picnic for family and friends.

Shared Knowledge: Yves Joseph
Palm Beach County Library Adult Literacy Project
Adult Student

Yves is part of the governing body of the New Learner's Club, the student council. They meet once a month, possibly two times depending on the amount of events that are going on that month. They try to have at least two events a month.

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The events are typically themed parties and picnics. For the events they get sponsors to pay for the food and activities. In most cases people from the sponsoring companies come out to the events as well. People who are not involved in the tutoring programs are welcome to attend as well so they are able to reach more people who need help furthering their education. This is one of the ways that they recruit students because many of the current students have friends that need to learn basic skills as well. Once people realize that they are not the only one with poor reading skills or a poor education they are more apt to sign up for tutoring.

The group has also found that when people come out to more events they tend to want to have more tutoring. The reason for this is that the tutors come out to the events as well. The more they spend time together the more they get to know about each other. Suddenly the student-teacher relationship turns into a friend-friend relationship. Tutoring time becomes more productive and students want more tutoring sessions.

Shared Knowledge: Harold Lockwood
LVA of Allegany County, New York
Adult Student

LVA of Allegany County has a student council and a board of directors in which adult students can participate. The student council has about 7 or 8 returning members for meetings scheduled every other week.   Events are scheduled 6 months in advance so that they have time to give a calendar out.

The group finds people to give presentations at meetings and events and also holds fundraisers, book sales, and participates in parades. They have made floats for these parades, which came in first and second place. One big event that they participate in is the Maple

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Festival. They set up a booth and hand out informational pamphlets, recruit volunteers and students, and sell books.

LVA of Allegany County has found that once a student becomes involved in the student council they most likely stay within the organization and participate more. The Board of Directors is a combination of the professionals and volunteers that work in the organization as well as some of the students from the student council. In their agenda there is always a spot for the students to report on what they are doing as well as future plans.

The group has also created a set of Student Bylaws, which sets out some ideas of the group. One of the articles in the Bylaws pertains to how a student can get a scholarship to go to a conference or a seminar. The fundraisers that the students set up fund the scholarships.

Shared Knowledge: Nancy Shield
OAASIS: Organization of Adult and Alumni Students in Service
Lifelong Learner, Delaware

> OAASIS is a state organization that was started in 1991 in order to help adult students. 10 people first started on the board, comprised of adult learners and professionals. They started off as volunteers and now are paid through the state. They currently have 3000 members and students who automatically become members. They have won awards from the Governor of the state, who has also received a GED. They also are found as a huge asset to programs because they help lower the drop out rate. Also since the employees used to be adult learners they find that there is a bigger impact on the current adult students since the employees have been through the program as well.

http://www.literacynet.org/value/whatsnew/states/states2000_12.html

> Adult learners in Delaware have their own statewide organization called "OAASIS" (Organization of Adult Alumni and Students in Service). Membership is awarded to any individual who is attending a state-

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funded adult education program. Alumni of these programs can join for $5.00 per year.

OAASIS' mission is "to link students and alumni to individuals and organizations involved in adult and community education, to address common concerns and shared goals and spearhead statewide efforts in lifelong learning."

OAASIS' goals are to provide:

• Advocacy for adult education.

• Support to adult education alumni and students.

• Outreach to adults, school students, and the community.

The OAASIS Board meets four times each year.

Here is a sample of the activities of OAASIS:

OAASIS Legislative Dinner: On January 17, 2001, Delaware adult learners will meet and eat with legislators while sharing the value of literacy and adult education programming. This is a very effective means of networking with our elected officials. Students will be prepared to talk to legislators about adult education and literacy accomplishments and needs, and thank the public officials for their support.

OAASIS Hall of Fame: This recognizes outstanding achievements by adult learners. Nominees must be either a graduate of a program or have completed one or more of the following programs sponsored by the Delaware Department of Education: James H. Groves, GED, ABE, ESL, volunteer literacy program, or family literacy program. Program administrators must verify that a nominee has met these requirements. A maximum of three learners will be honored each year.

Delaware Adult Literacy Summit: OAASIS helped plan this event, held on November 29, 2000. Participants discussed current needs in the adult education field and identified priorities for an action strategy for the next decade. The Summit featured the former Lieutenant Governor who was recently elected Governor. (She is also a former adult learner herself, having graduated from a GED program.)

Ninth Annual Adult Student Conference and Awards Event: A student will serve as keynote speaker, and twelve workshops will be provided. Awards will be given to outstanding students by the Lieutenant Governor and Governor. (Winners also get a $50 Savings Bond.) This

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event is sponsored by OAASIS, the Delaware Association for Adult and Community Education, and the Delaware Coalition for Literacy.

Teacher Appreciation Awards: Each December, OAASIS gives adult education teachers and staff a gift and card for their support for educating and caring about our students.

Shared Knowledge: Emma Torez

VALUE Board Member

Emma Torez is part of a new state organization for California. It is a state council specifically designed to help adult learners though different types of programs. The council is made up of adult student alumni and they are paid. They started this project 3 years ago. At first it was very hard to get the funding and the people together but as soon as they start going it was easier to organize. Some of the services offered are workshops for adult learners on topics such as computers and time management.

A big challenge that this group addresses is an adult student orientation. They explain what the program has to offer them, their rights and responsibilities, and if the students have any problems they can come ask for help from them. They find that this orientation is very successful and the students become more active, more attentive, and it offers them a more personal service. They also hold fundraisers and parties throughout the year.

<u>VALUE</u>: Voice for Adult Literacy United for Education

The only national support group for adult learners. Established in 1998, this group offers a biennial conference, information, and membership benefits. **Florida is a VALUE state!** Go to their website at http://literacynet.org/value/about/support.html

Mission

VALUE's mission is to expand the role of adult learners in the effort to promote literacy throughout the United States.

On February 7th and 8th, 1999, eight members of the board of VALUE met for a two-day strategic planning retreat at the offices of the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL) in Washington, D.C. NIFL provided space and a professional facilitator for the meeting.

The facilitator, Dick Rowson, was a volunteer from the National Executive Service Corps, a federal agency which links retired executives with nonprofit organizations which need help with planning and other tasks.

The retreat was organized to allow VALUE board members to develop an action plan to guide the organization in the next two years. This plan will be revised over time, as needs and opportunities are identified.

Goals

To fulfill this mission, VALUE will in the years 1999 and 2000 focus on the following more-specific goals:

1. Increase the numbers of adults participating in adult basic skills programs.

2. Increase program retention. (That is, we will help adult learners to persist in their learning once they have joined a program.)

3. Increase understanding of and support for adult learners and adult education among the general public, policy makers and funders, employers, unions, social service agencies, and other stakeholder groups.

a. These groups will better understand the potential of adult learners, as well as learners' special challenges, needs, and rights.

b. These groups will increase their financial and in-kind support for adult literacy efforts.

4. School administrators, teachers, parents, and children will (a) better understand adult learners' experiences as school children and (b) take steps to ensure the success of all children in their school years.

These goals are seen as the outcomes we want to result from our efforts. These are tangible results which we can document and measure, to determine our effectiveness.

Services

To achieve those goals, VALUE will serve as a resource center which provides training and ongoing support to (a) adult learners who want to take on leadership roles in their states, communities, and education programs and (b) others (e.g., adult education practitioners, funders, learners' family members, et al) who want to support the growth of adult learner leadership.

VALUE will remain "lean" in its operations and support state and local adult learner organizations, as well as individual adult learners, who will do the work of building and supporting adult learner leadership in their states. Working with a small staff, volunteers(board members and others), and electronic technology, VALUE will provide training and support services to help adult learner leaders meet the above-described goals in their states.

For example, to help adult learner leaders meet Goals 1 and 2 (i.e., increasing the numbers of adults participating in adult basic skills programs and increasing program retention), VALUE will train them to serve any of these leadership roles: serve as public speakers, run open houses, mentor new learners, organize social activities, facilitate cooperation between various ethnic or racial groups within an education program, identify causes of dropouts, or provide "sensitivity training" to teachers and tutors.

This leadership training and follow-up support would be provided through these services:

1. Conferences and workshops: VALUE will host an annual national Adult Learner Leadership Institute. As resources permit, VALUE representatives might also conduct workshops at other existing national and state conferences and advise state learner organizations which want to set up their own conferences and workshops for adult learners.

2. Referral services: VALUE will prepare a directory of adult learners who are willing to share their leadership expertise with others. The directory will describe various ways that adult learners can serve as leaders in their

states, communities, and education programs. It will also list individuals who have performed those leadership roles and who are willing to share what they have learned.

3. Electronic and print communications: In addition to the above learner leadership directory, VALUE will:

a. compile other types of information of use to adult learner leaders. (This might include learner-written materials, profiles of adult learner leaders, updates about adult leadership activities around the country, and bibliographies of relevant resource materials);

b. disseminate that information via a VALUE web site and print publications; and

c. provide forums (e.g., an electronic listserv for VALUE members) in which adult learner leadership issues and ideas can be discussed.

Infrastructure

To provide the above services, VALUE will require human and material resources to make decisions and carry out specific tasks, including:

The VALUE board: VALUE's board will be composed of adult learner leaders elected by the VALUE membership. The board will communicate via conference calls, a listserv, mail, fax, and occasional in-person meetings. Board members will set direction for the organization and, through its committees, help to raise funds, organize conferences, recruit members, administer funds, manage the VALUE web site, prepare and disseminate publications, and carry out other necessary tasks. The committees will include VALUE members not on the board, as well as mentors.

Administrative staff: The board will contract with one or more persons to carry out administrative tasks and provide leadership training and support services, as needed. We will also need the services of a professional accountant to file necessary tax returns.

Mentors: The board and administrative staff will be assisted by volunteer adult education professionals and others who serve as mentors to the board.

VALUE members: VALUE's membership categories will include (a) individual adult learners, (b) state and local-level adult learner organizations, (c) other individual supporters, and (d) support organizations (e.g., adult education organizations, foundations, corporations, etc.). These members will work with the VALUE board to carry out VALUE activities.

Material resources: VALUE's budget will have to cover costs of equipment and supplies (e.g., computer technology, a web site, printer, fax, phone, stationery supplies, copying services, postage) and travel and lodging for administrative staff and perhaps board members

Printed Resources

Talking to the Media, Laubach Literacy Action. A step-by-step training workshop kit, designed to be led by adult students with teacher/tutor assistance. All-inclusive for information about public speaking and in-person advocacy. Included with the first generation of this presentation packet. Copy available for check-out from the Florida Literacy Coalition. Call (800) 237-5113 or send email request to info@floridaliteracy.org.

Students Working for Literacy, Philip Rose and Beth A. Broadway, Literacy Volunteers of America, 1999. Student and Practitioner Editions offered. This is a great resource, but very difficult to find. Copy available for check-out from the Florida Literacy Coalition. Call (800) 237-5113 or send email request to info@floridaliteracy.org.

Growing Together: Improving your Literacy Program Through Student Participation, Craig Riecke, Literacy Volunteers of America, 1994. Included with the first generation of this presentation packet. Great resource! To request additional copies, contact LVA at (800) LVA-8812.

Forming a New Reader Support Group, written for students by Anna Mae Kuchta (Anna Mae is a student) and Beth Valentine-Pellegrini. Currently being reprinted. When re-printed (July 2001), resource will be available for check-out from the Florida Literacy Coalition. Call (800) 237-5113 or send email request to info@floridaliteracy.org.

Four Roles of the Support Group Facilitator

Group leaders wear many hats through the four phases of group development. Those hats change with the development of the group. In general, leaders will take on each of the following roles at different stages of the group's development.

The Administrator

The administrator provides and maintains structure for both the meeting and for the group as a whole. The administrator also creatively adapts the format and discussion to suit the unique personality of the group. Once the group has decided on ground rules and group norms, they will look to the facilitator to uphold those rules.

The Nurturer

A facilitator with a genuinely caring and nurturing personality will engender a group that truly helps people. There is no room for phoniness in this position, since a group will pick this up immediately. A nurturing individual creates a warm, hospitable atmosphere where people feel comfortable and accepted. This is done through active listening, acceptance, affection, praise and understanding.

The Guide

One mission of a successful support group is to take people on a journey of discovery, and the most productive journeys often begin with a clear road map. In addition to being organized and nurturing, a facilitator must be able to guide individuals through this journey

and to help them assign meaning to their experience. Many thoughts, feelings, emotions, and life situations will be tossed out for discussion. The guiding facilitator helps individuals sort through what has been discussed to see how it is relevant to their situation.

Because most support groups are ongoing, group members may perceive their situation differently after time. The same scenery can be viewed from a different perspective, depending on a number of variables. For whatever reason, they evolve to a different level. The guide helps direct this journey and point out the differences.

The Enabler

Although "enabler" has developed a negative connotation in recovery circles, an enabler can actually be a very powerful positive influence in people's lives. The enabler role is one where the facilitator makes it possible for individuals to express their feelings in a productive environment. The enabler raises provocative issues and topics, then listens without passing judgment as group members learn to take the risk and honestly share their feelings about these issues.

Tips to Make Your First Meeting a Success

Tip One: Get Organized and Be Properly Prepared

Ten minutes before the first group meeting begins, a good facilitator should have nothing left to do. That leaves him or her free to greet any early arrivals or to spend a few minutes reviewing the format for this first meeting and the initiation of the discussion. When group members arrive, they deserve the facilitator's undivided attention.

Tip Two: Create a Warm and Welcoming Environment

The ideal is for your group to meet at the same place and in the same room every time. Make sure the location is well posted. Arriving at a building and not knowing where to go can make people feel unwelcome. Post signs liberally, and (if applicable) let the people at the Information Desk know what is happening and where you will be.

Design the room for the anticipated size of the group – a group of 6 would feel swallowed up in a room set for 20, and a group of 20 would be very uncomfortable in a room for 6. Because circles imply connections, try to seat individuals in a circle – whether around a a tables or just sitting in chairs or couches. People should be able to make eye contact with everyone else in the room.

Posters are an inexpensive way to brighten a room, and you probably have some favorite posters that would be appreciated by your group. At the outset, make certain people either have name

tags (if sitting informally in chairs) or name "tents" to place in front of them on a table. This makes it possible for each person to personalize his or her comments to other group members without grappling for names. Try to avoid a room with glaring fluorescent lighting. If you're stuck with fluorescents, at least turn off a few to soften the environment. You'd be amazed how just a touch of atmosphere creates a comfort zone for anxious group members.

Tip Three: Meet People at the Door with a Personal Greeting

Strong eye contact, a friendly hello, and a handshake are the beginnings of a trusting and caring relationship between a facilitator and his or her group. Again, emphasize that people wear name tags and work hard at memorizing faces and names right away because personalizing the welcome can help develop an early bond. The facilitator who comes to the second meeting knowing each person's name (before they put on a name tag) confirms his or her interest and strengthens that bond.

Tip Four: Establish Group Norms

Starting and ending on time.

Facilitators can establish a safe, protective environment for new group members by adhering to a certain set of group norms, beginning with a predictable start time and end time for every group meeting. If the advertised start time is 7:00 P.M., then the meeting should start right at 7:00, even at the risk of having people arrive after the meeting has started. This establishes a clear expectation

for everyone. Activities should be planned carefully so you can also close at the announced time.

Facilitator Introductions.   Facilitators can begin by introducing themselves and by stating their personal connection to the group's purpose and their reason for becoming a facilitator. Personalizing this introduction helps create a comfort zone for members. Try to make eye contact with every group member during this introduction.

Housekeeping Details.   At the first meeting and at subsequent meetings when new people have joined, cover general housekeeping items, which may include the following:

- Details regarding parking and handicap access information.

- Location(s) of rest rooms.

- Dates and times of upcoming meeting and any dates when you will *not* meet.

Opening and Closing Remarks.   Groups with a religious component can close each meeting quite naturally with a prayer. However, even groups that are nondenominational also benefit from opening and/or closing rituals.

Tip Five: Establish Ground Rules That Suit the Groups' Needs

Ground rules set a disciplined tone and identify the group as being serious in its intentions. Group norms are created when you clearly state what is and what is not acceptable. If participants have the opportunity to suggest rules and decide which ones will be used, they will usually stick to them. Many groups adopt some of the following ground rules.

- Group always begins and ends on time.

- Confidentiality and respect for each other's privacy.

- No side conversations between group members are allowed during the meeting.

- All feelings are acceptable, whether positive or negative.

- No one monopolizes the conversation – the "10-minute rule" is followed.

- One person speaks at a time.

- Each group member is accepted without judgment.

- Sharing with others is encouraged, not required.

- Listen carefully.

- Have fun and enjoy!

Tip Six: Provide Strong Leadership and Direction

Although your group will evolve into a self-directed community, your leadership is critically important at the first few meetings. Facilitators set the psychology climate for the group and give it direction. By creating an atmosphere of warmth, hospitality, and acceptance, you instantly provide a safe environment. When you assume a "time to work" mindset, you are letting members know that this group is important and that you intend to provide an organized agenda for each meeting – at least in the beginning. By exhibiting leadership, the facilitator minimizes anxiety because group members sense that their leaders are in control.

Tip Seven: Establish a Shared Vision/Image of the Group's Time Together

Although most people in the room know intuitively why they have come together, hearing the facilitator articulate that information clarifies the group's purpose. Prepare a brief statement describing your vision of what the group is about. Present your idea, and work with the group to redraft the vision based on their expectations of what they hope the group will accomplish.

Tip Eight: Summarize and Reflect before Closing

Each small group will develop its own personality and its own manner. A facilitator usually *senses* that personality and *feels* that tone after one or two meetings. Is this group introverted or extroverted? Hopeful or resigned? Accepting or denying? A good facilitator finds a way to verbalize that personality and tone in a

positive way. At the close of each meeting, the facilitator might spend some time talking about the strengths of this particular group and how those strengths are improving with each meeting.

Group Leader's Skills Summary

You are helping when you—

- Listen with your full attention.

- Are organized and prepared before the beginning of each meeting.

- Participate by *encouraging,* not *directing.*

- Structure meetings early in the group's formation.

- Use humor to reduce distress or to bring people together.

- Disclose information about yourself to draw out the feelings of others.

- Provide information without lecturing.

- Accept each person's position without judging them.

- Identify common group themes.

- Ask questions in specific ways so the group is guided in the proper direction.

- Put people's feelings and behavior into words the group can understand.

- Protect members from verbally injuring one another.

- Encourage everyone to talk without pressuring anyone.

- Invite silent members to participate.

- Communicate nonverbally by using eye contact, body language, and nodding of your head.

- Exhibit a caring attitude by displaying warmth and affection to group members.

- Cope with conflict when it arises instead of ignoring it.

- Encourage individuals to take ownership to take ownership in the group by assigning tasks.

- Connect individuals with one another based on mutual needs and experiences.

- Summarize the group's progress and learnings at the conclusion of each meeting.

- Refer individuals needing special help to the appropriate source.

You are *not* helping when you-

- Take over the discussion or start to lecture.

- Are confrontational or argumentative.

- Suggest solutions rather that listening without passing judgment.

- Minimize the importance of feelings being expressed.

- Withhold warmth and affection.

- Allow any disruptive behavior to continue and form a pattern.

- Avoid discussion of tough issues.

Why Do People Join—and Why Do They Stay?

People join support groups to:

- Share common experiences and problems.

- Talk and/or listen.

- Share in problem solving and offer solutions.

- Have an emotional outlet and to gain support from peers.

- Reduce isolation.

- Find a sense of community.

- Form new friendships.

- Learn self-help techniques.

- Develop new skills through education and advocacy.

- Help others while helping self.

People stop attending groups because:

- They didn't feel welcome or accepted.

- The group didn't meet their individual needs.

- They felt pressured, embarrassed, or confused.

- The group had a negative focus.

- Friends stopped attending.

- They had gotten all the help they wanted and no longer felt the need.

- They weren't involved or committed.

- The group became stagnant and didn't foster new growth.

- The group lacked leadership or direction.

People don't join support groups because they:

- Don't view them as a personal necessity—don't sense the need.

- Don't know anything about the group and are wary.

- Feel uncomfortable talking about themselves in front of others.

- Lack transportation.

- Don't want to go alone.