



health workforce community



# What I've Learned Over 20 Years in Adult Education

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Executive Director, Wisconsin Literacy

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# Level Setting: This is my experience



**Everyone's program is different and some of this will not be relevant.**

But the underlining thoughts remain the same regardless



**I've been on the ground much longer than in this position and I want to share what I found.**

# Outline of the Conversation

## Outreach

How to Reach and Engage Adult Learners.

## Assessments and Intake

When, Why and How

## Relaying Class Expectations

Setting Up Learners for Success Through Clarity and Structure.

## The Importance Of Storytelling

Why Should People Care About Your Work and How to Get Them to Say What You Want Them to Say.



# My Roles in Adult Education

UW-Milwaukee: Educational Studies, Focus Adult Education

- Studied How Adult are Different From Children

@ Social Development Commission

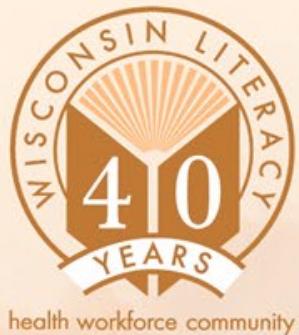
- Intern, Coordinator, Chief GED Examiner

@YWCA SEW

- Manager, Director, Senior Program Director

@Wisconsin Literacy, Inc.

- Executive Director



# My Shameless Self-Promotion

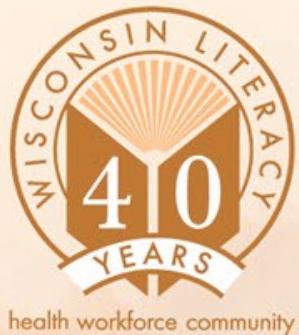
## Created 5.09 HSED Program @SDC

- Cohort based
- Practical Application Reviews
- Short time frame (all or nothing)

## Created 5.09 HSED Program at YWCA SEW

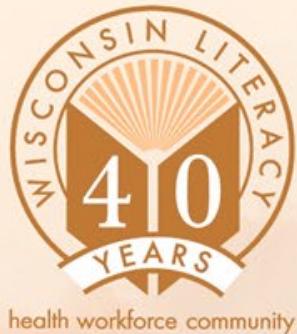
- Cohort based, modular, test out options
- Identified as National Best Practice- What Works Cities Initiative Bloomberg Philanthropies
- Workforce Innovation Grant
- RUSD Competency Based Credit Recovery

## Co-Authored State of Wisconsin Health Assessment



# While Making This Presentation

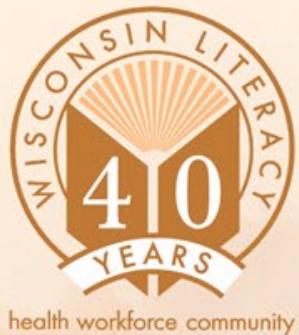
- Walk through a student's journey through our programs
  - Intake (but that isn't the start of our journey as educators)
  - Testing/ Placement (Bias, but necessary)
  - Classroom Management (events during the journey)
  - Telling the Story of Success or Struggles



# Outreach

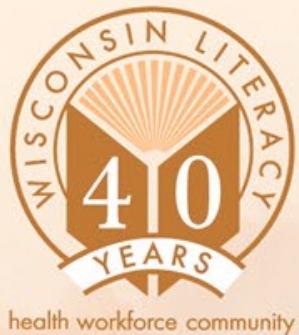
## How to Reach and Engage Adult Learners

- Know Your Community
- What Services it Needs
- Where You Fit



# Knowing Your Community

- Community Characteristics**
- Demographics**
- Educational Background**
- Economic Factors**
- Barriers to Participation**



# Why Is This Important for Outreach?

Understanding **who you serve and what they need** helps you:

- Find the right audience
- Choose the right channels
- Communicate in ways that resonate



# Where to Find This Information

## American Community Survey (ACS)

- Population Size & Age
- Educational Attainment
- Race/Ethnicity
- Language & English Proficiency
- Income & Poverty
- Employment Status
- Housing & Transportation



# Now What?



**Promote What You Do Best**



**Use Multi-Sector Collaboration**

Local City Government,  
Resource Providers and Places  
Where the Learners Bottleneck



**Ensure the Message is  
What is Important to the  
Learner**



**Real Learner Success**



**Leverage Trusted Relationships**

Peer-to-Peer and Word of Mouth



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# Assessments and Intake

*Why, When and How*

## 80/20 Rule

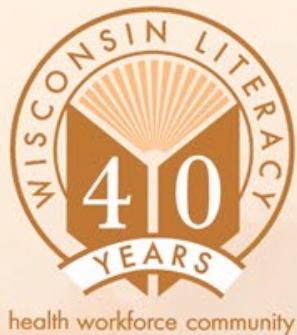
- A “thing needs to work for 80% if you use it on everyone
  - This should take 20% of your time
- The remaining 20% need individualized services
  - This should take 80% of your time



# Assessments

## What Are Standardized Assessments?

- Formal, consistent tests used to measure adult learners' skills in reading, writing, math, and sometimes English language proficiency.
- They help programs place learners appropriately and track progress.



# Assessments

## Why They Matter

1. Time is our real currency
2. Is the stuff your doing working
3. Success is not always measured in a test
  - Shows learner growth over time and program effectiveness.
4. This also helps storytelling
  - Data from assessments often ties to funding and performance metrics.



# From Assessments to a Holistic Approach

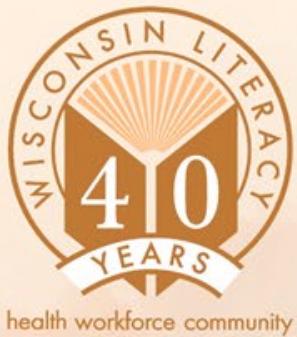
- **Limitations of Standardized Tests**
  - Standardized assessments have biases and may misrepresent marginalized learners' true abilities.
- **Combining Quantitative and Qualitative Data**
  - Integrating test results with interviews, observations, and goal-setting enriches learner evaluation.
- **Areas to Add Outside of Assessments**
  - Participant Agreement
  - Personalized Education Plan
  - Gather Demographic Information
  - Letter From the Learner



# Participant Agreement

## Key Points: Rights and Responsibilities

- **Purpose:** Ensures a safe, respectful, and productive learning environment.
- **Core Areas:**
  - **Respect for Everyone:** No offensive language, proper etiquette, report issues.
  - **Academic Expectations:** Complete work with 80%+, meet state and program requirements.
  - **Attendance:** Strict attendance policy; active participation required.
  - **Miscellaneous Rules:** The catch all .
- **Acknowledgment:** Students sign agreement to confirm understanding and compliance.



# Why This is Best Practice in Adult Learning

- **Safe Environment:** Clear rules reduce conflict and anxiety.
- **Inclusive:** Promotes respect and equity.
- **Accountability:** Adults thrive with clear expectations.
- **Engagement:** Active participation improves learning.
- **Workplace Prep:** Mirrors professional standards.
- **Integrity:** Protects program quality and funding.



# Personal Education Plans

- The form helps educators and students create a Personalized Roadmap for academic success
  - Personal Goals
  - Reason for Taking Classes
  - Establishes Their Expectations for Agency
  - Identifies Barriers
  - Sets Realistic Timelines
  - It Gives Them Individual Attention Before the Journey Fully Begins



# Demographics

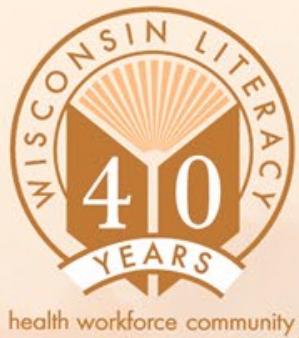
## Why We Gather This Information

- **Name, date of birth, gender**
  - Anchors the student's record
- **Contact and location (phone, email, ZIP)**
  - Let's us follow up, send reminders, and connect to nearby services
- **Language and education background**
  - Prevents frustration and helps us tailor programming
- **Employment status and income range (by household size)**
  - Helps us connect students to the right supports
- **Disability status**
  - Integrates needed supports into the PEP
- *We allow “Prefer not to answer,” but collect enough to truly know and serve each student.*



# The Importance of Storytelling

Using Narrative to Teach, Motivate, And Connect.



# Storytelling as the Thread of Our Work

- Outreach, intake, assessments, agreements, and PEPs all sit on top of one thing
  - Every tool is built around a human story
- This section is about how we honor and use those stories



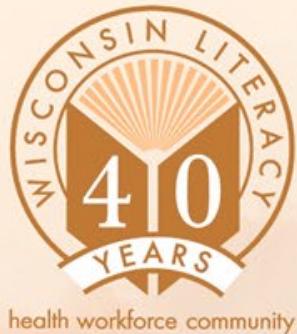
# Outreach: From Data to Neighbors

- Community data and ACS numbers show who is out there
- Stories turn numbers into neighbors
- One learner's story makes the statistics human



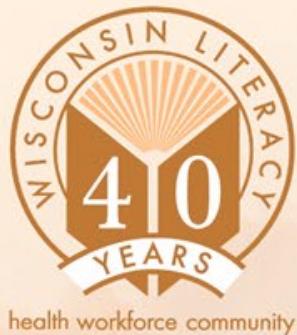
# Assessments: What the Test Misses

- Standardized tests help, but they have limits and bias
- Scores cannot see the full person
- Stories fill in what the data does not show



# Agreements and PEPs: Building a Safe Environment

- Participant agreement creates a consistent, predictable classroom
- Free of distractions, focused on safety and respect
- PEP and demographics help us support learners in and beyond class
- Stories turn boxes and signatures into a living narrative



# From Heavy Bricks to a Rebuilt Community

- Each person carries a 'brick' in their chest
  - Sharing a story sets one brick down
  - Many stories together show the wall of our collective effort
  - Bricks rebuild the local economy and community

# What I've Learned About Change

- Programs do not change communities, people do
- Tools and tests matter, but stories move hearts
- Stories told with consent and respect attract real investment



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[wislit.org/FallConference](http://wislit.org/FallConference)

