

## Literacy Can't Wait!

What's in a tag line? "Literacy Can't Wait" – the new tagline for Wisconsin Literacy's tutor recruitment campaign – has several messages. The first, and most obvious, is the sense of urgency. Literacy Can't Wait because it is a "root cause," or foundational, issue, that leads to so many other societal challenges of our time like poverty, unemployment and underemployment, incarceration rates, health disparities, and increasing dropout rates. Given the break-neck speed at which "the times are a changin'," it needs addressing quickly! To help improve these issues, we have to collaborate to resolve the origin of the struggle. Low or limited literacy is connected, and often a cause, to all of the above mentioned challenges of our day.

Literacy Can't Wait because of the cyclical nature of illiteracy and the importance of addressing it cradle to career. The more we learn about early brain development and the impact of oral literacy (talking, singing, rhyming, and engaging young children in words and language), we realize that literacy in fact can't wait. Nearly 85 percent of a child's brain infrastructure is already complete by the tender age of 18 months! Even if parents aren't readers, talking, singing and rhyming from day one of their child's arrival has life-changing consequences!

Literacy Can't Wait because of the critical need to help the more than 700,000 Wisconsin working adults who are currently underemployed or lack the necessary job readiness or language skills to help replace the Baby Boomers from their mass exodus from the workforce, now and during the next 10-15 years. Who will we count on to fill the labor shortage that is already upon us?

Literacy Can't Wait because the Millennials in the U.S. scored near the very bottom of 24 industrialized nations in their ability to problem solve in technology rich environments. This was surprising news from the PIAAC study given the technology resources in our country. With the pace of innovation, our economy and position as a world leader surely can't wait!



Sara, with the help of Hope Academy, Family and Children's Center, graduated with a high school diploma and a healthy baby boy.



Buffalo Pepin County Literacy Alliance's newly piloted English Language Learner Class

## AND SO YOU DON'T HAVE TO WAIT:

**You can volunteer** your time tutoring at a local agency - [http://wisconsinliteracy.org/find\\_literacy\\_program](http://wisconsinliteracy.org/find_literacy_program)

**You can call, email, fax, or write letters** to your state and federal representatives. Tell them that this is an issue you care about and it can't wait – <http://wisconsinliteracy.org/get-involved/advocate.html>

**You can donate** to the cause – <https://wisconsinliteracyorg.presencehost.net/get-involved/donate.html>

## Partnering to Improve Lives

Collaboration from different forces working to educate and employ Wisconsin citizens strengthens the whole of the state. Wisconsin Literacy is working to foster conversations and partnerships among adult literacy agencies, technical colleges, workforce boards, job centers, and the employers in their communities. Last fall, during the 2016 “Achieving Credentials for Success” conference, Wisconsin Literacy and the Wisconsin Technical College System arranged a series of discussions between literacy agencies, WTCS ABE leaders and staff, and WTCS Career Pathway Coordinators on how they can work together in their region to help students and job seekers succeed on a career pathway. As Carol Dussault from Literacy Council of Sheboygan County said about the discussions, “I think it will be a great starting point.”

The conversation didn’t stop there. Our southeast regional literacy consultant, Marsha Connet, coordinated a chance for agencies in

the southeast to meet with Regina Smith, Dean of Milwaukee Area Technical College’s School of Pre-College Education. Our agencies had an opportunity to discuss with Dr. Smith their contributions to adult education in their communities and how strong partnerships help serve community members – getting the skills and training they need for the jobs available. Regina Smith talked about expanding the relationships she has with our members: “I hope that the future partnership with the community-based organizations (CBOs) will lead to better services all around for our students -- to help one another with wrap around services. If we band together, we can show the community what we have to offer and how important we are to workforce and economic development in the state.” These partnerships will be key in the future to improving the lives of individuals and the overall education and economy of Wisconsin.



Ginger Duiven, Executive Director of Literacy Services of Wisconsin (third from right), engaged in discussion with the Milwaukee Technical College staff and other partners at the “Achieving Credentials for Success” Conference.

## Working Together for a Stronger Workforce

Connections between our member agencies and employers strengthen the Wisconsin workforce. In workplace literacy programs, our agencies bring classes to the workplace with customized curriculum for employee success. This builds confidence in the employees and promotes a healthy work environment.

Literacy Network and Latino Academy of Workforce Development both have robust programs in fields like manufacturing, hospitality, dairy farms, food, and janitorial and commercial cleaning. As Autumn Jackson, Senior Director of ESL Classes from Literacy Network, states, “Customization is key. With manufacturing partners, the class is likely talking about how to safely drive a forklift, whereas with our hotel partners (like North Central Group), the class might talk about



Literacy Network’s workplace program at North Central Group

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how to give a guest or visitor directions to the elevator.” Both agencies meet with the employer to create the customized lesson plans and to find the focus of the content for the ELL classes. The tailor-made curriculum meets students where they are and with the language skills they need to succeed in their industry.



Latino Academy's workplace program at Wayside Farm in Green Leaf

The employers offer these courses as a benefit to their employees to improve overall workplace culture. Ben, an employee at Future Foam, has shared with his teacher: “I like the class very much. My conversation with my supervisor and coworkers [are] better. I understand my work and what the other guys do. When there's a new employee, I can explain to them what to do.”

The benefits for the students extend past the workplace. Ninety-four percent of ELL students at Latino Academy's workforce programs at

Wayside Farm, Uniek, Cintas, and El Patron made language gains by the end of the class while sixty-one percent increased an NRS (National Reporting System) standard level.

As Norma Gallegos Valles, Co-Director of Latino Academy, stated, “The knowledge and communication skills students learn are implemented in their day to day lives, and offer an opportunity for sustainable employment.”

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## Helping Refugees With Medicine



Ah Jee, a Rohingya who survived 12 days in the jungle just to get to a refugee camp in Thailand, with his 3 sons (photo by Grassland Media, Inc.)

Understanding and using medicine properly can be hard enough for those who have lived in America all their lives and speak English as their first language. Imagine how much more difficult this may be for refugee and immigrant populations!

With that in mind, Wisconsin Health Literacy

(WHL) modified its “Let's Talk About Medicines” program to help refugee and immigrant populations better understand and use their medicines. Using a 2015 grant from the Wisconsin Department of Health Services Minority Health Program, WHL presented 20 programs to over 300 refugee and immigrants with various community partners and with the help of interpreters and materials translated in multiple languages. Year 2 funding was awarded and we are working with those same community organizations to reach an additional 300+ refugees and immigrants!

WHL is also working on a video to help pharmacists in their communications and interactions with refugees and immigrants. The video presented the challenges refugees have with medication use here.

Wisconsin Health Literacy promotes understanding health as an issue for all Wisconsin citizens. WHL's “Let's Talk About Medicines” for refugees and our pharmacist video aim to help this population of our state work through medical issues.



211 S. Paterson Street  
Suite 260  
Madison, WI 53703  
(608) 257-1655

info@wisconsinliteracy.org  
www.WisconsinLiteracy.org  
www.WisconsinHealthLiteracy.org



Wisconsin Literacy Board at the February board meeting

**2017 Wisconsin Health Literacy Summit**  
Health Literacy: A Critical Link in Patient Engagement  
**April 4-5, 2017**  
Monona Terrace Community and Conference Center | Madison, WI  
Medication Label Summit April 3

The banner features a green background with a red vertical stripe on the left. On the stripe are three circular icons: a white cross on a blue background, a white pill bottle on a blue background, and a white stethoscope on a blue background.