

Community Partnerships for Adult Learning

Partnership Profiles



The Houston County Certified Literate Community Program and its partners in Houston County, Georgia

The Houston County Certified Literate Community Program coordinates, promotes, and advocates for adult literacy services, working with partners from virtually every sector of the county.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS IN HOUSTON COUNTY . . .

- **Middle Georgia Technical College**, the sole public provider of adult education in the area, provides a home for the Houston County Certified Literate Community Program (CLCP), as well as many other forms of support.
- **WNNG Radio** provides information about and coverage of literacy issues and services.
- **Local churches** provide classroom space and information about literacy services to their congregations.
- **The Workplace Literacy Program** offers classes on-site and subsidizes further coursework at the technical college for city employees.
- **The Hispanic Collaborative** promotes literacy services for Spanish speakers within member agencies and throughout the community.

AND WHY THEY WORK . . .

- **The state provides guidelines and support, but also permits local autonomy.** The state Certified Literate Community Program allows great flexibility to communities to define their own goals and services for adult literacy.
- **Local government officials (city and county) make adult literacy a community priority.** With the help of its three cities' mayors, Houston County has made adult literacy and the CLCP an important public priority.
- **A committed and passionate executive director and advisory board drive the program.** Members of this diverse, representative board embrace the goal of improving adult literacy in their community.
- **The major public provider of adult education supplies significant support.** The support and involvement of Middle Georgia Technical College and its president have helped spread literacy services throughout the county.
- **Partners are creative in pooling resources to meet adult literacy needs.** Partners combine resources to meet needs that cross agency boundaries.
- **Partners plan proactively to meet future needs.** The Hispanic Collaborative anticipates continued growth in Houston County's Hispanic population and plans in advance to have necessary services available.

INTRODUCTION

When Jessica arrived in Houston County, Georgia, with her husband two years ago, she spoke very little English. A native of Mexico, she came to the Houston County Certified Literate Community Program (CLCP) as a student in the English language program (EL) and took courses in civics, reading, and writing. Like many of her fellow CLCP learners, Jessica found that the courses not only improved her language skills, but also gave her a greater sense of confidence and self-sufficiency. As she observed, “My husband is in the military, and the first time he went TDA [on Temporary Duty Assignment], I felt nervous and alone. The second time, I said “Go ahead, go!”

As a finalist in the statewide EAGLE (Exceptional Adult Georgian in Literacy Education, <http://www.dtae.org/adultlit/eagle.html>) competition, Jessica traveled throughout the state giving speeches. After this experience, which “changed my life and made me feel more confident,” she decided on a career in adult education. Jessica now teaches English to first-level EL students and will soon teach conversational Spanish courses to English speakers at the new Hispanic Academy.

Formed in 1998, the Houston County CLCP unites major community sectors—business, faith, government, media, and education—in three cities. With the support of these influential groups, the CLCP has strengthened services for adult learners and championed literacy as an important issue throughout the community. Working toward a ten-year goal to reach half of the county’s estimated 14,000 people without a high school diploma or equivalent, the program, as of 2003, was more than halfway to its goal and state certification as a “Certified Literate Community.” As a result, students like Jessica can learn to read, improve their English speaking skills, and participate more fully in their community as parents, workers, and citizens.

BACKGROUND

Located in middle Georgia, Houston County is a rural county encompassing three cities, Perry, Centerville, and Warner Robins. The county is home to Robins Air Force Base, the largest employer in the state. This area has experienced dramatic growth over the past few years, as evident in new commercial zones lining the two main roads of Warner Robins and a brand-new technical college facility. As part of this growth, Houston County’s immigrant population has also surged.

Literacy is a major issue throughout Georgia. Census data from 1990 show that 29 percent of adult Georgians lacked a high school or General Educational Development (GED) diploma. To address this need, the Commissioner of the Georgia Department of Technical and Adult Education began the Georgia Certified Literate Community Program with five pilot communities in 1990. Administered full-time by Billie Izard of the Office of Adult Literacy in the Department of Technical and Adult Education, the CLCP initiative encourages communities to form partnerships to leverage resources more effectively and to serve greater numbers of adult learners¹

The overall goals of the CLCP are to improve adult literacy rates in communities and to advocate for literacy activities at the local level (<http://www.dtae.org/adultlit/clcp.html>). The state provides guidelines and a process for communities to follow, support to local communities, and accountability through its certification process. CLCP participants seek certification as literate communities over a ten-year period. Defined loosely to meet regional needs, a “community” may be a city, county, or group of counties that come together to apply for CLCP certification. The community is certified twice—first, as a participant after

¹For the CLCP, adult learners are defined as anyone over sixteen years old without a high school or GED diploma.



an application review and approval process, and second, upon reaching its ten-year goal, as a Certified Literate Community.

CLCP implementation varies across communities in terms of infrastructure, community boundaries, and funding sources.

This flexibility allows each community to draw upon its existing strengths and to create a model suited to its needs. The following common criteria,

however, must be met in the application in order to participate:

- Goals consistent with the statewide CLCP mission.
- Culturally diverse representation of all major sectors of the community, including adult learners.
- Defined community boundaries.
- Target number of adult learners for program participation based on census data and needs assessment.
- Specific plans to achieve CLCP objectives in ten years.
- Process to measure progress towards goals.
- Written endorsements from community organizations, including government agencies, boards of education, chambers of commerce, civic organizations, churches, etc.
- Three-year budget plan.

Georgia's CLCP has now expanded to 53 programs. The first community achieved certified literate status in April 2000, and seven others have since met their goals and been certified. Currently, 45 other communities are working towards certification. Certified Literate communities are designated by road signs along Georgia's highways, and the economic development authority uses the CLCP designation to highlight to businesses that these are communities dedicated to literacy and to improving the productivity of their workforce.

The state provides considerable support to the CLCPs. Billie Izard of the state Office of Adult Literacy explains the value of the CLCP process:

By the time you are certified as a participant, you have gone through a set of very specific and rigorous criteria... [that reveal] what the need is, where it is.... The requirement for community-wide endorsement makes them pursue a very active public relations campaign that informs the community about something they weren't really aware of and results in a "call to action." If you say you are a CLCP, people know you have conducted a community-wide needs assessment, that you have a blueprint for action, and that your community has made a commitment to DO something.

Izard brings together the CLCP directors in quarterly meetings, one of which is a two-day staff development conference. The state also provides a newsletter, a listserv, and training workshops, as well as many resource materials. She notes that it is "very gratifying to see them solve each other's problems through the listserv and at meetings. They will travel to each other's counties to help." The CLCP programs, she says, "like being part of something bigger than just themselves. They believe that when you become a participant, you join 53 other communities and you become a larger voice/effort."

Izard says the CLCPs tell her that "being part of something bigger, within their own community and in the state, is very helpful when applying for grants." The Houston CLCP Director has been elected to serve as chair of

the directors' group. This involvement has led to support from local and state politicians in promoting funding for adult literacy and has helped increase public awareness of the importance of literacy to the economy.

The Origins of the Houston County CLCP

A mix-up at the Warner Robins Sanitation Department in 1996 signaled the need for more literacy services in Houston County. After assigning new trash collection routes to drivers, the department assumed work would continue smoothly the next day. But chaos ensued when some drivers drove their old routes, others drove the new ones, and trash was not picked up at many places in the city. Department leaders soon realized that many drivers were unable to read; they had memorized their old routes and could not read the directions for the new ones. As a result of this incident, the city recognized a need to provide more basic skills training to its employees.

In 1996, Houston County created a CLCP steering committee, which submitted an application to the state consisting of written bylaws, a list of potential board members, plans to meet the eight application criteria, and a list of committees for various issues. The committee also conducted a community needs assessment funded by the city of Warner Robins and consulted census data to set their goal of serving 6,945 adults over the next ten years.

Letters of endorsement from various community organizations, including the Houston County Board of Education, Warner Robins City Council, Middle Georgia Technical College, and the cities of Warner Robins, Perry, and Centerville, among others, accompanied the application. The Houston County Certified Literate Community Program was formally approved as a participant on September 3, 1998, an event celebrated in a public ceremony with the mayors of the three cities.

ADULT EDUCATION IN HOUSTON COUNTY

In Houston County, the technical college (a two-year postsecondary institution) is the sole public provider of adult education. The Middle Georgia Technical College (MGTC) enrolls students from four counties, including Houston County, and provides an extensive array of adult literacy services in addition to its other programs. All adult education activities in Houston County are in some way connected to MGTC, and all GED diplomas are issued through MGTC.

The adult literacy component of MGTC operates at a number of sites throughout the four-county service area, as well as through one-on-one tutoring. In Houston County, MGTC offers adult literacy services at eleven sites throughout the county, as well as at its Corder Road campus, four elementary schools, four churches, a community center, and on site at a city of Warner Robins facility. Classes are held mornings and evenings and occasionally on the weekend for some workforce training programs. Free classes are available in

EL, family literacy, workplace literacy, GED preparation, and adult basic and secondary education. The GED test is offered three times a month at the Corder Road campus. In 2001-2002, MGTC awarded more than 400 GED diplomas. The positive impact of the adult literacy program is felt throughout the community. As Dr. Billy Edenfield, MGTC's president, puts it: "Every time we award a GED, [you can] see its impact on the individual, the family, and the community... a ripple effect."



MCTC tutoring



Dr. Edenfield played a crucial role in initiating the CLCP in Houston County. He initially contacted the local Chambers of Commerce to ask them to join a task force focusing on adult literacy. This was the beginning of an important relationship between the technical college and the CLCP. The partnership is mutually beneficial. As Dr. Edenfield characterized it: “Some say the CLCP belongs to the technical college. I say it belongs to the community.”

The MGTC’s contributions to the CLCP include providing office space and other in-kind donations, instructors, classroom facilities, and advice. MGTC houses the Houston County CLCP at its Corder Road campus and covers all expenses, including postage and telephone, as part of a ten-year agreement. In addition, Brenda Brown, the director of adult literacy at MGTC, donates much of her time to help coordinate and improve CLCP services.

At the same time, the Houston County CLCP provides benefits to MGTC. It supports the college in its delivery of adult literacy courses through various recruitment strategies, advertising, and advice. The CLCP board of directors also functions as the advisory board for the adult literacy program at MGTC. Likewise, the CLCP contributes to the growth of the technical college by preparing learners for eventual enrollment at MGTC. When asked during a focus group interview what they hoped to do once they earned their GED diplomas, a group of learners all quickly responded: “Go to technical college!”

One MGTC adult education instructor listed several ways that the Houston County CLCP has contributed to her work: hosting banquets for teachers, obtaining funding for volunteer materials, supporting the state literacy conference, assisting with public relations, recruiting teachers and students, and providing occasional transportation. She feels that she can

turn to the CLCP for any type of support: “They step up to the plate for a lot of things.” The biggest benefit, she notes, is the CLCP’s role in promoting adult literacy in the community.

THE HOUSTON COUNTY CLCP AND ITS PARTNERS

Overseen by Bob Getter, a part-time executive director hired by the board of directors, the Houston County CLCP serves as an umbrella organization for all literacy programs within the county. In addition to its extensive partnership activities, the Houston County CLCP supplies materials for instructors, hosts recognition programs for learners and instructors, recruits adult learners and volunteers, and provides scholarships for GED test fees. The program also works to raise public awareness about the need for literacy and to bring various community groups together to discuss the issues. More than 1,000 adults use Houston County CLCP services each year.

The CLCP board of directors is diverse. Its members include clergy, attorneys, business representatives, a radio newscaster, school board delegates, city leaders, and others. The board meets every two months to monitor the CLCP certification process, evaluate partnerships, and coordinate fund-raising efforts. As needed, the board divides into committees to address such issues as public relations, assessment and evaluation, resources, recruitment and retention, and government relations.



CLCP Board meeting

Partnerships are the core of the Houston County CLCP. As required in the CLCP application, partners represent a culturally diverse cross-section of Houston County and include the faith community, media, business, city government, and the technical college. Several CLCP partnerships are described below.

Spreading the Word by Radio

The CLCP actively involves the local radio station (WNNG) in its campaign to raise public awareness about literacy. From public service announcements to coverage of Houston County CLCP activities, the station effectively gets the word out about the importance of literacy and the availability of literacy services. Both partners benefit from this relationship. The Houston County CLCP receives well-deserved attention and direct access to the community. The radio station believes that good news is good for the community and good for the station and that the CLCP provides it. As the WNNG representative on the board noted, “People need to and deserve to hear the positive things... those are the things often left out of the news. The CLCP is really good news for the community to hear.”

Churches and Classrooms

The CLCP also spreads its “good news” throughout the community through its outreach to local churches. Not only does this allow pastors and lay leaders to become involved in adult literacy, but it also provides an important way to reach adult learners and to disseminate information on available services. Representatives of local churches, such as the Greater Springfield Baptist Church and the Union Grove Baptist Church, serve on the CLCP Board. The faith community’s involvement is so crucial that the CLCP hosts a special pastors’ luncheon to give church leaders information about literacy programs to share with their congregations. In response to a discussion of the need for literacy services at the 2002

luncheon, church leaders held similar discussions within their congregations. Because pastors know the needs of their congregations, they can connect adults who would not normally hear about these programs to the Houston County CLCP and literacy services. The CLCP plans to hold other events like the luncheon to brainstorm ways to promote literacy services. Some churches provide free classroom space for adult education classes taught by volunteers and instructors from Middle Georgia Technical College. MGTC provides the instructors and materials to the church, while the CLCP helps recruit students and advertise the program. The courses offered here mirror those at the Corder Road campus, but transportation is not a problem for learners since they can take classes in their immediate community.

At a church on a sparsely populated two-lane road, Latino immigrant mothers and their children learn to speak and read English. The Greater Word of Deliverance Baptist Church is the site of one of the Houston

The Church Tackles Literacy

The Greater Springfield Baptist Church dedicates the entire second floor of its gymnasium to adult education. Walls there are covered with GED-related posters and other materials about the literacy classes taking place there. Learners who attend classes here are reminded daily: “It looks like a diploma but works like a passport. Georgia’s GED programs work!”

In one classroom at the church, an older adult learner named John worked one-on-one with his tutor. In 1997, he won an EAGLE award from the state for being an outstanding adult learner. John came to the program not knowing how to read, but after working with a tutor twice weekly for a year, he can now read and write. He expressed pleasure in the many benefits of literacy, such as writing his own checks, composing letters to his instructors, and reading the newspaper and his mail. He continues to work on reading; his goal is to be able to read the Bible. John is now working toward getting his GED diploma and says he will spend “as long as it takes” to finish.

County CLCP's English language programs. Wanting to get involved with the Hispanic community, the pastor of Greater Word approached the adult literacy program at MGTC for help in setting up this program. Together with the CLCP, the partners helped design courses, write syllabi, locate and obtain materials, decorate the building, and recruit instructors and learners.



Now the pastor, his daughter, and a part-time adult education instructor from MGTC teach at three tables in the church sanctuary. As their mothers learn beginning, intermediate, or advanced English, children in the nursery read books in English and learn basic conversation skills. The walls, doors, windows, and floors all have labels with their English names. The program is popular; it expanded from two students on the first day to more than 45 after only two months.

Although demand has not diminished, this program must now limit its size because of the lack of classroom space. The Houston County CLCP is seeking donations from businesses and others to repair the roof on a portable classroom for the church's use.

By working with these and other churches, the Houston County CLCP furthers its mission of serving a greater number of adults, reaching new learners, and building support in the faith community. Learners benefit by receiving services they might not otherwise have access to because of transportation or childcare issues. The faith community benefits as well by deepening its active involvement in the community. Finally, the Houston County CLCP benefits from the increased public exposure and moves closer to reaching its ten-year goals.

Involving Business Partners

Businesses are another key partner for the CLCP; they have been involved since its inception. Not only do representatives of business serve on the CLCP board, they provide financial support to the program and participate in fund-raising activities such as the annual big band concert. The CLCP has been an annual feature at the "Eggs and Issues" breakfast sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce to discuss progress and challenges in the area of adult literacy. As a result of this continuing outreach, businesses help to recruit learners by identifying employees with literacy needs and providing information through their human resources departments about literacy services.

Workplace Training for City Employees

The Houston County CLCP is helping upgrade the skills of city employees in Warner Robins in partnership with the city and MGTC. This workplace literacy program provides several levels of instruction to city employees,

City Employees Aim Higher

Kent attends Warner Robins' workplace literacy program and was honored as Georgia's Workplace Student of the Year in 1998. After being turned down for a job promotion because he did not have a high school diploma, he realized he could no longer "just get by." He had a family to support and needed a better salary, so he enrolled in adult education courses at Middle Georgia Technical College. Kent received his GED diploma in 1995 at the age of 36. He says he not only received a diploma, but also he learned the true meaning of self-esteem. "Knowledge is power for the spirit and soul," he says. "It's not about spelling. It's about getting to a place where you feel good about yourself." Now Kent also attends class on site at the Sanitation Department to reinforce his skills. He received a promotion and now works in the city's sign shop, where he uses his skills daily. When you're making street signs, he says, "You can't misspell 'STOP!'"



who can enroll in classes for two hours a week during their normal paid workdays. The idea originated from the confusion over trash collection routes at the Sanitation Department, but it has expanded to become an effort to improve the skills of employees throughout the city system. Classes are offered in basic literacy, GED preparation, and computer skills. The city pays for employees' participation in workplace training, as well as for those who want to attend the technical college for job-related training.

Donald S. Walker, the mayor of Warner Robins, sees this program as essential to the city's economic development. As for the effects of adult education on all aspects of city life – from the crime rate to its quality of life and more skilled workforce – he says: “Nothing will make a bigger impact than the [Houston County] CLCP.” Warner Robins received a U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) best practices award for this program.



Mayor Walker and Billie Izard

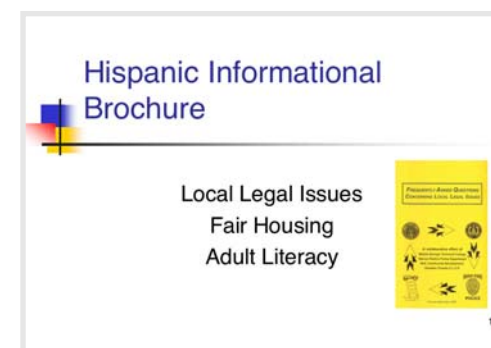
Reaching Newcomers: The Hispanic Collaborative

Recent estimates indicate that although Hispanics currently make up only 4 percent of the population in Houston County, that number is growing rapidly, as many come to the county to settle and work permanently, rather than to seek temporary or seasonal employment. The Houston County CLCP recognizes that non-English speakers need specific services to function as full members of the community.

In 2000, MGTC and the city of Warner Robins conducted a workshop in Spanish to explain housing opportunities and policies to Spanish-speaking

residents. At about the same time, the former chief of the Warner Robins Police Department, Dan Hart, saw a need to teach the Hispanic population about local laws and customs, hoping to prevent misunderstandings based on cultural and language differences. For example, some police officers noticed that many non-English-speaking residents were driving with international driver's licenses that are not valid in the United States. The police department decided to work with the CLCP, MGTC, and the city's Department of Community Development to design and print “Frequently Asked Questions Concerning Local Legal Issues.” This booklet describes local laws and ordinances, fair housing practices, and adult education services in both English and Spanish (examples of other slides from the presentation on the booklet are on page 11). Police officers distribute and refer to this booklet when working with Spanish speakers.

This cooperative project was the genesis of the Hispanic Collaborative, which has since evolved to include a wider range of partners and services for Spanish speakers. The partners actively promote services for Spanish-speaking adults within their own organizations, but they also come together to address community-wide issues facing the Hispanic population. The CLCP has published a guide to services and opportu-



Title slide from presentation on Local Legal Issues booklet.

nities for Hispanics in Houston County Collaborative partners include:

- **The University of Georgia Extension**, which sponsors a web-based clearinghouse (called “Extension en Español) for Extension publications translated into Spanish and offers some vocational programs in Spanish, for example, a pesticide safety course for horticulture and agriculture workers.
- **The American Red Cross**, which offers health and safety courses in Spanish and provides access to a language bank service to connect non-English speakers with translators on the emergency and disaster services telephone hotline.
- **Middle Georgia Technical College**, which provides English language courses for non-English-speaking adults and the Hispanic Academy, which will teach a basic conversational class as well as industry-specific conversational Spanish for ten industries, including law enforcement, banking, healthcare, restaurant, and customer service.

CONCLUSION

Through its impressive partnership initiatives, the Houston County CLCP is making great strides towards its ten-year goals. After only four years, the program is already more than halfway there. As the following table shows, the program has enrolled almost 6,000 students, most of whom have made progress toward achieving their goals of English literacy or GED attainment.

	Students enrolled	Students showing improvement
1998-1999	885	852
1999-2000	1124	928
2000-2001	1122	973
2001-2002	1389	1132
2002-2003	1450	1146
Total	5970	5031

In this process, the CLCP has gained valuable insight into partnerships and adult literacy issues that will help chart its course over the next six years. The Hispanic Collaborative has provided a model for assessing community needs proactively and designing services to meet them. Likewise, the Houston County CLCP can serve as a model for other counties participating in Georgia’s CLCP. Already, the Houston County CLCP has been asked to make presentations and speeches throughout the state and to provide training to other counties with similar programs. As one program administrator insists, “There’s no other way to do literacy... you have to form collaborations.”

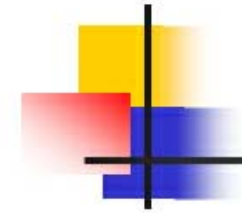


English Literacy Program



- Free English literacy and citizenship classes – open to everyone
- Where:
 - Middle Georgia Technical College, Adult Literacy Training Center, 1311 Corder Road, Warner Robins
- When:
 - English - Monday through Thursday in morning afternoon.
 - English and citizenship classes meet two nights per week

Slide from presentation on Local Legal Issues booklet.



English Literacy Program



- Curriculum includes:
 - Listening
 - Speaking
 - Reading
 - Writing skills
 - Civics
 - Preparation for TOEFL, GED, ASSET, and citizenship tests
 - Materials available to study for Georgia driving laws test.

Slide from presentation on Local Legal Issues booklet.



English Literacy Program



- Classes available for all levels of students
 - Those who speak no English
 - Those improving their English
 - Prepare interested students for INS naturalization application process and interview

Slide from presentation on Local Legal Issues booklet.