

# Community Partnerships for Adult Learning

## Partnership Profiles



### **Cedar Riverside Adult Education Collaborative and its partners in Minneapolis, Minnesota**

*The Cedar Riverside Adult Education Collaborative  
and other organizations provide English language instruction,  
family literacy services, and other support services to a community  
of East African immigrants and refugees in downtown Minneapolis.*

## COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS IN MINNESOTA ...

- **Minneapolis Public Schools Adult Basic Education** coordinates state and federal funds, provides English literacy and citizenship instructors and materials for the partnership and professional development for all partnership instructors.
- **The Riverside Plaza Tenants' Association Resource Center** administers the English literacy and computer literacy program, hires instructors, maintains a computer lab and supplies administrative as well as classroom space. The owners of the housing project provide additional classroom space and financial support.
- **The Brian Coyle Community Center** provides classroom and office space, literacy and citizenship courses, employment training, job placement, computer classes, and other support services for community residents.
- **The Family Opportunities for Living Collaboration (FOLC)** provides access to a larger network of partners, advocacy for education and support services for immigrants and refugees, and funds.
- **Fairview University Medical Center** contributes staff time to address community health and education issues and conducts free health education classes for local residents.

## AND WHY THEY WORK ...

- **Partners coordinate services and resources.** Partners pool client contact-hour dollars and leverage these, other federal grant dollars, and private funds to support coordinated adult education programs in the community.
- **Partners respect and incorporate the cultural traditions and customs of learners.** Providers accommodate learners' religious and cultural traditions in their programs.
- **Community residents are involved in the development of programs and services.** Residents are regularly consulted on their needs through surveys designed by community elders, focus groups, community meetings, and informal discussions. Immigrant and refugee leaders are encouraged to serve on FOLC's advisory council and work groups.
- **Partners put the needs of the learners first.** Partners hire East African counselors, teachers and other staff to help new arrivals adjust to American culture and master day-to-day challenges encountered outside the classroom.
- **Partners and teachers are committed to finding the best ways to serve pre-literate English literacy learners.** In their search to find better ways to help learners with few, if any, reading and writing skills in their native languages, computer and English teachers developed computer-based English literacy lessons.

## INTRODUCTION

Storytelling is part of the rich East African cultural heritage that learners bring to their family literacy and English literacy classes in Cedar Riverside, a community near downtown Minneapolis. One day recently, Desta, a young mother of four, read her life story to the women in her family literacy class. In English, she described the farm where she grew up in Ethiopia, the gardens and animals -- cows, camels, goats, and sheep -- her family of twenty, her favorite games, and how homesick she feels when she remembers her happy childhood. When Desta finished her story, the teacher distributed a map of Ethiopia and asked Desta to show everyone where her hometown is located, and she then encouraged the other women to ask Desta about her life in Ethiopia and to share their own experiences of growing up. Finally, the teacher passed out a list of questions about Desta's story and asked the class to answer them one by one.

The teacher used Desta's autobiography and the stories of her classmates to strengthen the learners' English speaking and reading skills, and she chose storytelling as an instructional approach because it is a familiar form of communication in the women's home countries. This sensitivity to the culture of the learners typifies the program administrators and instructors who provide education, training, and support services to the residents of the Cedar Riverside community.

Desta's family literacy class is one of the courses offered by the Cedar Riverside Adult Education Collaborative. In addition to family literacy, the partnership sponsors English literacy (EL) and computer literacy programs. The partners include Minneapolis Public Schools Adult Basic Education (MPS ABE), the Riverside Plaza Tenants' Association (RPTA), Pillsbury United Communities' Brian Coyle Community Center, the Family Opportunity for Living Collaboration (FOLC), and Fairview University Medical Center.

## BACKGROUND

Desta immigrated to the U.S. two years ago with her family and joined the large number of other East Africans residing in Riverside Plaza, a U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) facility. Most of the immigrant and refugee families in the neighborhood live in Riverside Plaza. Often referred to as the Ellis Island of Minnesota, these six high-rise apartment buildings house approximately 3,500-4,000 residents within one square block just east of downtown Minneapolis.

In 1995, the housing project was home mostly to Asian immigrants, some Americans, and a small number of East African immigrants. Today, 70 percent are immigrants and refugees from East Africa; most are from Somalia. In fact, Minneapolis has the largest Somali population in the U.S. The other 30 percent of residents are mainly of Asian descent, with a small percentage of African Americans.

Seventy percent of the residents are living at or below federal poverty levels. The average number of children per family is between four and seven. Some residents are employed and others receive public assistance. Many help support families in refugee camps in their countries of origin.

For many, Cedar Riverside Plaza is their first home in America. Most come from refugee camps, and they generally stay only two to three years before they move to other residences. When they first arrive, they usually stay with a relative until they have enough money to move into their own apartment. Many have not had much formal schooling and cannot read or write in their native languages of Somali, Oromo, and Amharic.



## ADULT EDUCATION IN MINNEAPOLIS

Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS) offers adult basic education, English literacy, citizenship classes, GED preparation, and adult high school courses to more than 10,800 adults annually through its Community Education program. Adult basic education, EL, and GED classes are also available through community and faith-based organizations unaffiliated with MPS ABE.

Most of these adults are served through partnerships that are part of the Minneapolis Adult Basic Education Consortium. The consortium is composed of partnerships with 17 service providers across the city that offer classes at 23 sites, including the Brian Coyle Community Center and the Riverside Plaza Resource Center. Partners are required to sign a **consortium agreement** each year, as well as individual agreements with MPS ABE.

### The Cedar Riverside Partnership

The Riverside Plaza Resource Center is located on the ground floor of an apartment building at one entrance to Riverside Plaza. Adults and children pass the Center on their way to work, to school, and to nearby mosques. The bright colors of their traditional dress are a striking contrast against Riverside Plaza's stark 1970s-era concrete buildings.

The Brian Coyle Community Center is just across the street. The Coyle Center has had a presence in the community for over fifty years, and is the predominant social service provider in the Cedar Riverside neighborhood. The center offers a myriad of services for both adults and youth and hosts more than 40 community and cultural celebrations annually. Before the partnership began, both organizations offered separate, competing courses and services to the residents of the Cedar Riverside neighborhood.



In 1999, the state legislature asked Minneapolis Public Schools to assume responsibility for the fiscal support of the adult education providers in the community. Carlye Peterson, manager of Minneapolis Adult Basic Education, brought the providers together to discuss a possible partnership. At the beginning, it wasn't easy to overcome long-standing turf issues between agencies as well as among individuals who had become active in the community. Over time, however, the partners saw the advantages of pooling resources and eliminating the duplication of services.

Shared funding resources come from the state (the money for client contact hours goes into a fund for adult education services for the neighborhood), local funders, and private foundation grants. Partners seek funds both jointly and individually, and they keep in close contact to be sure they are coordinating their fund-raising efforts. The partnership was recently awarded Even Start and Community Technology Center grants. MPS ABE manages these grant funds and the contact hour funds. Besides financial support, Minneapolis Public Schools provides teachers for the Brian Coyle Center and professional development for all instructors who teach at Coyle and the Riverside Plaza Resource Center.

While funding was the initial impetus for the collaboration, a shared commitment to the community keeps the partnership going. Partners have an equal say in determining program offerings, and they collaborate on the hiring of teachers. Now, instead of competing, the two centers coordinate courses and publicize them in a single course schedule. The partners' programs and services have expanded since the partnership began, and opportunities for other types of funding, such as grants, have increased. Partners report increased access to learners as well. Mike Melgaard, director of RPTA's Resource Center, organizes partner meetings and serves as the coordinator of the partnership. Partners meet at least quarterly and communicate regularly by e-mail.

The partners say that the partnership works “because we’re all headed in the same direction. We have the community in mind when we make decisions.” They also note, “We’re here to serve their needs, not to provide jobs for us.” As Mike points out, “We’re serving the hardest-to-serve communities in Minnesota. The learning curve has been tremendous. It’s been enriching and challenging. We’ve had to rely on each other for help.”

Learners are recruited through the food bank and other support services available at the Brian Coyle Center and by word-of-mouth. Sometimes the partners present information about classes and services during community meetings. In the 2001-02 school year, 728 adults were enrolled in the programs for a total of 83,134 participation hours, a 100 percent increase over the first year of the partnership. In 2002-2003, 619 adults attended classes during 71,130 contact hours. The partners feel that this drop in participation may be due to changes in the state’s “work-first” regulations lowering the level of English language abilities required for employment and to insufficient public funds for childcare.



The Riverside Plaza Resource Center was founded as a project of the Riverside Plaza Tenants’ Association in 1991. RPTA was established in 1988 as a member-based, nonprofit association to advocate for Riverside Plaza residents. Its goal is to bring services to where people live, and it does this by providing a place for education programs for children, youth, and adults, community gatherings, and other services that match the needs of residents.

The owners of the housing complex contribute \$150,000 yearly to support the operation of the Center. As a nonprofit, the Center can employ teachers with a wide variety of backgrounds and seeks teachers and other staff who are from the neighborhood or of East African descent. Currently, there are four full-time and twelve part-time instructors. Most of the classes are held in community rooms within the complex. Space is at a premium and, at times, classes must be rescheduled because the rooms are being used for other events. An AmeriCorps VISTA volunteer increases community involvement by recruiting community volunteers for the program.

The Center has a computer lab that is used by RPTA and Coyle students during class hours and is open to the community after hours. Volunteers from nearby Augsburg College assist in the computer lab and serve as teaching assistants in the EL classes. The Center receives assistance from HUD, which supports “Neighborhood Networks” computer centers with guidance on program operation, budgeting, and recruiting volunteers ([www.neighborhoodnetworks.org](http://www.neighborhoodnetworks.org)).<sup>1</sup>

The other provider in the partnership is the Brian Coyle Community Center. It is one of six neighborhood centers sponsored by Pillsbury United Communities, a nonprofit organization serving youth and adults in Minneapolis. It offers a variety of support services to the Cedar Riverside neighborhood, including:

- Basic needs services such as housing resources, domestic abuse counseling, emergency services, health and nutrition services, and an Emergency Food Shelf open to community members in need.
- Self-sufficiency services that include English literacy classes, citizenship courses, employment training, computer literacy and spe-

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<sup>1</sup>HUD created Neighborhood Networks in 1995 to encourage property owners to establish multi-service community learning centers in HUD properties. Neighborhood Networks help provide computer access to low-income housing communities. One goal of Neighborhood Networks is advancing literacy.

cial topic classes for adults. The EL classes are overseen by Rhonda Eastlund, adult services manager, and taught by MPS ABE teachers. A comprehensive employment preparation and placement program includes job-search and resume-writing assistance; training in interviewing skills, work-readiness skills, and computer skills; and a temporary-to-permanent staffing service that provides transportation to and from job sites.

- After-school, weekend, and summer employment and academic and leadership programs for youth.
- Referrals to social services.
- Information on housing, insurance, and taxes.

Two Somali Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP)<sup>2</sup> counselors are on site to help welfare recipients find employment. The Coyle Center also offers legal services to community residents and is home to one of the most well-known Somali organizations in the state, the Confederation of Somali Communities in Minnesota.

The Family Opportunities for Living Collaboration, another member of the partnership, is a grassroots alliance of immigrant, refugee, and American-born individuals who work together to find solutions to neighborhood problems. It is led by FOLC coordinator Eileen Watson, an advisory council, and several work groups. The council is co-chaired by the Coyle Center's Rhonda Eastlund and includes Ann Ellison of Fairview University Medical Center, residents of the community, representatives of several East African organizations, and Trinity Lutheran Congregation. FOLC was founded in 2000 by a partnership among the Alliance of Early Childhood Professionals, Augsburg College, the Coyle Community Center, RPTA, the Confederation of Somali Communities of Minnesota, Cedar Riverside

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<sup>2</sup>The Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) is the state's welfare program.

Children's Home Society, Fairview University Medical Center, and two local churches. Trinity Lutheran Congregation serves as its fiscal agent.

FOLC began with funding from the West Bank Human Service Providers Council, an organization of neighborhood social service organizations, and has continued with support from private foundations and Hennepin County. But securing sufficient funding remains a challenge. In 2002, FOLC didn't have enough funds to pay staff, but managed to continue its operation through the generosity and commitment of the staff and advisory council, who volunteered their time.



*Family literacy class*

FOLC strives to include residents in every aspect of its operation and constantly seeks ways to involve them. FOLC was created in response to a comprehensive survey of residents' needs that was designed by immigrant and refugee leaders. FOLC staff said that they didn't even know what questions to ask to determine the needs of the community, so they went to the residents and asked them how to ask the right questions. They found that residents wanted to learn to speak and write English, find employment, participate in job training, secure childcare, and locate housing.

In response, FOLC created six work groups to address these issues. The purpose of the work groups is to help residents adjust to life in America, Minneapolis, and the neighborhood. The groups focus on self-reliance, quality-of-life issues, children, youth and parent relationships, transportation, and health and wellness. RPTA, Brian Coyle Community Center, and Fairview University Medical Center, along with many other neighborhood organizations, are members of the work groups.



*Yahye Mohamad, former Cedar  
Riverside adult education student,  
now staff member*

According to a study of the challenges of being an immigrant in Minnesota, “Becoming fluent in English is arguably the single most important step that an immigrant can take if he or she wants to be successful in the US.”<sup>3</sup> One focus of the Self-Reliance work group is providing English literacy, GED, and computer instruction and job-skills training opportunities in the community.

Another is “navigating and surviving in America.” The Self-Reliance group recently created the New Neighbors Network, Cedar Riverside’s own “Welcome Wagon.” The goal of the Network is to orient new arrivals to the community, city and state services, and resources. RPTA estimates that eight to ten new families move to Riverside Plaza each month.

With a small grant from the city, the Self-Reliance group developed an emergency contact card and a process for offering basic information about community life to each newcomer. The group enlisted volunteers from the partner organizations and the neighborhood to talk to new residents about health and safety issues. The volunteers meet with each new arrival to discuss emergency contacts, food storage and safety, home fire hazards, lead exposure, crime prevention, dressing for the Minnesota winter, pedestrian safety, cleaning techniques, nutrition, and immunizations. They also accompany newcomers to such neighborhood sites as the RPTA Resource Center, the Department of Motor Vehicles, the supermarket, the hospital, and the public library. The Network is designed to be a neighborhood-helping-neighbor support group. As more residents acquire better English language skills, they will take over orienting new arrivals.

<sup>3</sup>*Immigration in Minnesota: Challenges and Opportunities*, The League of Women Voters of Minneapolis, Minneapolis, MN, December 2002.

Fairview University Medical Center is one of the largest and oldest organizations in the community and a Cedar Riverside Adult Education Collaborative partner. The hospital has been in the community for 100 years, carrying out its mission “to improve the health of the people in the communities we serve.” Ann Ellison’s job at Fairview is to see how the hospital’s resources can best be used in the community and to bring the community’s concerns to the hospital. To do this, Ann frequently attends community meetings, and it was at such a meeting that she heard about the adult education partnership’s struggle to find classroom space.

Not long ago, the owners of Riverside Plaza bought an old factory adjacent to the housing project. When Ann learned about the empty building, she thought it would make the perfect place for a community learning center. The hospital approached the owners of Cedar Riverside, who agreed and offered to provide the tools for the renovation. The hospital’s management staff worked after work and on weekends to clear out trash and tear down interior walls. The hospital also enlisted the assistance of its vendors to begin the rebuilding.

RPTA’s Resource Center administrators and staff are working with an architect to develop a plan for the building. Tentative plans call for five to seven classrooms, a resource room, four offices, and a reception area. When the Resource Center staff talk about the project, their excitement is infectious. Soon they will have enough classroom space to accommodate all of the English literacy classes and can return the common rooms to the community. When the new center is complete, it will be dedicated to the memory of the victims and survivors of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.

As part of Fairview University Medical Center’s commitment to the neighborhood, it offers free health education classes at the Coyle Center. The classes address many of the health concerns of the community, such as navigating the American healthcare system, health insurance, diabetes, asthma, arthritis, communicable diseases, pre-natal care, and obstetrics.

Participants who attend ten or more classes receive a participation certificate. The classes are new, but the hospital expects that 225 immigrants and refugees will attend this year.

## **Cedar Riverside Partnership Programs**

### ***English Literacy***

Cedar Riverside teachers do their best to accommodate the learning needs and cultural traditions of their learners. The adults in their classes range in age from 25 to 78. Most have very low-level literacy skills in their native languages. Teachers often use large-group instructional strategies because their students prefer this to working in small groups, and teachers have found that student performance increases with social interaction. Because of cultural taboos, teachers are mindful of pairing men and women during learning activities. The teachers often integrate hands-on activities in class because learners are accustomed to this from their home countries. The adults in the Cedar Riverside classes present significant challenges for the teachers, including:

- Hidden learning disabilities. Teachers struggle to identify learning disabilities among pre-literate EL learners.
- Age-appropriate curriculum. Teachers find it difficult to meet the varied expectations and needs of elderly and young adults in the same class.
- Irregular attendance. Class attendance is inconsistent, as it is in many adult education programs. Learners try to maintain a delicate balance between attending class, caring for family, maintaining employment, and addressing health issues and challenges related to resettlement. One teacher commented, “Sometimes this balance topples.”

Relationships between the teachers and learners extend beyond the classroom. As one teacher described it, “We are cultural liaisons for our stu-

dents.” Because they trust the teachers, learners come to them for help navigating the American system. Many learners have experienced civil war in their home countries. Some have post-traumatic stress disorder that reduces their short-term memory and diminishes their self-confidence. Teachers refer them to counseling and other services when needed. Teachers recognize that they are “ambassadors for the American culture.”

### **Navigating Life in America**

Newly arrived immigrants and refugees can find it very difficult to adjust to a country where they cannot read or speak the language and where the culture is so different from their own. Routine activities in this new setting, such as food shopping, catching a bus, or cleaning a home, can be intimidating and, at times, even dangerous. For example, when teachers heard that some students had injured themselves using household cleaning products common in America, they developed a lesson about how to read labels and use the products properly. The Cedar Riverside teachers not only teach their students English and other academic subjects, they also help them master the day-to-day challenges of life in their new homeland.



### **Computer Instruction for Low-Level English Literacy Learners**

Riverside Plaza Resource Center’s computer lab started with just a few computers, but has grown to two rooms that have 36 computers purchased with funding from Wells Fargo Bank and the McKnight Foundation. Learners from all the Cedar Riverside Adult Education partnership classes spend time in the lab two or three times each week. The computer literacy and English literacy teachers team-teach the lab sessions.

One recent morning, members of two Level 1 English literacy classes sat at computers in the larger of the two rooms, using the computer mouse to match letters to the days of the week that appeared on their computer monitors. These men and women of all ages were from Somalia and Ethiopia and speak Somali, Oromo, or Amharic. They were all smiles when asked why they want to learn to use a computer. Many replied, "To e-mail my family in Somalia." Some said, "To get a good job," and others answered, "To help my children with their school work." A smaller group of Level 4 learners worked at about a dozen computers in the other room. They were reading stories about famous African Americans on their computers and clicking on highlighted words to see their definitions.

In October 2002, the Cedar Riverside Adult Education Collaborative received a Community Technology Center (CTC) grant to incorporate technology into English language acquisition instruction. The partners credit the partnership with their success in securing the federal grant. The grant has made it possible to staff the Resource Center with two full-time computer instructors, to develop software for pre-literate EL learners, and to provide computer training to the adults in the neighborhood's EL and family literacy programs.

When Eden Rock, the CTC project director, with the help of the Minnesota Literacy Council, brought the RPTA and Coyle Center teachers together to discuss using software with their students, the teachers were skeptical. They had reviewed several programs, but they found that either the content wasn't appropriate or they required a high degree of manual dexterity. They were concerned about the coordination required for using a mouse, since many of their learners never had held a pencil.

The computer teachers researched various software development programs and came up with a combination of computer-based instructional

support that looked promising. It included a software-authoring package, a web-based lesson-planning tool, and word recognition software. They found an easy-to-use software development program designed for K-12 teachers and students and adapted it for adult learners (HyperStudio, [www.hyperstudio.com](http://www.hyperstudio.com)). They also found "Sebran's ABC," a Danish web-based lesson-planning program for children that has letter recognition exercises suitable for adults. (To preview Sebran, visit [www.cnet.com](http://www.cnet.com) and type in Sebran under Search.) They used "Word Order" shareware to reinforce reading and spelling skills (teachers select the words, scramble them, and then ask learners to put them in order).



The teachers agreed that they wanted a smooth flow of instruction in the English and computer classes. The computer teachers asked the English literacy teachers what their needs were and then developed the computer lessons with those in mind. The software development program gives the computer and EL/family literacy teachers flexibility; they can design new computer lessons as needed, either to accommodate changes in the curriculum or to respond to requests from learners.

Instruction in the computer classes reinforces the curriculum in the EL classes. Learners are able to work at their own pace, and teachers feel that they are serving their low-level learners more effectively. In the end, the teachers' initial concerns about students' motor skills were unfounded; learners have no trouble using the mouse. In June 2003, the teachers made a presentation on the computer-based lessons to 40 adult educators at the Minnesota Literacy Council's Technology in Adult Literacy conference. They are exploring the possibility of creating a website that will make the lessons easily accessible. To view sample lessons, return to the Cedar Riverside Partnership Profile Summary (<http://www.c-pal.net/profiles/minnesota.html>).

## Family Literacy

In early 2001, FOLC was awarded a grant from the Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning for a six-month family literacy pilot program for seven refugee families. The program included English language classes for the adults, early childhood education for preschoolers, parenting information, and Parent and Child Time Together (PACT), a time when parents learn how to support their children's learning through play and other joint activities. The Cedar Riverside People's Center, a neighborhood education and support organization, provided the adult education teachers and space for the adult and early childhood classes. The Children's Home Society supplied an East African early childhood teacher. The adult EL and early childhood curricula were provided by Minneapolis Public Schools.

In response to a survey of the community before the pilot, parents made it clear that they were not interested in learning about child rearing from Americans. They were interested in English language instruction and childcare consistent with their cultural traditions. FOLC struggled with how to respect the parents' wishes and at the same time meet the requirements of a state-sponsored family literacy program.

FOLC decided that the first step was to develop trusting relationships with the parents and create a program that included English literacy instruction and culturally appropriate childcare. After gaining the trust of the parents, the teacher skillfully integrated parent issues into the English literacy curriculum. Parents were introduced to the children's teacher and the PACT teacher and gradually got to know and trust them. By the end of the pilot, all parents demonstrated some measurable improvement in their English language skills.

Building on the success of this pilot project, FOLC and MPS ABE were awarded a four-year Even Start grant to fund the Cedar Riverside Family School. Designed to improve the English literacy skills of families in the

## Respecting Others' Customs

The Cedar Riverside Adult Education partners are sensitive to the cultural differences of their learners and accommodate their customs and traditions in their classes. For example, during the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan, teachers avoid food-related projects and refrain from giving tests, knowing that learners perform better when they are well fed. At the Riverside Plaza Resource Center, a private nonprofit, they provide a place for students to pray. The Resource Center and Coyle staff get help understanding their learners' needs from the Somali and other East African immigrants they employ who are available to translate for learners.



Cedar Riverside neighborhood, the program offers English language classes for adults, early childhood education, parent education, and PACT. It incorporates the required curriculum of Even Start and integrates other instruction requested by participants, including computer training, math education, and job training supported by funds from FOLC. Parents in the program get their computer training at Riverside Plaza's Resource Center. Twenty parents and 25 children are currently enrolled in the program.

Desta is one of the parents in the Even Start program. She and the other mothers study English, mathematics, geography, history, and computers at the RPTA Resource Center, appreciating the convenience of being able to attend class in the Riverside Plaza complex. They say the class enables them to speak for themselves when running errands, shopping, meeting with their children's teachers, or visiting the doctor's office. They feel better about themselves when they don't have to rely on interpreters. One mother said, "Now I can really help my sons with their school work," and the others nodded in agreement. They say that many more mothers would enroll in the program if they had reliable childcare. The limit on enrollments for children also keeps some mothers who want to attend from participating.

## Ongoing Challenges and Future Aspirations

Although the partnership is still relatively new, the partners have made considerable progress in solving the problems associated with serving very low-literacy EL adults. All this has been accomplished in a relatively short time, despite some bumps along the way. The partners identify their challenges as follows:

- Finding funds. Securing enough funding to provide education and training to all who need it is a perennial problem.
- Maintaining communication (among the partners and within the community). Keeping each other informed can sometimes be problematic for the partners. They recognize this and try to alleviate it through frequent e-mails and telephone calls. Communicating with learners and others in the community, given the differences in languages and customs, can also be hard.
- Collecting follow-up data. As in many adult education programs, some learners don't return for post-testing, and there are no resources to track them down once they leave. Because learners usually stay with relatives or friends when they first arrive, it's hard to find them once they move into their own apartments. Many residents come from places where anyone asking for information on family members is distrusted, so relatives are reluctant to pass along their new addresses and telephone numbers.
- Documenting learner progress. Program administrators and teachers find some learner progress difficult to document. Although they can see the progress, such as learners speaking English with more self-confidence, they don't have a way to document it in hard numbers.
- Evaluating the partnership. At this point, there is no formal evaluation process, and they check their progress by trying to determine if they got "the outcome we intended."

- Providing sufficient high-quality childcare. Neighborhood surveys show that more adults, particularly women, would attend EL classes if they had reliable, culturally appropriate childcare (e.g., care that is consistent with how children are treated in their home countries). Daycare is often provided by families and for some residents through the welfare system, but not everyone is eligible.
- Serving elderly learners. State legislation requires that MPS ABE demonstrate that learners are securing employment. But a number of adults in their programs are too old to be in the workforce, and yet they still need to develop their English language skills so they can function in society.
- Responding appropriately to different cultural and religious traditions. The providers (because they are nonprofits) can provide places to pray and to accommodate other religious traditions of the residents, but doing so remains difficult.



In the future, the Cedar Riverside Adult Education Collaborative partners will continue to seek ways to meet these challenges. They hope to strengthen their partnership by involving more local businesses to improve the employment services and workplace education programs available to residents. They have met with a couple of small businesses, but they acknowledge that many businesses may not know what services they have to offer. They would also like to see greater involvement by the faith community, beyond the one local church and a few mosques that are active participants. In addition, recruiting more tutors to work with learners one-on-one is a priority. They recognize that they need to offer more support for learners, so that they are fully prepared to go on to further education and employment.

## CONCLUSION

The Cedar Riverside partners see many benefits from their collaboration, to the community, their organizations, and themselves personally. They agree that they are in a better position to get funding because of the partnership, citing the CTC and Even Start grants as examples.

Ann Ellison says that she has learned a great deal about the educational and other needs of immigrants and refugees as a result of the collaboration, and this benefits Fairview University Medical Center. More and more of the hospital's employees are immigrants, so the knowledge she has gained from the collaboration is helping the hospital to understand the needs of its employees better. Because of their experience with the partnership, the hospital is now offering English literacy classes on site. Mike Melgaard feels that RPTA now can offer residents so much more, because the partnership enables them to refer residents to employment services and the food shelf at Coyle.

The partners' involvement in the neighborhood has created relationships with the residents that are built on mutual respect and trust. The partners' efforts to honor the cultures and traditions of the people they serve is a solid foundation on which the partnership can continue to grow.

### Advice from Cedar Riverside

When asked for advice to offer to other community partnerships serving large populations of learners in need of English literacy services, the Cedar Riverside partners had this to say:

- Be respectful of learners and partners.
- Address learners' needs in a way that is consistent with the population you're serving.
- Involve the people you're serving in the development of the program.
- Listen more than you talk.
- Make sure everyone feels that they're contributing.
- Remember that "all stakeholders need to own the stakes."

**Minneapolis Public Schools  
Adult Basic Education Program Partnership Agreement between  
MPS Adult Basic Education and Cedar Riverside/Brian Coyle**

Origin Date: July 2002  
Mid-Year Review Date: Dec. 2002  
End of Contact Review Date: June 2003

MPS ABE Program will provide:

1. Teachers for ESL assigned at Brian Coyle based on an agreed-upon schedule.
2. Coordination and communication with other sites in the MPS ABE program.
3. Clerical support for hours submitted monthly and for the state report.
4. Marketing the program in ABE publications.
5. Budget support based on previous years' attendance.
6. Attendance reporting and achievement tracking.
7. Staff development opportunities for all teachers.
8. Site coordination for daily operations.

Cedar Riverside/Brian Coyle will provide:

1. Classroom, office space and computer lab.
2. Teaching staff and community volunteers at Riverside Plaza Family Center.
3. Budget for management, development and supplies.

4. Support to students who move from site to site.
5. A written outreach/marketing plan that addresses strong attendance and student retention.
6. On-site coordination to include setting the schedule.
7. A signature on the ABE Assurances Form (note the signature acknowledges having read the form and a willingness to comply).
8. Registering students, monthly attendance, attendance reporting and achievement tracking using Literacy Pro.
9. Miscellaneous: furniture, phone, fax, supplies and food/beverage.
10. A plan to improve learner retention and commitment to facilitate the movement of learners from site to site.

Note: Both parties agree to the parameters in the agreement. Failure to comply could result in dissolving the agreement.

RPTA Coordinator \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

MPS ABE Manager \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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