

# Southwest Michigan Community Literacy Initiative – Phase II

## Summary

Community-based adult learning providers can play a vital role in preparing students with low literacy skills to successfully transition from “literacy to work.” By building upon the framework of the Southwest Michigan Community Literacy Initiative that began in 2015 with support from the Region 8 Regional Prosperity Initiative – adult literacy, English as a Second Language (ESL), and Adult Basic Education (ABE) providers in collaboration with workforce development providers will more effectively deliver services in a career pathway context. Phase II of this initiative will utilize distance learning technology, evidence-based practices, and the expertise of trained volunteer tutors supported by professional instructors to deliver workforce development outcomes. This will result in a sustainable and innovative regional model that effectively prepares adults who lack basic literacy and language skills to more capably meet employer expectations.

The Kalamazoo Literacy Council (KLC) on behalf of the partnering organizations of the Adult Literacy Collaborative (ALC) of Kalamazoo County and participating literacy councils of Region 8 is submitting this proposal to support the next phase of the Southwest Michigan Community Literacy Initiative. The outcomes of this initiative will be accomplished by:

- Utilizing distance learning to create a network of Community Literacy Centers (CLCs) and other instruction venues in urban and rural areas of the region that have access to quality adult learning services and the support of a faculty of volunteer and professional instructors.
- Providing training in strategies for delivering contextualized lessons that combine the background knowledge necessary to navigate a particular career field with basic skills instruction.
- Supporting new and existing CLCS in the region to effectively integrate career-focused content into their instruction.
- Engaging representatives from the business sector to inform learning expectations in curriculum development, to serve as advisors to service providers, and to serve as speakers to adult learners.
- Providing access to navigation services and supports that remove barriers to learning and employment and increase retention in services.

Completion of Phase II of the Southwest Michigan Community Literacy Initiative will strengthen a vital part of the regional career pathway infrastructure by more effectively extending workforce development instruction into adult literacy, ESL, and Adult Basic Education programs that serve adults with low literacy skills and/or language barriers throughout all seven counties of Region 8.

## Project Description

There are 55,151, or 10.8%, of adults 25 and over in the seven counties of Southwest Michigan who have less than a high school diploma or GED. Of them, 17,970 have less than a 9<sup>th</sup> grade

education, according to the 2014 American Community Survey. To ensure adults at the lowest level of literacy, language, and academic attainment have the basic skills necessary to fully participate in the workforce, efforts must be made to integrate Career Pathway instruction into the services provided by community-based organizations and literacy providers. Research detailed in The Case for Investment in Adult Education white paper published by ProLiteracy in March 2017 shows individuals participating in Adult Basic Skills (ABS) programs such as defined in this initiative had a dramatic increase in income over time, especially those participating for 100 or more hours. Participants were more likely to go on to obtain a high school equivalency credential, especially those participating for 100 or more hours. Program participants were more likely to pursue secondary education and received more credits than nonparticipants. Program participants were more likely to develop improved literacy proficiency over time, especially those participating for 100 or more hours. Unfortunately, access to adult literacy services, particularly those that include workforce literacy, are not yet fully available to every county in Southwest Michigan.

Phase II of the Southwest Michigan Community Literacy Initiative will directly serve no less than 875 adult learners within a year (up from 650 currently being served by the literacy services in Branch, Cass, Calhoun, Kalamazoo, and St. Joseph counties in addition to 150 ESL learners served by ESL of Southwest Michigan) on a campus of up to 25 CLCs and a faculty of at least 350 volunteers supported by professionals and community partners. It will also extend adult literacy services to Van Buren and Berrien counties, which will create the capacity to provide quality adult literacy services in every county in the region that can deliver workforce development outcomes sustained by the efforts of trained volunteers.

### **I. Establishing a Distance Learning Network**

A key element of this initiative is to create a network of distance learning sites that utilize ClearSea and Polycom video conferencing systems to provide **instruction, training, and navigation services and supports**. This technology will be provided through Van Buren Intermediate School System and has already been successfully piloted for ESL training and class instruction. Van Buren ISD's experience also includes College Coursework and Vocational Training. Two CLCs are currently using this system to simulcast the instruction of a Career Specialist from Michigan Works Southwest and up to 10 sites will be connected in the region in this phase. Distance learning will allow content experts from Michigan Works!, Western Michigan University, Goodwill Industries of Southwestern Michigan, KLC and others to deliver services via teleconference. This will significantly reduce or eliminate transportation barriers (which are the most common documented barriers to learning in the region) and leverage the limited number of professional faculty across multiple sites. Sessions may also be recorded to allow participants who were unable to attend to receive the content presented.

### **II. Providing Training and Professional Development**

A core concept of this initiative is to train volunteer tutors to serve as the faculty for this growing, interconnected adult learning campus. This will be accomplished by hosting the Adult Literacy Research and Training Symposium and providing training in best practices for teaching and tutoring strategies in Basic Literacy, ESL, Workforce Literacy, and the CLC Model. The Adult Literacy Research and Training Symposium, which is held annually at the WMU Fetzer Center,

is an excellent example of “Tapping the Resources of Education to Solve Regional Challenges.” Its purpose is to engage university faculty, staff and college students across multiple disciplines to work in collaboration with community experts in adult literacy and education to develop concrete community/university strategies that will improve the state of adult literacy in the region. The partner agencies of the symposium include WMU Business Connection, WMU Osher Lifelong Learning Institute, WMU Homer Stryker M.D. School of Medicine, WMU Lewis Walker Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnic Relations, WMU Extended University Program in addition to faculty from Literacy Studies, Education, Health along with interns from WMU and Kalamazoo Valley Community College. It is anticipated that more than 85 tutors, instructors, and volunteers from across the region will attend the 2017 symposium (up from 72 in 2016).

### **III. Integrating career-focused content into instruction**

A major focus of this initiative will be integrating Career Pathways, Workforce Development, Employability Skills Training and Preparation into instruction. The Job Opportunity and Basic Skills (JOBS) Curriculum that was developed in collaboration with Michigan Works Southwest, Goodwill Industries of Southwestern Michigan, and the KLC provides adult learners with the literacy skills they need to engage in workforce development activities. This includes equipping learners with the vocabulary, reading, writing, and critical thinking skills necessary to become proficient in services provided by workforce development and employment readiness agencies (e.g. Michigan Works! and Goodwill Industries among others). The curriculum was successfully piloted in April 2017 and offers eight one-hour sessions provided by Michigan Works and an additional three to six hours of instruction per week provided by volunteer tutors in computer skills, writing, vocabulary, and language/professional speech. Learners who complete the series have a resume that they can read, understand, and upload to job sites. They also have completed career exploration through O\*Net, completed a mock interview, and continued to pursue academic instruction that improves reading fluency and basic math. The volunteers who provide instruction are also trained to implement the ExpressWays 2 Success Program, which provides quality adult literacy instruction for adults with low-literacy skills who are seeking to earn a GED, improve their literacy skills for employment, or enter community college or vocational education training. Volunteer tutors provide literacy and Adult Basic Education instruction for adult learners through one-on-one tutoring, small groups and classes, and self-paced learning tools. The program is based on the ExpressWays program that was successfully implemented for three years at Kalamazoo Valley Community College. This approach utilized PLATO Courseware and academic tutors to provide instruction for students who were seeking to take for-credit courses at KVCC but scored low (approximately below 7<sup>th</sup> grade writing, reading, and/or math) on entrance tests. Students who completed the program successfully retested at a rate of 72%. The program has since been replicated at eight CLCs. Use of JOBS and ExpressWays 2 Success will integrate career pathways instruction in adult literacy, ESL and Adult Basic Education for adults with low literacy and language skills. It will also provide guidance on how to utilize existing instruction and improve practices to deliver workforce development outcomes.

### **IV. Supporting new and existing Community Literacy Centers**

Through this initiative the KLC, the participating literacy councils, and its ALC partners will expand its support of CLCs in the region. There are currently 20 CLCs in the region (13 in Kalamazoo County, 3 in Calhoun, 1 in Cass, 1 in Branch County, and 3 in St. Joseph County). All of these CLCs were established using the CLC model that was developed by the KLC in 2011. They are designed to be flexible and adaptable to the unique needs of each site and the learning goals of students; affordable and cost-effective both to the host site and the adult learners they serve; sustainable as an ongoing operation utilizing existing community resources and leveraging these resources to encourage additional support; and capable of achieving results by providing effective outreach to adult learners who want to improve their literacy skills and connecting them to trained tutors, educational materials and other resources that will help them grow. This initiative will provide literacy volunteer training and program development training to interested counties on how to establish and sustain CLCs using the model. It will also provide financial resources to support the training, books and supplies to establish up to five new CLCs in the region using the CLC model. Each CLC requires \$2,500 to launch and is sustainable for less than \$1,000 per year on an ongoing basis. Most CLC providers have been successful in sustaining their operations without requiring additional grant support by connecting to existing systems of funding and in-kind support. Through this initiative, a regional network of interconnected CLCs will operate as an adult learning campus that can deliver workforce development and academic outcomes.

#### **V. Engaging business in the process**

This initiative will be guided with input from the business sector to ensure the instruction provided is responsive to existing and emergent employer needs. This will be accomplished in part by Michigan Works Southwest hosting the 2018 Regional Talent Summit at the WMU Fetzer Center. The last such summit was held in 2013 by Michigan Works Southwest and Kinexus. In addition to gaining input from business, it is hoped that the Talent Match project will be shared with employers and with academic service providers to better align instruction with employer expectations. Some anticipated outcomes include having direct feedback from employers to inform teaching expectations in curriculum development and to serve as advisors to service providers. As with the previous summit, approximately 100 individuals are anticipated to attend. The Talent Summit will ensure the business sector has direct input in the program and curriculum design, which is crucial for the ongoing success of this initiative.

Workforce job placement will be tracked by the referrals made to Michigan Works services and other workforce development agencies, particularly in job sectors identified in Talent Match and the input received at the Regional Talent Summit.

#### **VI. Removing barriers to learning and employment**

Adult learners encounter many barriers that prevent them from engaging in learning and employment services such as lack of transportation, child care, and housing among others. This initiative will build upon the Region 8 Navigation Services Initiative that is strengthening the coordination of navigation services and supports to ensure adult learners have greater access to learning and have a greater capability of remaining active in instruction for Michigan Works Agencies and Adult Education, including basic literacy and ESL. This effort includes expansion of the Navigation Strategies Workshop that was presented in June 2017 in collaboration with

Kalamazoo Adult Education, Goodwill Industries, and the KLC with funding from a Special Projects Grant from the Office of Adult Education. The workshop will be offered to providers in Region 8 and will include providing guidance on how to utilize navigation strategies that remove barriers to learning. This will help to replicate functional Navigation Work Groups such as the one in Kalamazoo County, which has increased student retention rates from 49% to 69% within the past year.

Specific measurements for this initiative will include:

- The number of adult learners referred to Michigan Works for employment services and placed in employment, particularly in job sectors identified in the Talent Match project.
- The number of CLCs equipped to integrate career-focused instruction through distance learning, with the aim of having 10 in the first year;
- The number of individuals who complete the volunteer tutor training, with the aim of training at least 85 annually;
- The number of literacy centers that are established utilizing the CLC Model with the aim of establishing at least five in the next year across multiple counties;
- The number of individuals who attend the 2018 Regional Talent Summit, with the aim of having at least 50 business representatives in attendance;
- The number of individuals who attend the Adult Literacy Research & Training Symposium with the aim of having at least 80 participants each year.
- The written report from the initiative that defines regional priorities for adult literacy and sustainable solutions to address the issue, with the aim of having at least 30 agencies across the region endorsing the report.

## **Organizational Description**

Phase II of the Southwest Michigan Community Literacy Initiative will be led by KLC Executive Director Michael Evans with BCLC Executive Director Sam Ellis Greenburg, SJCLC Director John Yoder, and E3 Achievement Executive Director Rhonda Ostrander Cook serving on the project team. The team will also include WMU Business Connection Director Lisa Renee Garcia as the WMU point of contact for planning and hosting the Adult Literacy Research & Training Symposium. The project team will be tasked with planning and implementing the project and extending services within their respective counties. Other literacy representatives from the region and participating agencies of the ALC will be enlisted to join the project through the Adult Literacy Research & Training Symposium. Monthly updates will be provided to the ALC and to regional partners to provide support and measure progress at the CLC sites that will be established through this initiative. Site visits to each of the participating CLC sites will be coordinated by KLC staff.

The Kalamazoo Literacy Council will continue to serve as the lead organization and fiscal sponsor of this project. The mission of the KLC is to provide quality literacy education that enhances the lives of adults through programs designed to increase reading, writing, and spelling skills. For more than 40 years the organization has been the leading voice for the cause of adult literacy, mobilizing and training volunteer tutors to teach struggling adult readers

throughout the region. The KLC was founded in 1974 and operated as an all-volunteer organization until August 2010 when its current Executive Director was hired. The KLC established an office in the Goodwill Industries of Southwest Michigan building at 420 E. Alcott Street to provide a central location for its services. Goodwill Industries serves as the primary site for training volunteer tutors from throughout Southwest Michigan. It is also host to the first Community Literacy Center that was established in 2011 using the CLC Model. The KLC's Tutor Training Program provides training for qualified volunteers in the Laubach Method, which was developed specifically to help adults with limited or no reading skills achieve success and become confident readers. This structured, phonics-based series is in prominent use nationally and internationally and has had proven evidence-based results for more than 30 years. The literacy councils participating in this project have all endorsed use of this method. Tutors commit to 14-hours of training and a minimum of a year of service. The KLC facilitates the Adult Literacy Collaborative (ALC) of Kalamazoo County, which is comprised of more than 30 area adult education, workforce development, literacy and other agencies, and meets monthly to provide a collective voice for adult literacy. ESL of Southwest Michigan – a program of the KLC, will provide training for volunteers and instruction for 150 ESL learners in the region.

The Branch County Literacy Council (BCLC) was established in 1986 as a grassroots effort to address the problem of low literacy rates in Branch County. It is a non-profit volunteer organization dedicated to enhancing the lives of non-literate adults through free one-on-one programs designed to develop reading, writing and spelling skills. BCLC also offers a comprehensive ESL program. The BCLC center is located in the Branch District Library in Coldwater. The St. Joseph County Literacy Council (SJCLC) was formed in 1986 to help teach adults to read. Located at 920 W. Michigan Ave., Three Rivers, the SJCLC has tutors based primarily in Three Rivers and Sturgis with CLCs at Glen Oaks Community College and two other locations. E3 Achievement in Calhoun County offers a range of educational, employment and entrepreneurial programs and workshops with the goal of helping people succeed economically.

Through the leadership of the four participating literacy service providers, the members of the ALC, the technology support provided by Van Buren ISD, and the training provided by WMU through the Adult Literacy Research & Training Symposium, it is anticipated that models for high-quality, sustainable adult literacy instruction will be replicated throughout Region 8.

## Partners

Branch County Literacy Council, St. Joseph County Literacy Council, and E3 Achievement: Will coordinate tutors and instruction in Branch, St. Joseph, and Calhoun counties respectively.

Goodwill Industries of Southwestern Michigan: Will serve as the primary Tutor Training site and continue to provide expertise for the JOBS Curriculum.

Western Michigan University: Will host the Adult Literacy Research & Training Symposium, provide follow-up forums in Workplace Literacy and other topics and supply college interns and faculty advisors.

Van Buren Intermediate School District: Will provide access to distance learning technology and access to WIOA funding to CLCs operated in partnership with the KLC and assist in identifying volunteers in Van Buren County.

Michigan Works Southwest: Will provide the lead instructor for the JOBS Curriculum, host the 2018 Regional Talent Summit, and provide job placement services for adults referred.

Adult Literacy Collaborative of Kalamazoo County: Agencies that host CLCs will make progress reports at monthly meetings and share practices with other collaborative bodies in the region.

Other sites have been identified in Van Buren and Berrien counties through existing collaborations with Van Buren ISD.

## Project Timeline

The activities of this initiative will take place from December 2017 to December 2018.

December	2017 Adult Literacy Research & Training Symposium (full day)
January	Tutor Orientation and Training (14 hours) Workforce Literacy Tutor Forum I (2 hours)
February	Tutor Forum for volunteer tutors (2 hours) Workforce Literacy Tutor Forum II (2 hours)
March	Tutor Orientation and Training (14 hours) Workforce Literacy Tutor Forum III (2 hours)
April	ExpressWays Tutor Workshop (2 hours)
May	Tutor Orientation and Training (14 hours)
June	Navigation Strategies Workshop (6 hours)
September	Tutor Orientation and Training (14 hours)
October	ExpressWays Tutor Workshop (2 hours) Site visits to participating literacy councils (2 hours each)
December	2018 Adult Literacy Research & Training Symposium (Day long) Written plan for addressing regional adult literacy priorities Final Report of SWMI Community Literacy Initiative submitted to RPI

Instruction will take place year round, providing access to at least 100 hours of instruction per adult learner. Sessions are scheduled at various times at each site.

## Conclusion

If the RPI grants this request, literacy services will be strengthened on a regional level, instruction practices will be better-aligned toward workforce development and adult education outcomes, and a system of support will be established to sustain the infrastructure of literacy services throughout Southwest Michigan.

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## Budget

This project aligns with the RPI priority to “Rebuild and focus assets on developing infrastructure for reaching adult illiterate population.” It also supports RPI goals “to encourage a culture of learning” and “to support work of, and develop a communication conduit for, existing education institutions.” The KLC intends to leverage \$64,000 from grants it has received from Dollar General Literacy Foundation, local foundations, contracted services, and other contributors to support this initiative. Specific line items for expenses include:

Expenditure Category	RPI Request	Funds from Other Sources	Total
KLC Staff (Initiative Oversight and Direction)	\$10,000	\$10,000	\$20,000
Van Buren County ISD Administrative Support		\$32,000	\$32,000
IT Support (In-Kind)		\$10,000	\$10,000
(3) Workshop Forums	\$1,500		
2018 Regional Talent Summit at WMU	\$5,000		\$5,000
2017 & 2018 Training Symposia at WMU	\$4,000	\$2,000	\$6,000
Regional Navigation Strategies Workshop	\$2,500	\$1,000	\$3,500
Program Support (Materials, Supplies, Training)			
Kalamazoo	\$3,000	\$9,500	\$12,500
St. Joseph	\$5,000		\$5,000
Calhoun	\$5,000		\$5,000
Branch	\$5,000		\$5,000
Other counties	\$7,500		\$7,500
Distance Learning Units			
(5) Polycom RealPresence Debut @ \$1,795 ea.	\$8,975		
(5) Debut Expansion Mics @ \$199 ea.	\$995		
(5) Peerless Smarfmount Carts @ \$547 ea.	\$2,735		
(5) 65" Samsung TVs @ \$1,098 ea.	\$5,490		
<b>Totals</b>	<b>\$66,695</b>	<b>\$64,500</b>	<b>\$111,500</b>