ABOUT US

OUR MISSION: We teach reading, writing, communication, and computer skills to Dane County adults, so they can achieve financial security, well-being, and deeper engagement with their families and the community.

We opened in 1974 as Madison Area Literacy Council, housed in a church basement on the southside. That year, 12 adult students were tutored by 12 volunteers teaching essential reading, writing, and English skills.

We now serve over 1,000 adults every year with the help of over 900 volunteers in programs held in over 30 locations across Dane County!

WHAT IS LOW LITERACY?

People who are low literate struggle to:

- understand labels on medicine bottles
- help children with homework
- complete job applications or duties
- effectively communicate with doctors & teachers

WHY ARE SOME ADULTS LOW LITERATE?

Between birth and kindergarten, if a child's parent does not regularly read to them or invest time in learning activities, most likely that child will grow up to be low-literate. Reasons parents may be unable to read to their child:

- They are low-literate
- They do not understand the value of reading to their child
- They work multiple jobs to support the family; too busy

Other adults are low-literate because they dropped out of school at a young age in order to work to support their families, or for other environmental reasons.

A surprising fact for many of us is that adults who are low-literate often get by in the world without anyone else knowing they struggle to read or write. The secret is kept from family members, coworkers, and friends. You probably know someone who secretly struggles with literacy.

The truth is: 1 in 8 adults in Dane County is considered low-literate.
WHO ARE THE STUDENTS?

- All Literacy Network students are adults living/working in Dane County
- Students and their families are low-income
- Immigrants and refugees in our programs come from over 70 countries
- ESL students have a variety of backgrounds, from stay-at-home moms to former doctors or teachers --but due to poor English skills, they are stuck in low wage jobs
- Many students read/write below an 8th grade level; most below 5th grade
- Students learning computer skills don’t know how to use email, format letters, or understand the internet
- Some are studying to obtain their GED

WHAT PROGRAMS ARE OFFERED?

Every semester we offer dozens of free group classes taught by professional instructors who are paid staff, covering the essential goals of our students:

- Basic English (ESL Levels 0-4)
- English for Employment/Workplace English
- English for Parents
- Basic Computer Skills
- Citizenship Exam prep
- GED Exam prep

We also offer TUTORING PROGRAMS populated by screened and trained volunteer tutors helping our students with:

- English as a Second Language (ESL), for immigrants/refugees
- Essential Literacy, for adults who already speak English but need to improve basic reading and writing skills (or rudimentary computer skills)
- GED Test Prep
- Citizenship Tutoring

HOW DO GROUP TUTORING PROGRAMS WORK?

Each semester students & tutors sign up for a weekly 2-hour class. Each class has up to 8 tutors/students enrolled. A Session Leader creates weekly lesson plans for each tutor/student pair, based on individual students’ skills and goals (which are assessed before the semester starts).
EXPECTATIONS OF ALL VOLUNTEERS

Always be polite and courteous – as a volunteer, you are an ambassador of Literacy Network. Carry out your shift in a pleasant and professional manner. Smile! Be welcoming to others. If you become uncomfortable with any situation during your shift, seek out your Session Leader or program director for guidance.

Volunteers are expected to report to their assigned location at least 5 minutes prior to the start of their shift. This will provide time to check in, get settled, and be ready to start.

You should notify your Session Leader at least 24 hours prior to your shift if you are unable to volunteer as scheduled or anticipate running late.

Please refrain from wearing flip-flops, short shorts, mini-skirts, spaghetti-strap tanks, muscle shirts, or other beach-appropriate clothes. We work with a variety of adults from cultures throughout the world and dressing as if you are attending a friend’s cook-out is inappropriate and unprofessional.

Silence and put away your cellphone during your volunteer shift.

You will be patient, professional, and supportive with students, Session Leaders, staff members, and other volunteers. We are a non-profit agency that works very hard to fulfill our mission, and no person or system is perfect. If you have questions or need help, ask us!

VOLUNTEER FAQS

Who should I contact if I will miss a session?

Your weekly Session Leader will need to be notified, and you’ll get his/her contact info at the start of the semester from your Program Manager. Program Managers:

- ESL Group Tutoring: **Molly** via molly@litnetwork.org or (608) 244-3911 ext. 45
- GED or Essential Literacy Tutoring: **Marie K** via mariek@litnetwork.org or (608) 244-3911 ext. 35
- GED Classroom Support: Cassie via cassie@litnetwork.org or (608) 244-3911 ext. 85

If I’d like to tutor again after taking a couple semesters off, do I need to reapply and go through training again?

Tutors active in their program within the last 2 years do not need to reapply or get trained again – just contact your Program Manager (listed above) and let them know you’d like to get on the roster. If it’s been longer than 2 yrs (or you want to tutor in a different program), you will need to reapply on our website (www.litnetwork.org/volunteer)

I’m nervous about tutoring; I’ve never done it before. What if I’m a bad tutor?

Relax! We’ve been training tutors for more than 40 years, and you’ll be given thorough training, so you know what lesson plans look like and how to best implement them. If you are patient, can listen more than talk, and if you can occasionally say, “You’re doing a great job and I’m proud of you,” then you will be a GREAT tutor!