
use your
POWER
for good.

2021-22 Annual Report
Literacy Council of Bowie & Miller Counties



Dear friends,

The 2021-22 fiscal year was record breaking for the Literacy Council of Bowie and Miller Counties. The board of directors and I decided to share our first ever annual report so you could see the inspiring ways that your kindness is helping us push forward our goal to provide empowerment through education.



We believe that an educated Texarkana is a better Texarkana, and our mission is to use literacy as a catalyst for positive change that impacts us all. Whether you made a donation, purchased a ticket to an event, or generously gave services or goods from your company, your support made an incredible impact.

We know our adult learners are finding success because we monitor and measure data on their progress, and more importantly, we hear them talk about the exciting things happening in their lives. Our students are meeting academic and personal goals, gaining confidence, and finding employment. It is really beautiful to watch their hard work pay off, and you will see some of those highlights in this report.

None of these success stories could have been possible without you, and we are so thankful you were willing to step up and use your power for good when you chose to support the Literacy Council.

All my best,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jenny Walker". The script is fluid and cursive.

Jenny Walker,
Executive Director





According to the National Center for Education Statistics—a division of the U.S. Department of Education—about a quarter of adults in our service area (23% Bowie and 25% Miller County) function at "level one" for literacy.

People at this level are at risk for difficulties using or comprehending written information. Adults at the upper end of level one can read short texts and understand the meaning well enough to perform simple tasks like filling out a form but cannot comprehend information, make inferences, or connect ideas across multiple sources. Those who fall at the low end of level one may be only able to understand basic vocabulary or find very specific information on a familiar topic.

With your help, we are making a difference.

Data Source: <https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/piaac/skillsmap>

The Plot Thickens



Students in the Literacy Council's summer theatre program write a script for a fairy tale. Children's program options in 2022 included theatre, ACT/college prep, and family literacy. The Council also supported the Four States Urban Development program through the summer Read and Rise program and after school homework help at the Washington campus. Beginning in January, our Kids Club will meet on the Texarkana College campus and serve as childcare for students taking evening ESL and GED classes.

[Fun Fact]

Each month, the Literacy Council hosts a celebration luncheon where we fellowship together and give out awards to students who have made progress toward their goals. At each luncheon, we also recognize our Student of the Month, and we make a toast for continued change with sparkling apple cider. It's our favorite time of the month!

Here we GROW!

Expansion included two new locations in 2022



In 2020, the Literacy Council had to downsize from its 4,000 square-foot campus on Main Street because of financial strain caused by the pandemic. For more than a year, the Council operated out of an 800 square-foot office while it recovered. When the opportunity to move into an 1,800 square-foot space opened up two doors down in Summerhill Square, the Literacy Council was thrilled to expand.

In addition to the location in Summerhill Square, the Literacy Council had an incredible opportunity to join other local non-profits as part of the We Are Washington community center on the Arkansas side of town. Most of the Council's adult learning programs are based out of our Texas-side location, but Washington caters to children's programs. This summer, the Literacy Council was able to offer a children's theatre program as well as a summer reading program thanks to a partnership we have with Tina Jones and the Four States Urban Development program.

These expansions allowed the Council to serve almost 400 people in 2022 through programs, classes, tutoring, and special events.

TAMU-T's 'Big Event' brings life to Literacy Council's new Washington location

Each year the Texas A&M University—Texarkana students and staff participate in a full day of community service projects, and this year, the Literacy Council's Washington classroom was one of the project sites. Volunteers helped us get the classroom in order by decorating, writing thank you notes, and assembling student welcome folders. We were so grateful for their help!



AmeriCorps members serve the community

Last year four Arkansas Reads AmeriCorps members served as tutors for the Literacy Council. Beth Carlton, Jackie Hudson, Derrick Keener, and Nere Soto helped adult learners get and stay on track for success, and our AmeriCorps members participated in multiple days of service representing the Council at local events like the Juneteenth celebration and those held in remembrance of September 11.

AmeriCorps is a federally supported program that offers a stipend for those interested in serving the community through service organizations like the Literacy Council. Our AmeriCorps members receive a small stipend and may qualify for an education award. Our AmeriCorps members are an important part of our team, and we are proud of our partnership with AmeriCorps and Arkansas Reads.



AmeriCorps member Derrick Keener talks about the Literacy Council at an event at Mt. Orange Church.

[Fun Fact]

The Literacy Council served almost 400 people in 2022 through programs, classes, tutoring, and special events.



Second Annual
**LOCALS FOR
LITERACY
MUSICFEST**

**AREA BANDS + FOOD
VENDORS + FUN**

Hopkins Icehouse
09/16/2023

[Fun Fact]

If you select the Literacy Council of Bowie and Miller Counties as your preferred charity through the Amazon Smile program, Amazon will donate a small portion of their sales directly to us. Those pennies add up, and it's an easy way to support us just by doing your regular online shopping. We also have an Amazon Wishlist where you can purchase things we need and never have to leave the comfort of your home!



Save the Date

**EAST TEXAS
GIVING DAY**



April 25, 2023

Learn more at

www.easttexasgivingday.org

Taking the show on the road Council leaders represent Texarkana on state, national levels

The Literacy Council is leading the way in professional circles for quality adult learning programs, and in 2022, Literacy Council leaders presented at state conferences for both Texas and Arkansas as well as at a national conference for literacy.

In August, Executive Director Jenny Walker and 100 Families Coordinator Kristina Rivas-Jones presented at the Literacy Texas conference. Their workshop "Resolving Recruitment and Attendance Issues through Community Collaboration," highlighted the incredible partnerships the Literacy Council has made with other Texarkana organizations to strengthen efforts to get and keep students enrolled.



Walker and Rivas-Jones

In October, the duo presented a session "The Intern Initiative," at the ProLiteracy national conference. In this workshop, Walker and Rivas-Jones shared about Literacy Council's partnership with Texas A&M University Texarkana to provide quality experiential learning programs for a variety of majors.

Also in October, Walker presented, "A Solid Foundation: How Collective Impact Improves Stability for Adult Learners," at the Arkansas Association of Community and Adult Education conference in Little Rock.

Each of these opportunities allowed the Literacy Council to showcase the incredible work happening in Texarkana.



From Crisis to Career

Literacy Council brings together community partners for the 100 Families initiative

In March, the Literacy Council launched the 100 Families initiative that brings together non-profits, faith-based organizations, government agencies, and other community partners to coordinate the efforts of families in crisis situations. The Alliance, which serves families in both Bowie and Miller Counties, includes more than 50 community partners who are committed to working together to solve complex problems. In only a short amount of time, the 100 Families Alliance of Bowie and Miller Counties has helped more than 50 families and has positively impacted more than 100 school-aged children. 100 Families Coordinator Kristina Rivas-Jones said that even though the program serves families as a whole, our priority is placed on helping the children.

"We help parents get on track so that they can provide a stable home for their children," Rivas-Jones said.

"Oftentimes kids struggle in school because of unstable home lives. We believe that if we can help the parents, ultimately, we will help the children."

Each month, partners meet at the Literacy Council for a monthly meeting to learn about the services each organization provides and to discuss ways we can support one another's work.

"We have some incredible resources in Texarkana," Rivas-Jones said. "But, if we are not communicating, we are not working as effectively and efficiently when trying to help families connect with other community resources. By working together through the 100 Families Alliance, we can make referrals between partners and work together instead of in silos. It's so exciting to see people's lives being changed because of this work. When we work together, everyone wins."

**"When we
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everyone
wins."**

100 Families Success Stories

The following situations feature real 100 Families clients, but we have changed names and used stock photos in order to protect dignity and privacy.

Seeing a young woman cradling her newborn baby as she is being wheeled out of the hospital can warm the heart. For Taylor, a 100 Families client, what cannot be seen are the struggles she faced leading up to that point and the true generational change this occasion represents. Before giving birth, Taylor had been recently released from a woman's detention center for inpatient addiction treatment, in lieu of jail time. The norm



for women in her family was to turn over the baby to child protective services custody after delivery, yet this young lady defied all the odds and became the first in her family to leave the hospital with her bundle of joy. Taylor knows the work does not end there, but with the guidance and encouragement of her case manager, church, employer, and other community organizations, she is now on a path toward stability for herself and her infant daughter.

Good help is hard to find - or is it that we are not giving potentially good employees a chance? Before finding 100 Families, Janice was living outdoors and in abandoned buildings. She cleaned up each day in local park bathroom sinks. Even though she was homeless for more than six months, she applied for jobs daily using computers at the public library. She was working hard to pull herself out of her situation. When she was able to land job interviews, she had to walk across town in the hot and humid spring and summer months of East Texas. Possible employers often met her with "don't call us, we'll call you." She was homeless, but she was not hopeless.

Fortunately, she interviewed with someone who was familiar with our work. He reached out and agreed to take a chance on hiring her. Janice and her case manager made a plan and worked with community partners to help secure housing and transportation. Within six weeks of her first visit to the Literacy Council, Janice moved into an apartment and is now thriving and happy.



[Fun Fact]



All 100 Families Alliance partners sign a declaration when they join. This short video of that declaration is used state-wide in Arkansas, and all of the children featured are Texarkana kids.

The Dark Corner of Dyslexia

One Literacy Council tutor helped brighten up one student's world

Growing up in rural Arkansas, Literacy Council student Oree Bradley faced many challenges as a child. When rains would wash out the dirt road he lived on, a lack of transportation to and from school made it hard for him to attend regularly. When he did go, he was slow to learn, so teachers focused on other students. Even though he was given a high school diploma, Mr. Bradley never learned to read.

"Because I couldn't read, I missed out on a lot of things in life," Mr. Bradley said. "I was not able to go to the military, and I was stuck without a lot of options for work."

**"Because I
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He described this inability to read as a "dark corner" where he stayed for more than 60 years. That all changed when he came to the Literacy Council and began working with Patti Huckabee, a retired dyslexia therapist.

"I saw that he was showing some of the classic signs of dyslexia," Mrs. Huckabee said. "I wanted to try to help, and once we began working together, it was like a light

came on for him."

Mrs. Huckabee and Mr. Bradley have been working together since the spring, and even in that short amount of time, he has made incredible progress. His main motivation was to be able to read the Bible, and on Father's Day, he read Job 11:18 for his church congregation: "having hope will give you courage," a fitting verse for his educational journey. Mr. Bradley continues to learn new reading skills and makes progress every single day. However, he is not the only one whose journey has been blessed.

"Working with Mr. Oree has changed my perspective completely," Mrs. Huckabee said. "Although I have a true compassion for anyone who struggles, I have never worked with someone who spent their entire life in this 'dark corner.' I have actually learned as much from him as he has from me, and I would encourage any retired teacher to come share their expertise. There is not a day that you volunteer that you aren't blessed."

Mr. Bradley's main goal is to be able to read the Bible. When he read Job 11:18 at his church, his Literacy Council family was there to celebrate. Watch the video of that moment by scanning the QR Code below.



A learning lab for everyone

Interns, leaders focus studies on Council work

Literacy Council students were not the only ones who learned through the organization's programs last year. Interns from Texas A&M University—Texarkana, as well as two leaders in the organization, were able to practice the things they studied in the classroom through hands-on work experience at the Council.

In the 2021-22 academic year, the Literacy Council was a field site for 12 college students with a variety of majors and included both undergraduate and graduate students.

Additionally, Executive Director Jenny Walker and 100 Families Coordinator Kristina Jones will graduate in 2023 with advanced degrees and have focused their research on their work with the 100 Families initiative. Both leaders feel their studies directly impact the quality of work they are able to provide as leaders at the Literacy Council.

"Understanding the barriers and needs of our most vulnerable residents from a macro level will help our case managers and staff locally provide the highest level of care while helping families move out of crisis toward stability that can be maintained," Rivas-Jones said.

Walker, said she had an especially fond moment while observing education majors teach an English as a second language class one evening at the Council.

"There was a moment where I just sat back and watched these college students teach," Walker said. "I had this great realization that every single person in that room was learning. The students were learning. The interns were learning, and I was learning. I love that the Literacy Council can provide a safe place where our interns can explore, take risks, and try the innovative strategies they learn about in their classes. We can offer a true learning lab, and that makes my nerdy teacher heart very happy."

The Literacy Council's strong internship program was featured on social media by ProLiteracy, a national organization that advocates for adult learning. Additionally, Walker and Jones were invited to speak at ProLiteracy's national conference to teach other leaders of adult learning programs about our internship success.



TAMU-T education major Jackie Hudson serves as the academic coordinator for the Literacy Council

Workforce program provides job skills, opportunities for adult learners

The Literacy Council of Bowie and Miller Counties rolled out a new workforce program that allows adult learners to gain vital employment skills for Texarkana's job market. This program is built on strong partnerships with local organizations and employers who share our vision for student success.

Our workforce program offers a wide range of assistance for job seekers, including free test preparation and certification exams for ServSafe, ACT WorkKeys, and the National Career Readiness Certificate. Workforce coordinator and AmeriCorps member Beth Carlton also provides guidance in creating resumes,



Literacy Council student Logan Webb prepares an order at Lost Pizza as part of the workforce skills program.

cover letters, and online applications. Additionally, we provide limited scholarships to cover work-related expenses that would otherwise be barriers to employment for workforce program participants (steel-toed boots, scrubs, etc.).

One of our adult learners with special needs, Logan Webb, recently landed his first job thanks to

preparation from our workforce program. Logan's mother, Christy Seastrunk, said the Literacy Council was instrumental in his success.

"We were able to connect Logan with the Literacy Council at a time when we were looking for a way to get him engaged and find a new purpose," Seastrunk said. "Through his relationship with the Literacy Council, he was able to connect with Lost Pizza. For many, many years Logan has said the job he wanted to have one day was making pizzas so when the opportunity arose with Lost Pizza, he was thrilled. Ms. Jenny Wilder has been so welcoming with Logan, making sure he has always felt part of the Lost Pizza family. He is the happiest we have ever seen now that he has purpose, feels a part of a team, and is getting to fulfill his dream of working in a pizza restaurant. This opportunity means the world to this momma's heart."

Head of the Class

Award-winning student takes on new role as peer mentor to help others find success

Like all of our adult learners, Jackie Grissom took a placement test the day she enrolled at the Literacy Council. When she missed her appointment to get the results and create a plan of action toward GED success, Executive Director Jenny Walker became concerned.

"We called her. We left messages for her, but she just would not respond," Walker said. "Then one day about six months later, she walked right in. We hugged her, told her we were happy to see her, and picked up right where we left off."



Jackie Grissom

Jackie later admitted that she did not feel confident in her test, and she was afraid to find out the results. Her feelings of inadequacy are not uncommon, but Walker said that if students can walk through the doors, the hardest part is behind them. When Jackie came back in, we all knew she was going to shine.

"I cannot imagine the amount of courage it takes for our students to walk through those doors," Walker said. "So many have only known failure when it comes to academic success, and we know they are trusting us with one more chance. We do not take that responsibility lightly. Jackie is proof that giving it one more chance is sometimes all it takes."

In the last year, Jackie has made significant progress toward her goals. She is working toward a GED and has her eyes on college. In 2022, she was named the Adult Student of the Year for the entire state of Arkansas. Locally she was the recipient of the Literacy Council's Against All Odds Award and was named Student of the Month in January.

As leaders began to make plans for the Literacy Council's growth, Walker said one of their top goals was to establish a peer mentor position. This person would be someone who has first-hand experience in overcoming the challenges our adult learners face. Grissom was a perfect candidate for the position.

"Jackie was already serving as a peer mentor before she started working in an official capacity in December," Walker said. "It is beautiful to watch her work with students

Scan this code to learn
more about Jackie's
inspiring story.



who are frustrated and immediately make them feel at ease. Her own experience allows her to connect with them in ways that our tutors cannot because she has truly been there."

Bulldog Bees



For two consecutive years, the Texarkana College team has taken home the trophy as spelling bee champions. This year the Literacy Council celebrated the purchase of a new traveling trophy named in memory of Spelling Bee enthusiast Aaron Brand. Photographed are members of the Texarkana College team Madeleine Russell, Jesse Hausler, and Joe Stark.

SAVE THE DATE

**29th annual
Spelling Bee**

2023

**6 p.m.
Saturday, April 22
SILVERMOON THEATRE**





2022-23 Board of Directors

David Watkins, Chair

Diane Engelkes

Dr. Brian Matthews, Chair-Elect

Fred Markham

Vashil Fernandez, Vice-Chair

Traci Pitman

Jennifer Harland, Secretary

Christi Shedlock

Kerry Brown, Treasurer

Dr. Kevin Williams

2022-23 Literacy Council Team

Jenny Walker, Executive Director

Kristina Rivas-Jones, 100 Families Coordinator

Beth Carlton, AmeriCorps Member and Workforce Skills Coordinator

Catherine Ellis, Intern

Jackie Grissom, Peer Mentor

Patti Huckabee, Dyslexia Therapist

Jackie Hudson, Academic Coordinator

Patsy LaRue, Office Manager

Elana McClory, Intern

Emily McMillan, Intern

Paula Moss, Intern

Brenda Pharr, Case Manager

Candi Potts, Case Manager

Nere Soto, Language Learning Coordinator

Linda Taylor, Case Manager

Jaxon Walton, Intern

Debbie Watson, VITA Tax Program Coordinator



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