



Well-Equipped AFE Can Help Solve the Problems Our Communities and Nation Now Face

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The recent killing of Charlie Kirk and the resulting finger-pointing and calls for retribution are the latest in a line of symptoms of a modern American society that is hurting and at risk of further damage. (We're not alone in this, as other countries are impacted by similar problems.) This and other shocking-and-numbing examples of violence, hatred, and negativity provide us with opportunities to do some constructive reflection on the causes and possible solutions to these problems.


In my view as a U.S. citizen of an advanced age, these problems are an outgrowth of multiple interwoven factors that have unfolded in my lifetime. They include:

- declines in meaningful, family-sustaining employment;
- environmental destruction and health conditions (remember COVID-19?) that threaten our health, livelihoods, and quality of life;
- declines in social and other support systems that our communities have historically relied on;
- over-reliance on electronic media that undermine critical thinking, social cohesion, and constructive problem-solving;
- government policies that reward the wealthy while undermining everyone else;
- distorted interpretations of civic and spiritual principles that have held families, communities, and our nation to stay together for centuries; and
- a reliance on false prophets who steer too many of us to not understand the above problems or to support simplistic and/or outright destructive "solutions" to them.

The good news is that there are pockets of U.S. society – individuals, groups, and organizations -- who have in recent years been trying to understand and do something about these problems. I support the idea that those individual, group, and organizational stakeholders should come together – at local, state, and national levels and within and across stakeholders – to participate in constructive problem-solving and action-planning on problems they have special expertise and interest in, if not all of them at the same time.

As an adult educator, I believe that *well-equipped* adult foundational education (AFE)* can be an important part of the solution to many of the above problems. *Well-equipped* AFE programs are often home-bases for community-building across social and stakeholder groups. *Well-equipped* AFE can help individuals and communities to better manage employment, health, financial, legal, and family issues. *Well-equipped* AFE can also help learners to access and use digital technologies and media in smart ways. *Well-equipped* AFE can also help historically marginalized people get other supports they need to lead productive, rewarding lives. (Current discussions of the alienation of many young people – especially young men – sound a lot like discussions of two decades ago about the "disconnected youth" unmoored from meaningful career, educational, health, and other supports in a society and economy that are going begging for new workers for emerging jobs.)

But AFE programs are often not *well-equipped*. Too often they are under-funded and hog-tied by policies and old thinking that limit their ability to play these important community-building roles. We are now



entering Adult Education and Family Literacy Week and reaching out to policy makers to ask their support for AFE. We should remind policy makers and funders that AFE can be much more than “teaching the 3Rs” (as important as literacy and math are in our emerging society). We as advocates should be making the case that well-targeted, user-friendly, adequate support from public and private sectors is vital if AFE is to be part of the problem-solving that our communities and nation now need.

* *Adult foundational education (AFE)* is used here as an umbrella term encompassing the mix of services sometimes called “adult literacy,” “adult basic education,” “adult secondary education” (or “GED/HSE preparation”), “ESL/ESOL,” and contextualized education for workforce/ workplace literacy, college preparation, citizenship preparation, family literacy, financial literacy, and other applied uses of basic skills. This term helps distinguish our field from for-credit higher education and other activities that might fall under the heading of “adult education.”