**ProLiteracy America Report - U.S. Adult Literacy Programs: Making a Difference**

The report summarizes a variety of published studies that demonstrate that adult and family literacy programs are helping people to dramatically improve their lives. Some key statistics presented in the report include:

***Workplace Advantages***

* Actual earnings for high school dropouts have declined more than 20% since 1979. Also, the number of jobs for which adults with low skills qualify continues to drop; those with only a high school education or below now qualify for fewer than 20% of all new jobs.

**Evidence shows:** Adult literacy programs help students gain the skills they need to get and keep jobs. An AT Kearney study reported that for every dollar invested in Literacy Volunteers of America, Inc. students experienced a $33 economic gain in their lives.

***Fight Welfare Dependence***

* Seventy percent of adult welfare recipients function at the lowest level of literacy. Recent high school dropouts are more than three times as likely to receive public assistance as recent high school graduates.

**Evidence shows:** Literacy programs help adults make significant inroads in their fight against welfare dependence. In a national study, 80% of literacy programs reported an overall reduction in welfare dependence among their students.

***Health Literacy***

Those who lack basic literacy skills are much more likely than others to suffer from heart disease, diabetes, and prostate cancer and have health care expenses as much as six times higher than adults with average levels of literacy.

**Evidence shows:** As people gain literacy skills, they are more likely to understand their health problems, have both the confidence and knowledge they need in order to find appropriate medical care, and follow their treatment regimens properly. Studies have found that as literacy levels rise, there are declines in the incidence of particular diseases such as prostate cancer, heart disease, and diabetes.

***Incarceration Rates***

* Although the average reading and math levels of an incarcerated adult are at or below the eighth-grade level, only 9% of all prisoners with low literacy skills receive literacy training while in prison.

**Evidence shows:** A Virginia study looked at a sample of 3,000 inmates. It found that among adults who have been in prison education programs, 20% are re-incarcerated as compared to 49% of those who have not been in a prison education program. The same study found that only 54.6% of former prisoners on parole who had had no educational programming in prison were employed for a period exceeding 90 days. For paroled inmates who had completed an educational program in prison, the figure was 77.9%. When researchers take reductions in recidivism into account, each $1 spent on correctional education pays back at least $2.

***Better for the Next Generation***

* The children of low-literate parents tend to get poor care and poor nutrition at home and to do poorly in school.
* **Evidence shows:** When adults enter literacy programs and improve their literacy skills, their children tend to have fewer nutrition and health problems, drop out of school less, and have fewer teen pregnancies, less joblessness, and less social alienation.

***Better Advances for Women and Families***

* Worldwide, 70% of adults who lack basic literacy skills are women. Low-literate women earn only 70.1% as much as men with equivalent skills.

**Evidence shows:** Women benefit from increased literacy skills in all of the areas cited in this report (including employment and earnings). In addition, as women become more literate, they become more effective as advocates for their children with schools and other public institutions/systems.

***Further Education***

* A large proportion of those who lack basic skills are embarrassed to admit it. For example, more than 67% of these adults who are married never tell their spouses about their literacy problems. The result is social isolation that prevents many people from making progress.

**Evidence shows:** Participation in literacy programs leads to a significant increase in participation in other community organizations. Literacy programs are also a steppingstone to participation in higher-level educational programs.

* Between 1990 and 1994 a large, national evaluation of adult literacy programs was conducted and funded under the Adult Education Act. The National Evaluation of Adult Education survey collected data from 2,619 programs. Among the findings:

• Adult Basic Education students who continued in a program from a pretest to a posttest received a mean of 84 hours of instruction, and they attended for an average of 15 weeks. On average, their gain was 15 points on the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE)—a significant gain. In terms of grade level,9 students advanced from an average 6.1 grade level on the TABE to a 7.4 grade level—i.e., they advanced 1.3 grade levels in 15 weeks.

• ESL students received on average 120 hours of instruction and attended 14 weeks

between pretests and posttests. Their learning gain on the California Adult Student

Assessment System (CASAS) was five points (also a significant gain).

* Other data also show impressive gains. For example:

• In 2000–2001, 21,037 Laubach Literacy students advanced at least one literacy level

(roughly equivalent to one grade level). This is out of 170,200 students served, of whom

many dropped out early for personal reasons. ( most Laubach-affiliated programs specialize in working with the most challenging students—those reading below a fifth-grade level.)

• A study of family literacy programs found that adults who remain in classes for at least 150 hours show an average gain in reading (or grade) level of 1.5 years.

* For 2000–2001, Laubach Literacy programs reported the following student accomplishments:

• 7,790 students obtained a job or better job

• 5,164 students enrolled for their GED

• 2,298 students completed their GED

• 1,903 students obtained a driver’s license

• 1,544 students obtained U.S. citizenship

• 1,309 students voted for the first time

* Literacy Volunteers of America, Inc. (LVA) reported similar student gains and added a few additional categories.12 The 65,231 students they served in 2001 report the following first-time accomplishments, among others:

• 3,338 used a library

• 2,046 read to their children

• 2,084 learned basic computer skills

• 518 obtained a driver’s license

• 544 obtained U.S. citizenship

• 540 registered to vote

* A study undertaken by the Annie E. Casey Foundation titled “Chicago’s Child-Parent Centers: Proving the Value of Early Childhood Education in the Real World” concluded that the programs ***paid back $7.14 for every one dollar spent. The financial benefits came from:***

• increased earnings due to better jobs (which resulted from students’ higher educational attainment)

• reduced child-care costs

• additional taxes paid by participants because of higher earnings

• lower criminal justice costs due to lower arrest rates

• savings to crime victims of crimes not committed

• savings to school systems due to the number of students not kept back or not placed in special education

* ***In a nationwide telephone survey of 5,401 adults who had been in adult basic education programs and who had been out of the programs at least six months:***

***• 37% reported that they had been employed at the time they had entered their program; and***

***• 69% were employed at the time of the survey.***

* A study undertaken by the National Center for Family Literacy, “The Power of Even Start Family Literacy: A Summary of Findings from a Follow-Up Study.”looked at 15 exemplary family literacy programs and 508 adults who had been out of those programs from one to six years. The study found that 50% of these adults had obtained either a job or a better job.
* A separate family literacy study undertaken by the National Center for Famil Literacy, “*Follow-up Study of the Impact of the Kenan Trust Model for Family Literacy*” looked at adults one year after having completed 12 months in a program. Upon entry into the program, fewer than 10% had been employed; at follow-up, 35% were employed.
* Another study looked at eight representative literacy programs in Tennessee. It noted,

“At the baseline [start of program], 32% of participants were employed, as compared with 48% one year after enrollment in a literacy program.” (Bingman, M. et al., Changes in Learners’ Lives One Year After Enrollment in Literacy Programs: An Analysis from the Longitudinal Study of Adult Literacy Participants in Tennessee, Cambridge, MA: Natl. Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy, 1999.)

* Studies have found that as adults on welfare enter and stay with literacy programs, their welfare reliance tends to decline:

• A study of 15 Even Start family literacy programs showed that 42% of former participants who had received welfare when they enrolled had reduced the amount of public assistance they received. (Hayes, A., The Power of Even Start Family Literacy: A Summary of Findings from a Follow-Up Study, Louisville, KY: Natl. Center for Family Literacy, 1997.)

• The Beder report (the large national study that analyzed data from many different studies) found that, of programs that tracked welfare dependence, 80% reported an overall reduction in welfare dependence by their students. (Beder, H., T*he Outcomes and Impacts of Adult Literacy Education in the United States*, NCSALL Reports #6, Cambridge, MA: Natl. Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy 1999.)

**Source:** ProLiteracy America. “U.S. Adult Literacy Programs: Making a Difference. A Review of Research on Positive Outcomes Achieved by Literacy Programs and the People They Serve.” March 2003.

<http://literacyconnects.org/img/2011/11/US-Adult-Lit-Programs-Making-a-Difference-Research-review.pdf>