

Community-Oriented Adult Foundational Education in Urban Areas

*Hosted by the Steering Committee
of the Urban Alliance for Adult Literacy*

May 29, 2024

Let's briefly introduce ourselves (in the chat)

- Your name
- Organization and community you're based in
- Adult foundational education (AFE) "coalition" you work with, if any

Presenters: Paul Jurmo & Jessica Tomkins

Moderator: David J. Rosen

Today's agenda

1. Participants better understand:
 - strengths and limitations of current AFE;
 - features and potential benefits of community-oriented AFE;
 - how they can learn more and take action relevant to their role and context;
 - how they can get involved in the Urban Alliance.
2. Steering Committee better understands:
 - participants' interest, experience, questions related to community-oriented AFE;
 - whether/how Urban Alliance might incorporate this model into its work.

First hour: two presentations and a short Q&A.

Additional 30 minutes: further Q&A

Views expressed are of the presenters, not necessarily of Urban Alliance or ProLiteracy.

Community-Oriented AFE: Definitions

“Adult foundational education”

- Recent umbrella term for the mix of services traditionally called “adult literacy,” “GED/HSE” prep, “adult basic education,” “ESL/ESOL,” and contextualized education related to workforce/workplace literacy, citizenship prep, family literacy, health literacy . . .

“Community”

- “Community” typically refers to a geographic location (e.g., neighborhood, municipality).
- But here “community” can include social groupings with common purposes/goals, behaviors, and concerns.
- Might include demographic groups (e.g., families, or groups defined by ethnicity or race, age, gender, health status, occupation, income, disability) and social institutions or contexts they participate in (e.g., workplaces, labor unions, or healthcare, correctional, or other institutions).

About “In Community, Strength: Changing Our Minds about U.S. Adult Foundational Education”

5 volumes summarizing:

- Strengths and limitations of the current AFE field.
- A vision for more-comprehensive, better-implemented, and better-supported AFE systems responsive to a wider range of learners, their interests and needs, and the communities they are part of.
- Examples of such programs (in 12 categories).
- Resources such systems need and actions advocates might take to generate funding, policies, and other resources for systems reform at all levels.

Based on reflective experiences, dialogue, and research (by author and others cited in series).

Strengths & limitations of current AFE

AFE (despite limited supports) has positive results:

- helps some learners & diverse communities achieve some meaningful goals;
- produces useful models, practices, and professionals to build on.

AFE also is limited in . . .

- Reach: limited numbers of learners & other stakeholders benefitting.
- Relevance and requirements: not responding to broader (and inter-related) interests, needs, strengths, and realities of learners and their communities.
- Resources: inadequate, unsustainable, inefficiently targeted funds; reliance on a few sources; insufficient professional AFE workforce and research base...
- Recognition/respect as an important *profession* relevant to many needs/interests in the U.S.

We need AFE systems reform that . . .

- Builds on strengths of existing and past models in AFE and other fields, while acknowledging and avoiding ineffective thinking and practices.
- Is organized around a new vision of . . .
 - Purposes
 - Partnerships
 - Practices
 - Principles
- Uses effective strategies to plan, implement, strengthen, expand, and sustain *AFE systems*.

Key features of community-oriented AFE systems: A new vision of . . .

- Purposes: equip and empower learners, community stakeholders, and AFE itself to manage relevant opportunities and challenges.
- Partners: adult learners and diverse stakeholders in the social communities they participate in (families, neighborhoods, workplaces, healthcare, K-12, criminal justice...)
- Practices: understand learners and communities; involve relevant stakeholders; use effective instructional and management strategies; continuously monitor and improve services; and invest adequate, timely, and sustained financial and in-kind supports.
- Principles: respect, resourcefulness, resilience, reason, relevance and responsiveness (choice), constructive collaboration, commitment to high quality. . .

Key features of community-oriented AFE systems: Strategies (part 1)

Use effective, evidence-informed practices for:

Planning

- Community needs assessments to understand the diverse learners and community stakeholders who can benefit and contribute;
- Seeing “community” as both a venue/resource and goal/outcome for AFE;
- Developing customized, flexible plans to guide/ coordinate efforts.

Key features of community-oriented AFE systems: Strategies (part 2)

Use effective, evidence-informed practices for:

Implementing

- Contextualized, integrated instructional/learning and other customized supports for learners and their communities.
- Examples: “ESOL for eldercare,” digital & work-readiness skills for former inmates, “test-taking” for union members, “health/safety” and “environmental” literacy, “paperwork” for factory workers, “understanding your worker benefits and rights,” “intergenerational literacy,” “learner leadership” training and jobs...
- Organizing activities/services into coordinated, mutually supportive systems rather than isolated, fragmented projects/programs.

Key features of community-oriented AFE systems: Strategies (part 3)

Use effective, evidence-informed practices for:

Supporting

- Supporting AFE providers and others who do this work (through adequate financial and in-kind supports; capacity-building through professional jobs, staff training, pilot projects . . .)

Continuous improvement

- Monitoring, documenting, learning from, strengthening, and expanding of mutually-supportive projects into coordinated systems in which all stakeholders learn and improve their abilities to carry out their roles.

A Case Study from the Garden State



Literacy NJ Statewide Network

STUDENTS & TUTORS

4,180 students

1,321 volunteers

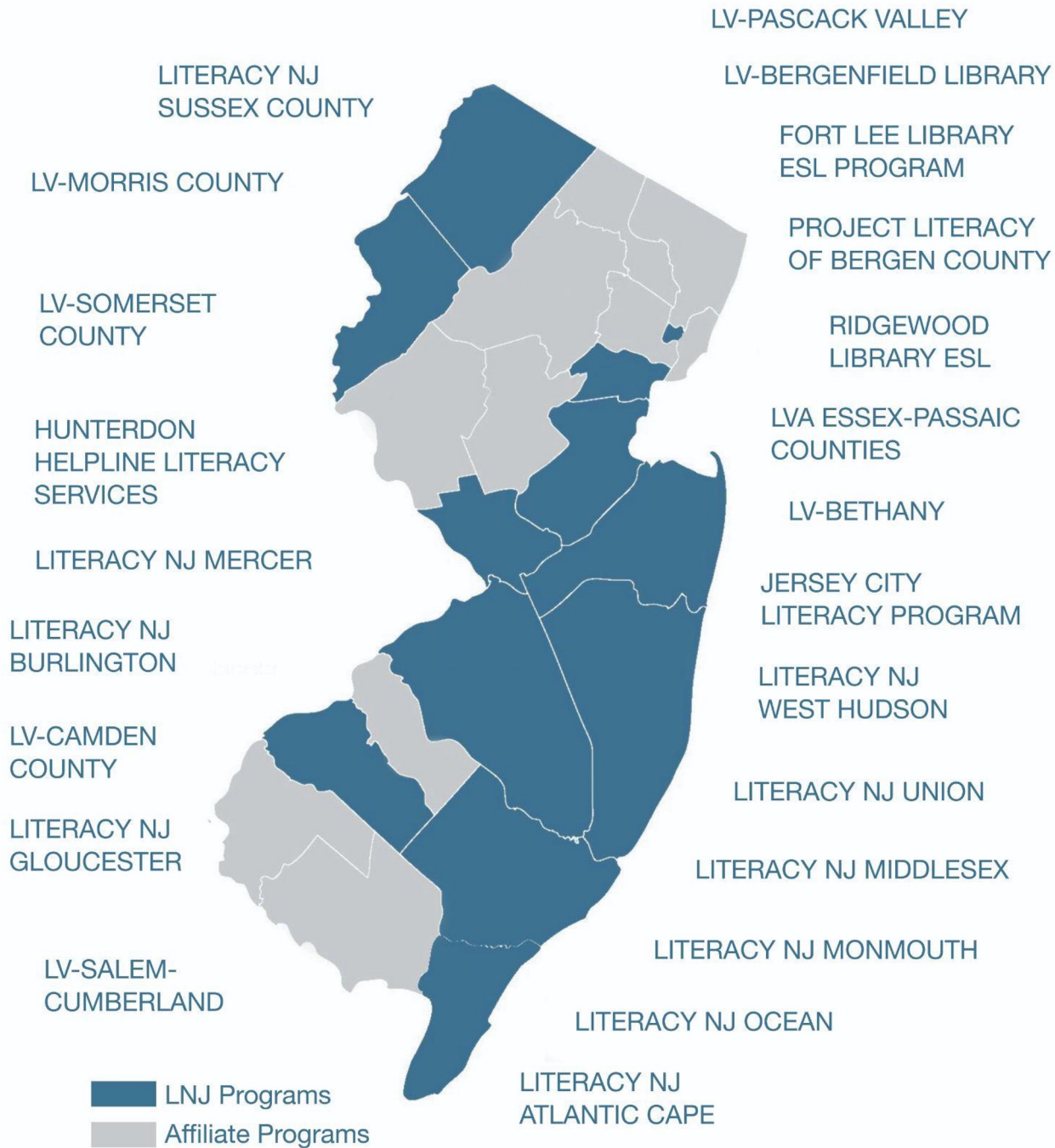
146,446 hours of learning

14,000+ goals achieved



TOP PROGRAMS OFFERED

- ESOL
- Basic Literacy
- Citizenship
- High School Equivalency
- Digital Literacy



Volunteer model

- Small group instruction
- Flexibility
- Access
- Mentorship
- Retention
- Contextualization / individualization
- Training at center of services



VOLUNTEERS AND TRAINING

In FY23, our network held **53** training courses and welcomed **445** new volunteer tutors. During the year, tutors participated in over **50** continuing education workshops.

Adult literacy includes...

- Job readiness
- Digital skills
- Civics / citizenship
- Health literacy
- Financial literacy



Having a tutor has changed my life for the better. I'm not ashamed to go to a restaurant, make my appointments by phone, or go to stores and ask for an item. I also have conferences with my children's teachers and I had the confidence to take the CNA course. Sometimes I serve as a translator for my friends and my husband is proud of me because he says that I have improved my English a lot and that makes me feel special. –Veronica

Goals

- A better outcome
- Contextualizes instruction
- Increases communication
- Prioritizes student needs

COMMUNITY IMPACT

1,113 Workers

Our students who improved their job skills, including 655 students who got a job, promotion, or raise.

2,311 Citizens

Our students who became citizens, registered to vote, voted for the first time, or became more involved in their communities. 135 students became citizens last year!

3,455 Families

Our students who became more involved in their children's education, became smarter consumers, or attained healthier lifestyles.

1,415 Computer Skills Gained

Our students who learned how to use computers and the internet.

\$3 Million Contributed

Donation to the state of New Jersey in volunteer time.

Our goal: all students identify at least one short-term goal at intake and 80% of our students achieve 1+ goals a year

FY23 Student Goals

GED/other goals

2.9%

Wellness & consume...

14.4%

Support children's ed...

16.6%

Computer skills

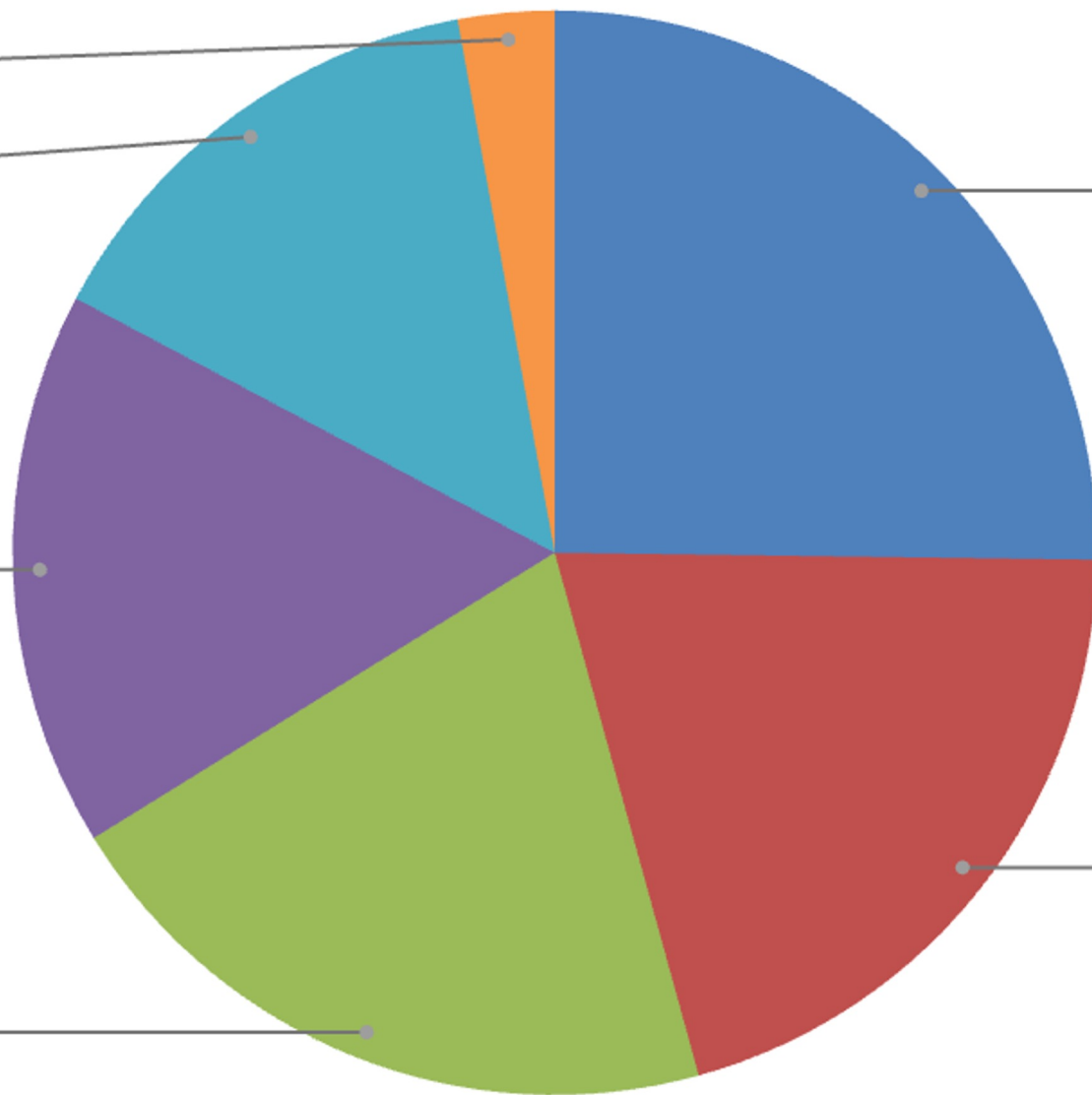
20.5%

Get a job or a better...

25.2%

Citizenship & comm...

20.5%



Student Leadership

- Input into instruction
- Space for community building
- Spokespeople
- Authors/speakers
- Volunteers
- Staff

VISIONS OF A PERFECT WORLD

JANUARY 2024

VOL. FOUR

LITERACY NEW JERSEY

STUDENT WRITING

I was so happy to start working for Literacy NJ. I had been a student there for a few years and volunteered a few hours a week in the office.

I couldn't imagine I'd have a chance to work here, even though I have an education degree from my country. Because of my English, I felt so insecure and couldn't imagine I could apply for a job like that. When I received a call from the office with a job offer, I couldn't believe I had done it. I told my husband: "Can you believe, they hired me and will pay me for my work?" At that point, I felt like I should pay someone so they would allow me to work for them for free.

I have worked for Literacy NJ for six years and plan to work for many more. Because of my background as an immigrant who came to the country with no English, I understand what our students feel, what our organization and volunteers are doing for the students, and how important it is.

So, from my perspective and experience, hiring students to work for the organization could be very successful. Both students and the organization would benefit from it.

-Julia Ibragimova

Key lessons & aspirations

- Capacity building
- Diversification of funding
- Partnerships & coalitions
- Professional development
- Organizational values

Values

Respect & Inclusion

We are committed to creating a caring, patient, and welcoming environment for all participants, embracing and celebrating diversity, and honoring the personal goals and life experience of our students and tutors.

Community & Collaboration

We recognize that our volunteers are our most important partners; we believe in sharing resources and appreciate the contributions of our volunteers, community members, and partners.

Equity

We believe that all adults deserve access to high-quality educational opportunities and we are committed to expanding access to services by removing barriers to participation.

Innovation & Leadership

Recognizing that literacy needs change and evolve, we believe in designing relevant, quality programs to help our students achieve their goals.

Celebration

We celebrate student and tutor success and find joy and happiness in our work.

Next steps (1): How a community-oriented approach might be relevant to urban AFE coalitions

- Provides arguments, models, and strategies for making AFE more relevant, better-equipped, and better-coordinated to serve multiple diverse learners and community stakeholders in urban areas.
- Helps other stakeholders to better understand how AFE might be relevant to them and worth supporting.
- Helps move away from simply asking for more funding to support the status quo.

Next steps (2): What you can do

- Learn more.
 - Read the 5-volume series, especially the Summary in Book 1.
 - Read and contact relevant sources cited.
 - Communicate with the author.
- Consider carrying out the recommendations for action (in Book 5).
- Share these ideas with others.
- Tell Urban Alliance whether and how it might incorporate this approach into its work.
- Consider how you and others might become advocates and leaders for systems reform.

Next steps (3): Leadership needed

Effective leaders are required to move forward with such systems reform (at program, local, state, and national levels). We should:

- Recognize that systems change isn't easy (in AFE and other professions) and requires well-informed, carefully-crafted strategies.
- Recognize we can build on good pieces of this puzzle previously and currently developed in AFE and other fields.
- Work with others as problem-solvers with a vision, courage, persistence, creativity, and collaborative attitude and skills.
- Involve funders and other partners to understand why and how to invest in this approach to AFE systems reform.

Questions and comments?

Please post your comments and questions to the chat and/or raise your hand now. . .

. . . (and stay on after this presentation for additional discussion if you can.)

Thanks!

We welcome your interest and participation!

The Urban Alliance for Adult Literacy Steering Committee
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“A good head and a good heart are a formidable combination.”

Nelson Mandela

Discussion (continued)

For the next 30 minutes, let's . . .

- Hear your questions and comments in the chat or by raising your hand
- Share questions and ideas for the presenters and others who are here now
- And tell us a bit about yourself and your work in urban AFE.