

## Southwest Michigan Community Literacy Initiative

### Capstone



### Project Description

The purpose of the Southwest Michigan Community Literacy Initiative is to establish a sustainable regional model that effectively prepares adults who lack basic literacy and language skills to more capably meet employer expectations and help them successfully transition from “literacy to work.” Phase I of the initiative began in 2015, which included hosting the first Adult Literacy Research and Symposium in collaboration with Western Michigan University, establishing and supporting 22 Community Literacy Centers (CLCs) in the region using the CLC Model of the Kalamazoo Literacy Council (KLC), and establishing the ESL of Southwest Michigan program. Phase I also included the development of the Job Opportunity and Basic Skills (JOBS) Curriculum, which was designed to impart the literacy skills adult learners need to engage in workforce development activities. This curriculum was developed in collaboration with the KLC, Michigan Works Southwest, and Goodwill Industries of Southwestern Michigan. It is part of the ExpressWays 2 Success Career Pathway program of the KLC, which served 90 adult learners in the past year across 10 instruction sites. Phase II of this initiative established a Distance Learning Network across the region using the online infrastructure of the Van Buren Intermediate School District. 22 sites across seven counties have been connected to this initiative, with 12 being able to access virtual classes for employment skills, workshops, and navigation services to remove barriers to learning. The sites include five in Van Buren County, four in Kalamazoo County, two in Berrien County, and one in Calhoun County. This includes equipping the Michigan Works Service Centers in Kalamazoo and Battle Creek to allow Career Coaches to provide instruction virtually without needing to travel to sites. Additionally, four sites have been equipped with mobile computer labs to provide access to online workforce literacy content, performance assessments and testing. These sites can now serve Adult Basic Education, English as a Second Language, and Adult Basic Literacy learners with these services in one inter-connected system.

The purpose of the Capstone Project is to highlight the achievements of the Southwest Community Literacy Initiative and demonstrate the impact it has had with the support of the Region 8 Southwest Michigan Prosperity Committee. The Capstone Project will also leave a record of the Regional Prosperity Initiative’s impact on adult learning in southwest Michigan as well as a road map for how this system will be further developed and sustained in the years ahead. Specific activities include:

**Hosting the 2019 Adult Literacy Research and Training Symposium on 12/13/19 at the WMU Fetzer Center.** This day-long event will explore the five selected themes of Workforce Literacy, ESL, Parent Literacy, Health Literacy, and Learning Disabilities/Differences. It will also feature a Business Roundtable on Adult Literacy, which will provide invited employers, workforce development providers, and program partners with information about the impact adult literacy has on developing a skilled workforce in the region. It will share the impact of the JOBS Curriculum, demonstrate the strategic use of Navigation Services to remove barriers to learning and employment, and share innovative approaches that integrate career-focused content into the instruction of existing adult literacy, Adult Basic Education (ABE) and English as a Second

Language (ESL) programs. This is the fifth symposium hosted through the dynamic community/university partnership between the KLC and WMU. The workshops presented will inform and train up to 150 volunteer tutors and instructors from southwest Michigan and will help set literacy priorities in the region. Poster presentations will be displayed at the symposium with information from various programs and projects that have been engaged in this initiative. The symposium will feature Chicago author and literacy advocate Rob Shindler. His book *Hot Dogs & Hamburgers: Unlocking Life's Potential by Inspiring Literacy at Any Age* shares the personal journey of Shindler, who offered his time and unconventional teaching techniques to help a young man with serious learning differences and adults with low literacy skills. Copies of his book will be provided to all symposium attendees.

**Publishing a special edition of the Literacy Advocate journal** that includes articles from each of the symposium focus areas (ESL, Health Literacy, Parent Literacy, Workforce Literacy, and Learning Differences/Learning Disabilities). The 32-page journal will be used to inform the public about the work the Adult Literacy Research and Training Symposium has accomplished and inspired over the past five years with support from the Southwest Michigan Prosperity Committee and will contain the written reflections of the initiative leaders and participants. The journal will invite others to join this initiative and will be published in print and digital formats.

**Hosting a Navigation Strategies Workshop to Successful Navigation Strategies for Removing Barriers to Learning** on 10/4/19 at Goodwill Industries of Southwestern Michigan. Adult learners often have several barriers to learning that prevent them from attending classes and tutoring sessions. For the past three years, the KLC in collaboration with Goodwill Industries of Southwestern Michigan and Kalamazoo Adult Education has developed eight specific strategies to address the most frequent barriers in the “Circle of Support” adult learners face, including transportation, childcare, housing, financial, health, employment, and education. Attendees will learn steps that can be taken to develop a Navigation System that improves retention rates and increases the satisfaction and focus of adult learners. This approach has been used to train dozens of navigators and case managers in southwest Michigan and was initially funded through a grant from the Office of Adult Education.

This project will address several the goals and opportunities under the Education priority of the Prosperity Plan to promote talent development and retention to encourage growth and sustainability in all facets of the local economy. The Capstone Project promotes accessibility and opportunities to participate in education and skilled training programs and demonstrates how to tailor adult learning programs to market demands. It encourages a culture of learning by providing opportunities for adults with lower literacy and language skills. It promotes digital literacy and workforce literacy through use of the JOBS Curriculum and career pathways. It encourages infrastructure development and interconnectivity to better support education, training, and employment by connecting Community Literacy Centers and programs across the region to distance learning equipment and navigation services. Finally, it supports the work of existing organizations, particularly adult education, functional literacy, and career exploration through the integration of career-focused content into instruction provided.

This project will impact all seven counties in the region by engaging the existing sites in Berrien, Branch, Cass, Calhoun, Kalamazoo, St. Joseph, and Van Buren counties in the activities defined in this initiative. This project will serve as the Capstone of the Southwest Michigan Community Literacy Initiative and will serve as one of the lasting legacies of the Regional Prosperity Initiative under the support of the Southwest Michigan Prosperity Committee. It will also the impact this initiative has had on more than 875 adult learners in the region.

## **Organizational Description**

The Kalamazoo Literacy Council (KLC) is a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization committed to enhancing the lives of adults by improving their reading, writing, spelling, and comprehension skills. The KLC was founded in 1974 and is the only organization in Kalamazoo County with the exclusive purpose of providing free, basic literacy instruction to adults. For more than 40 years, the organization has been the leading voice for the cause of adult literacy and mobilizes and trains volunteer tutors to teach struggling adult readers throughout the region.

The KLC partners with the Western Michigan University (WMU) through the WMU/KLC Advisory Board, which was established in 2014. The purpose of this advisory board is to engage university faculty, staff, and students across multiple disciplines to work in collaboration with community experts in adult learning and to develop concrete community/university strategies that will improve the state of adult literacy in the region. A major objective of this body is to facilitate cooperation between the academic research of best practices in adult literacy and community-based application of this knowledge in the region.

The KLC has led the Southwest Michigan Community Literacy Initiative since 2015. It provides training, technical support, strategic planning, and advocacy for program partners across the region and has been recognized on a local, regional, and national level as a leader and advocate for adult learning. The KLC also convenes the Adult Literacy Collaborative of Kalamazoo County – a group of nearly 30 adult education, workforce development, English as a Second Language (ESL), literacy agencies, and community organizations that meets monthly to determine adult literacy priorities, identify and expand resources, and align services and programs in the county.

This project will be led by KLC Executive Director Michael D. Evans and Lisa Garcia, who is the Director of Western Michigan University's business engagement office. Together, with members of the WMU/KLC Advisory Board and representative members of the ALC, the project will have the reach and capacity to fulfill the goals and objectives of this project.

## **Partners**

WMU/KLC Advisory Board: In addition to Evans and Garcia, the Advisory Board consists of faculty members, staff, and literacy experts who will serve as advisors on this project and assist in the implementation of its activities. Specific partners for this project from within WMU include:

- WMU Business Connection
- WMU Center for the Humanities
- WMU Homer Stryker M.D. School of Medicine
- WMU Osher Lifelong Learning Institute
- WMU Department of Psychology
- WMU Lewis Walker Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnic Relations
- WMU Service-Learning

The KLC will engage the community organizations that participate in Adult Literacy Collaborative (ALC) of Kalamazoo County and will partner with the literacy councils in Branch County and St. Joseph County to engage volunteer tutors supported by those programs and to coordinate project activities.

The KLC has active agreements with Kinexus, Michigan Works Southwest, Goodwill Industries of Southwestern Michigan, KRESA, and Van Buren Intermediate School District to support the JOBS Curriculum across multiple sites in the region.

## **Project Timeline**

### **September 2019**

New Tutor Training hosted. 9/9, 9/12, 9/16, & 9/19. Prospective volunteers will complete 14 hours of training in basic literacy tutoring strategies. Sessions will be led by the KLC's volunteer Tutor Trainers. The training will be able to accommodate up to 24 people. The training will also be available virtually at selected sites using the Distance Learning Network. In addition to the tutor training, volunteers will be invited to attend the symposium.

### **October 2019**

Literacy Advocate Journal published in advance of the symposium. The publication will be distributed to all partner sites and will include recognition of the Southwest Michigan Prosperity Committee's support of this initiative.

Navigation Strategies Workshop hosted 10/4/19 at Goodwill Industries of Southwestern Michigan. The training will accommodate up to 30 people and will be promoted to case managers and navigators across the region. A distance learning option will be provided.

### **November 2019**

Presenter's Luncheon hosted 11/13/19. Presenters who have been selected for the 2019 Adult Literacy Research and Training Symposium will meet with the WMU/KLC Advisory Board to share the content of their workshops and receive feedback.

### **December 2019**

2019 Adult Literacy Research and Training Symposium (Keynote Speaker Rob Shindler) hosted on 12/13/19. This day-long event will explore the five selected themes of ESL, Parent Literacy, Health Literacy, Workforce Literacy, and Learning Disabilities/Differences, as well as the Business Roundtable on Adult Literacy.

Final report presented to the Southwest Michigan Prosperity Committee.

### **Ongoing activities:**

Workforce Literacy Forums will be hosted monthly September – December on the second Friday of each month at Michigan Works Southwest.

Updates on this project will be provided September – November at the monthly meetings of the Adult Literacy Collaborative of Kalamazoo County at Goodwill Industries of Southwestern Michigan and at the monthly meetings of the WMU/KLC Advisory Board.

The October cohort of the JOBS Curriculum will be hosted across multiple sites via distance learning. Weekly hour-long sessions will be held. Each learner will complete a 10-week course and receive an additional 4-6 hours of instruction per week.

## Budget

The total cost of this project is \$28,625. In addition to the \$10,000 mini-grant requested, the KLC has a \$12,100 grant pending with the Michigan Humanities Council and plans to secure \$1,500 in sponsorships for the symposium. The KLC has grant support from the Kalamazoo Community Foundation to offset \$4,535 of the staff costs of this project.

Expenditure Category	Mini-Grant Request \$10,000	Funds from Other Sources	Total
KLC Staff (Initiative Oversight and Direction)	500.00	4,500.00	5,000.00
Rental of WMU Fetzer Center for Symposium	1,500.00	2,180.00	3,680.00
Design and Printing of 1,000 copies of the Literacy Advocate Journal	2,500.00	2,660.00	5,160.00
Printing brochures, posters, and flyers to promote the project	1,000.00	1,445.00	2,445.00
Printing of Poster Presentations and 150 copies of Symposium Guide	1,000.00	1,250.00	2,250.00
Instructor fees and supplies for Navigation Strategies Workshop	2,000.00	1,500.00	3,500.00
Honorarium and Lodging for Symposium keynote speaker	0.00	1,500.00	1,500.00
Tutor Training supplies and materials for remote training sites	500.00	1,000.00	1,500.00
150 copies of featured book for Symposium	0.00	2,100.00	2,100.00
Food and presentation materials for Business Roundtable at Symposium	1,000.00	500.00	1,500.00
<b>Totals</b>	<b>10,000.00</b>	<b>18,635.00</b>	<b>28,635.00</b>

## Information

### Michael D. Evans

Executive Director

Kalamazoo Literacy Council

420 E. Alcott Street, Suite 400

Kalamazoo, MI 49001

PH: (269) 382-0490 ext. 222

Email: [mevans@goodwillswmi.org](mailto:mevans@goodwillswmi.org)

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