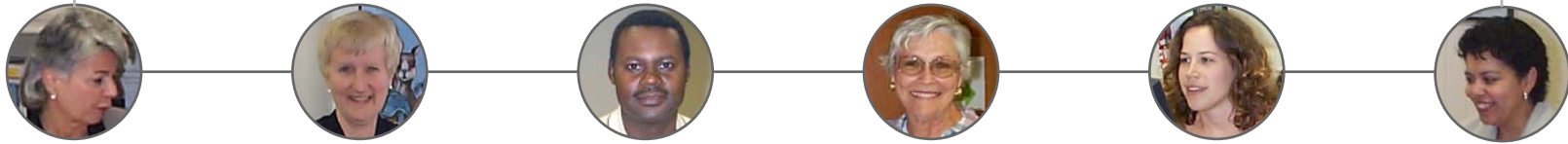


Community Partnerships for Adult Learning

Partnership Profiles



The Palm Beach County Literacy Coalition and its partners in Palm Beach County, Florida

The Palm Beach County Literacy Coalition promotes literacy activities, coordinates services, and operates a literacy hotline with the help of many partners across the county.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS IN PALM BEACH COUNTY . . .

- **The Communications Committee** involves media representatives in promoting literacy, recognizing learners' achievements, and recruiting learners and volunteers.
- **The Palm Beach County Bar Association's Lawyers for Literacy Committee** helps sponsor literacy events and supplies volunteers for literacy activities.

AND WHY THEY WORK . . .

- **Leadership comes from local businesses with a vested interest in literacy.** *The Palm Beach Post* needs readers, and Palm Beach County needs literate residents.
- **Media involvement brings literacy issues to the fore.** Besides providing support for literacy activities, media partners build community awareness of literacy issues and services.
- **Inclusive events bring partners and the community together in support of literacy services.** Events provide public recognition for adult learners and Coalition partners and keep literacy issues in the public eye.
- **Early success paves the way for more partnerships.** The literacy hotline was an uncontroversial way to begin the Coalition, and this first success led to more partnerships.
- **Egos are left at the door.** Partners put aside their own agendas to focus on the community-wide issue of adult literacy.
- **Natural connections are creatively exploited.** Lawyers working with non-English-speaking clients have a natural interest in helping them become literate—and in having their law firms seen as good community citizens.

INTRODUCTION

When I got here [from Haiti], I could not speak or understand English, so a friend of mine got me a job picking fruit around Sebring, a town north of Lake Okeechobee. I was working 10 hours a day, six days a week. When I asked my boss for more money, he told me that to get ahead in this country I would have to learn to speak, write and understand English.

I heard about DePorres Place through the Haitian radio station from West Palm Beach. At this same time, I learned my wife and two of our children had been murdered in our home in Haiti.

I still had two children dependent upon me, even though they lived with relatives down there. I needed to learn English! So I enrolled at DePorres Place and began my studies with my tutor. He kept telling me that if I wanted to learn English, I had to speak English whenever possible – even with my friends! And this is what I did. . . .

My tutor and new friend, Bob, has been with me for three years and he makes learning fun. I thank DePorres Place for helping me to be successful. I have had so many opportunities here to improve myself, and I thank all of you for your support of literacy programs for adults, children, and families. (*The Palm Beach Post*, March 30, 2003, page 7D)

As Palm Beach County resident and adult learner Adony Daout read his essay, tears flowed freely among the group of community members gathered at The Breakers Hotel for the annual luncheon to celebrate literacy. Because of a literacy hotline created, advertised, and staffed by the Palm Beach County Literacy Coalition, adults like Adony find their way to literacy services—and change their lives—every day.



Adony Daout

The Coalition, founded by a partnership of media representatives and adult education service providers in Palm Beach County in 1989, made its first priority the creation of a toll-free literacy hotline to channel all interested adults and volunteers to the appropriate providers. The Coalition continues to maintain the hotline, but now it also coordinates literacy services ranging from pre-school to adult basic education, hosts several high-profile fund-raising and awareness events, provides volunteer training, and runs recruitment campaigns for learners and volunteers.

BACKGROUND

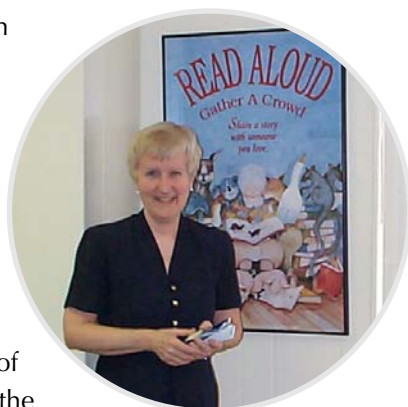
Twenty-two percent of adults in Palm Beach County don't have the skills to read a bus schedule accurately, balance their checkbooks, or speak English well enough to negotiate everyday situations successfully. Before 1989, this population was operating under the radar screen. Although outsiders may stereotype Palm Beach County as an enclave of rich snowbirds in mansions by the sea, this county the size of Rhode Island has a large proportion of adults needing literacy services.

As a frequent volunteer in her community, the founder of the Coalition had a passion for making a difference in peoples' lives. After becoming a senior executive at *The Palm Beach Post* and attending a conference on literacy in 1988, Gail Howden set out to research the extent of the problem in Palm Beach County and what literacy services were already available. What she found was multiple service providers with little coordination, adults with little sense of how to find services, and a community with little knowledge of the need for adult literacy services. Realizing that a larger, more cohesive organizational structure was needed, she invited leaders from other media outlets, the United Way, and the Workforce Alliance to discuss the issue.

Although those at the table recognized the need for coordination, at first they were unwilling to cross their turf boundaries. After many conversations and much negotiating, everyone agreed that the creation of a literacy hotline could be a first common goal. The group envisioned a central toll-free number that adults, volunteers, and community members could call for information on literacy in Palm Beach County. Soon thereafter, a local crisis center offered a phone line, the emerging Coalition created an intake sheet to track calls, and the hotline—and the Coalition—were off and running.

One early test of how these partners would work together came in the form of an individual adult learner who clearly needed multiple services from several providers. Ms. Howden sat down with school and library staff and suggested that they create a model for combining their services to help this person. By working together to help a real adult with real needs, the partners were able to set aside their own agendas and turf issues dissipated. In this way, the Coalition engendered a spirit of cooperation and established itself as the coordinating body for a wide range of literacy services in the county.

The establishment of the hotline was an impetus for the growth of the Coalition and a surge in community awareness of literacy issues. After a few years, the original partners decided it was necessary to hire staff for the Coalition. In 1992, Darlene Kostrub, the present executive director, was hired, given a small salary, a desk, and no benefits. Now with a full-time staff of fifteen, she has dramatically increased the Coalition's scope and outreach. Coalition partners unanimously praise Ms. Kostrub's enthusiasm, passion, and leadership skills as the glue that holds it all together. As one adult



Darlene
Kostrub

educator noted, Ms. Kostrub clearly defines the focal point of the Coalition's efforts. She "knows how to celebrate the students and bring the limelight to them."

The Coalition coordinates all literacy activities in the county, ranging from early childhood literacy efforts and a program that puts books in pediatricians' offices to adult basic education and English-language learner services. Money, volunteers, learners, and in-kind contributions flow into the Coalition's offices and are then distributed to programs and locations throughout the county. The Coalition's recent successes include:

- Recruiting 3,209 adult learners and volunteers and directing them to more than 60 learning sites in 2002-2003.
- Working with 25 attorneys who read books to children in elementary schools on *Read Across Palm Beach County* day.
- Raising \$25,500 in 2002 for literacy during the AT&T Wireless *Great Grown-Up Spelling Bee*.
- Helping 200 employees in local businesses improve their English speaking and reading skills through workplace literacy classes.
- Distributing over 50,000 new children's books to at-risk children and families throughout the county.
- Distributing a health literacy kit to doctors in 38 hospitals and coordinating literacy outreach to 22 pediatricians' offices.
- Hosting training for volunteers and childcare providers.
- Providing scholarships to pay for GED testing fees.

Each of these efforts brings the Coalition partners closer to achieving their goal of "universal literacy in Palm Beach County." (For more information on the Coalition, visit <http://www.pbcliteracy.org/>). View the Coalition's manual for volunteer literacy programs at http://www.pbcliteracy.org/task_force.html.

ADULT EDUCATION IN PALM BEACH COUNTY

The Palm Beach County Public School District, the fifteenth largest school district in the nation, has the primary responsibility for adult basic education and English literacy classes in the county. About 60 percent of the adult education classes offered by the district are classes in English for speakers of other languages. Although the school district is the main provider of adult education in the county, the Coalition largely markets the district's services and recruits learners.

Callers to the literacy hotline may be directed to one of the school district's adult education classes, depending on their educational goals and geographic location. In exchange, the school district provides funds to the Coalition to support outreach and recruitment activities and mini-grants to smaller providers for professional development, books, and other materials. As Roger Pelser, manager of adult education and workforce development for the school district, observed, "We just could never do our job without the Coalition. We'd have to allocate more money and staff to accomplish what the Coalition does for us.... We piggy-back nicely with the Coalition." Instead of spending money on newspaper ads or bus signs, the school district can concentrate on doing what it does best—providing services—and let the Coalition handle what it does best—outreach and recruitment.



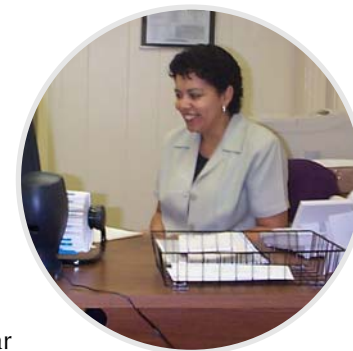
Most of the adult education classes in Palm Beach County take place at several centrally located facilities. But one goal of the Coalition hotline is to help adult learners find programs appropriate to their goals and convenient to their location. Several smaller sites provide educational programs for adults, often with the financial support from the school

system funneled through the Coalition. The Coalition also provides support to these sites through AmeriCorps volunteers, money for professional development, and free books. Because these sites are smaller and often more geographically dispersed, they benefit greatly from the Coalition's efforts to recruit tutors and learners and guide them to appropriate programs.

Partnerships with the Palm Beach County Literacy Coalition

The Palm Beach County Literacy Coalition orchestrates literacy services, recruitment, fundraising, and outreach for this large south Florida county. In an office in southern Palm Beach County, a bilingual receptionist answers the literacy hotline. The call could be from an adult who saw a bus sign about English classes, or from a potential tutor interested in working with adults who need to learn to read, or from a community member who wants to know who will be the keynote speaker at the next Love of Literacy Luncheon. Because many recent immigrants in the county are from Haiti, a Haitian/Creole translation service is available during business hours in case callers do not speak English or Spanish

The receptionist fills out a standard intake form for each call and sends the intake form to the appropriate Coalition staff person for follow up. For example, an adult seeking to earn a GED diploma might be directed to the classes provided by the school district on weeknights at their local high school or to another partner who provides classes. During fiscal year 2002-2003, the hotline handled about 1,700 calls from potential adult learners and volunteers throughout the county.



Besides staffing the hotline, the Coalition staffs, manages, and funds an extensive array of literacy-related programs based on partnerships and geared to all age levels, such as the following:

- **Care to Read** provides training and resources for childcare staff. Since its inception in Palm Beach County, it has expanded 90 preschool libraries, provided professional development to 150 childcare staff members, and distributed hundreds of new books to young children across the county.
- **Reach Out and Read** is a literacy initiative with pediatricians. Volunteers in pediatricians' waiting rooms model effective reading strategies with the children and distribute free books for the children to take home. The pediatricians themselves advise parents about the benefits of reading to their children. *Reach Out And Read* is active at 22 sites in Palm Beach County.
- **After School Reads** trains after-school program staff at 30 sites on strategies for including reading in their activities. In Palm Beach County, 75 after-school providers have attended training. Currently this project is working with fourth-graders to encourage them to read with younger students as *Bookwork Buddies*.
- **The America Reads Challenge** recruits and trains hundreds of Learning Partner volunteers to provide reading enrichment on a one-to-one basis for at-risk students in public elementary schools, after-school tutorial programs, and preschool. In Palm Beach County, more than 850 kids have a one-to-one relationship with a volunteer tutor.



- **The Region V Adult Literacy Center** coordinates literacy efforts in the four counties of southern Florida, linking the counties with local literacy coalitions and helping to establish and mentor new literacy coalitions in the region. It also offers many resources for improving and expanding adult education services, specifically in the form of how-to manuals. Region V's work, funded primarily by the state department of education, also includes recruiting adult learners and volunteers.

In addition to these formal programs, the Coalition sponsors a panoply of other activities to promote adult education and literacy in the county, including:

- Providing funds to various service providers to buy books for students to take home to start their own libraries.
- Recruiting and placing AmeriCorps volunteers in literacy programs throughout the community.
- Creating bookmarks, bus signs, brochures, and posters in English, Spanish, and Haitian/Creole to distribute around the community.
- Organizing field trips for adult learners, including a real civics lesson—a visit to Tallahassee to meet their state representatives.



Bookmark from the Palm Beach County Literacy Coalition

A Symbiotic Network

The partnerships that support the Coalition have become a symbiotic network of organizations that enhance each other's missions. Each partner both contributes to and benefits from the increased efficiency of operations and services coordinated through the Coalition. Outreach, recruitment, and volunteer training provided by the Coalition support the work of the adult education providers and help the media partners promote their image as literacy champions in the county. Two partnerships—with the media and the Palm Beach County Bar Association—are described in more detail below.



Brochure detail from
the Palm Beach
County Literacy
Coalition

Media Partners

The Communications Committee includes representatives of local TV stations and newspapers. Through their active participation in the Coalition's work, the committee has blazed the trail for the Coalition's success in outreach and recruitment. Media partners provide over \$50,000 worth of free advertising annually to further the cause of literacy in Palm Beach County.

While the media representatives are natural business competitors in the community, for their work with the Coalition they set competition aside and focus on the overarching goal of improving literacy. Turf battles, competition, and egos all disappear in the face of their common mission. Often, one television station will create a public service announcement about literacy. They will then make a generic version and distribute copies of it to their competitor stations for them to add their own tagline and air. The organizations involved in the Communications Committee sponsor

teams in the *Great Grown-Up Spelling Bee*, provide corporate contributions, send anchors and columnists to tutor and read at various events, run ads to recruit adults and volunteers and promote events, and host the adult essay contest.

The Adult Literacy Essay Contest

The Adult Literacy Essay Contest is one way the Coalition recognizes and encourages the success of adult learners. Adults participating in basic literacy, English literacy, and the GED program from all over Palm Beach County are invited to participate in the essay contest, which culminates in a celebratory evening reception. Adults like Adony, quoted previously, have the opportunity to write and speak about how English literacy has made a difference in their lives. The contest also serves to highlight the work of adult education providers and promote the issue of adult literacy in the community.

Many Coalition partners play key roles in this event. Adult education providers and the media help to promote the event and recruit the essay writers. *The Palm Beach Post* hosts the event at its office. Local businesses provide dinner and supply free gifts for participants. Instructors, volunteers, community members, and public officials serve as judges and attend the event. The media publicize the results of the contest, including printing selected essays and publishing photographs of learners.

The judges offer positive comments on each essay and praise each learner's participation in the process. As a result of their involvement in the contest, adult learners report more confidence and pride in their accomplishments. As they see the tangible results of their efforts, attendees at the event strengthen their commitment to adult literacy. Community awareness of adult literacy issues improves, and calls to the hotline increase. At the Region V Adult Literacy Center, the Coalition has devel-

oped an implementation guide (*Implementation Guide for an Adult Literacy Essay Contest*) to show other counties how to conduct such a contest. The pdf version of this guide can be downloaded at http://www.pbcliteracy.org/region_v.htm.

The Lawyers for Literacy Committee of the Palm Beach County Bar Association

Formed in 2001, the Palm Beach County Bar Association's Lawyers for Literacy Committee is an excellent example of how to engage professional organizations in the cause of literacy. The Coalition governing board recognized that lawyers often serve low-literacy and limited-English-proficient clients and sought to involve local attorneys in helping meet literacy needs in the county. The Coalition approached the bar association about creating a Lawyers for Literacy Committee as part of their volunteer committee structure. Each year, increasing numbers of attorneys help promote literacy in Palm Beach County.

The lawyers participate in many Coalition events throughout the year. On International Reading Day in 2002-2003, for example, 30 lawyers went to the adult education center and spoke with classes about their work and the students' learning. The Committee also sponsors a team of lawyers who participate in the *Great Grown-Up Spelling Bee* and individual lawyers participate in *Read Across Palm Beach County Day*.

Many of the lawyers say they enjoy being a part of this group because they are actually "doing something," as opposed to engaging in the traditional networking opportunities that abound in their profession. Other lawyers indicated that their firms support their work with the committee



because it reflects well on the firm's commitment to and engagement with the community.

At the Region V Adult Literacy Center, the Coalition has developed an implementation guide (*An Implementation Guide for Developing a Lawyers for Literacy Committee*) to show other counties how to develop a Lawyers for Literacy program. This Implementation Guide is available by mail. For more information, visit their web site at http://www.pbcliteracy.org/region_v.htm.

CONCLUSION

Palm Beach County Literacy Coalition partners recognize that choosing the toll-free hotline, a relatively uncontroversial initiative, as their first collaborative effort made early success possible and paved the way for the Coalition's expansion. As one partner put it, "Find something everybody can agree on. Make it a success and go from there. It's important to find your early success." Another partner elaborated, "The secret to our success has been 'I'm here to serve the cause of literacy' [not my own personal agenda].... Put business in the leadership, not the [literacy] providers, because the providers are going to be here forever. Put business and media right at the front. This gets them talking, rather than providers just talking to themselves." By providing comprehensive coordination for all aspects of literacy services in Palm Beach County, the Coalition unites the community around the cause of literacy and connects adult learners with help that can change their lives.