



California Library Literacy Services: Adult Literacy Services

Submitted to CLLS by
Harder+Company
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Executive Summary

Literacy is a “crucial life skill”;¹ some say it is a human right.² Literacy is the foundation for many of life's stages: learning and education, employment and career opportunities, parenting and helping children achieve their potential, and progressing through life with the ability to meet many of today's demands and challenges.³ Improving one's literacy has also been associated with self-esteem, empowerment, and better health.⁴ Return on investment studies on literacy programs have found that between \$11 and \$7 are returned for every \$1 invested.^{5, 6}

In order to promote literacy in California, the California State Library (CSL) administers the California Library Literacy Services Adult Literacy Services (CLLS ALS), located in public libraries. These library literacy programs provide a valuable community service and promote the connection between literacy and the public library emphasis on reading. Further, libraries are one of few great free public institutions. Libraries are deeply imbedded in the communities they serve and provide a wide variety of free and low-cost

services.⁷ Return on investment studies on libraries have found that that between \$6.54 and \$3.81 are returned for every \$1 invested.^{8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13}

Research Questions and Key Results

In 2007 Harder+Company Community Research was enlisted to perform an overall evaluation of the CLLS ALS.¹⁴ The main objectives of this evaluation include a comparison of the priorities and tutoring model of CLLS ALS with those of other adult literacy services (i.e. Adult Basic Education (ABE)), and to examine the overall effectiveness of the

¹ Durgunoglu, Aydin Y., Banu Oney, and H. Kuşçul 351;cul. "Development and Evaluation of an Adult Literacy Program in Turkey." International Journal of Educational Development 23 (2003): 17-36.

² UNESCO. "International Literacy Statistics : A review of concepts, methodology, and current data. " 2008. <http://www.uis.unesco.org/template/pdf/Literacy/Literacy_Report2008.pdf>

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ A.T. Kearney. "Literacy Volunteers of America, Inc., Economic Impact Analysis Project Report." Syracuse, NY: Literacy Volunteers of America, 1999.

⁶ Stanfield, R. "Chicago's Child-Parent Centers: Providing the Value of Early Childhood Education in the Real World." Baltimore, MD: Annie E. Case Foundation, 2002.

⁷ Spangenberg, Gail. Even Anchors Need Lifelines. Public Libraries in Adult Literacy. Education Resources Information Center: Numerical/Quantitative Data; Reports - Research, ERIC# ED406519 <http://eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/16/78/bb.pdf>

⁸ Griffiths, José-Marie, Donald W. King, Christinger Tomer, Thomas Lynch and Julie Harrington. September 2004. "Taxpayer Return on Investment in Florida Public Libraries: Summary Report." State Library and Archives of Florida.

⁹ The British Library. "Measuring Our Value." <<http://www.bl.uk/pdf/measuring.pdf>>.2004.

¹⁰ Holt, Glen E., Donald Elliott, Amonia Moore. "Placing a Value on Public Library Services." Saint Louis Public Library <<http://www.slpl.lib.mo.us/libsrc/restoc.htm>>.

¹¹ Aabø, Svanhild. June 13, 2005. "The Value of Public Libraries." Presented at the World Library and Information Congress: 71th IFLA General Conference and Council "Libraries – A Voyage of Discover" August 14th – 18th 2005 Oslo, Norway

¹² Kamer, Pearl M. "Placing an Economic Value on the Services of Public Libraries in Suffolk County, New York." NY: Long Island Association. June 2005

¹³ Levin, Driscoll, & Fleeter. "Value for Money: Southwestern Ohio's Return from Investment in Public Libraries." Ohio: 22 June 2006.

¹⁴ This project was funded in whole or in part by the U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act, administered in California by the State Librarian.

Roles & Goals outcomes measurement approach, which is used by CLLS ALS to track and assess learner progress in the program. An Evaluation Framework, including seven key research questions (Appendix B) guided this study. This section lists the seven research questions in order of their appearance in this report and provides a summary of Harder+Company's responses to each. Detailed findings and recommendations are provided in the body of this report.

CLLS ALS Design

How does the CLLS ALS model compare to other adult literacy models?

+ The CLLS ALS model compares very favorably with other ABE-type literacy training models, particularly for the specific audience that this program targets. While no "best practices" have been empirically identified through Harder+Company's extensive review of the published literature on adult literacy services, some "promising practices" have been identified. These promising practices are all currently being implemented in the CLLS ALS model. The mission and core values of the CLLS ALS align very well with these promising practices. These promising practices include life-contextualized learning, dialogic/collaborative teacher/learner dynamics, individualized instruction with access to small groups, innovative instructional techniques and volunteer tutors. Few other adult literacy service programs in the U.S. utilize as many of these promising practices as does the CLLS ALS.¹⁵

What are the successes and challenges of one-to-one literacy services compared to small group and classroom settings?

¹⁵ Purcell-Gates, Victoria, Sophie Degener, Erik Jacobson. "U.S Adult Literacy Program Practice: A Typology Across Dimensions of Life-Contextual/Decontextual and Dialogical/Monologic." National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy. NCSALL Reports 2 (1998): 1-28

+ CLLS ALS is designed to be individualized. Tutor/learner dyads work together over time, sometimes for more than a year, to achieve the goals set by the learner. CLLS ALS focuses particularly on the niche of learners who have not succeeded in a classroom setting.¹⁶ As such, it has shown success using individualized and small-group settings adult learners. In addition, the targeted clientele often find that their family and/or work responsibilities do not allow them to routinely maintain rigid classroom schedules. For them, the ability to schedule one-on-one sessions with their individual tutor provides a more flexible and comfortable learning environment, resulting in greater success attaining goals than in other adult literacy service program settings.

However, this model is very dependent on pairing individual tutors and learners for individualized focus. Wait lists persist at many sites because of this time-intensive design, a definite CLLS ALS challenge.

What are the successes and challenges of volunteer-based literacy services?

+ CLLS ALS draws heavily upon local communities for skilled volunteers to support many program activities and to tutor adult learners. Local CLLS ALS programs have 25 years of success in utilizing volunteer tutors in their one-to-one literacy model. This tradition has been successful in providing many community members with rewarding opportunities to serve their communities and fellow residents. The volunteers also provide high-quality literacy services to a struggling population and vastly increasing the value of the public library at a very low cost. The local programs honor and value the volunteer commitments and provide orientation, ongoing training, and support for volunteers.

¹⁶ California Library Literacy Services. CLLS Core Values. 2003.

However, it is also true that recruiting and retaining volunteers has been a challenge, particularly in recent years.

CLLS Outputs and Outcomes

How many adult learners are served by CLLS ALS?

- + 77,844 adult learners have been served by CLLS ALS during the four years that this study covered (July 2004-June 2008). It is important to note that almost three fourths of the CLLS ALS participants during the course of this study were in their prime wage earning years (from 20 to 49 years). Thus CLLS ALS appears to be addressing a specific group that can greatly assist in improving their own economic status as well as that of the state of California, as literacy skills have been found to promote employment,¹⁷ decrease overall health costs,¹⁸ reduce the need for public assistance,¹⁹ and increase the Gross Domestic Product.²⁰

What is the effect of CLLS ALS on adult learners (as measured by the Roles & Goals)?

- + Adult learners participating in CLLS ALS are making significant progress toward their literacy goals. Program participants were able to accomplish their self-defined literacy goals at very good rates, as documented in the six-month summaries of Roles & Goals set and met (see Appendix D). Generally, about 50% of participants who set a particular goal actually met that goal; sometimes the rates

achieved were as high as 75 to 90%. As would be expected, short-term goals (i.e. 'take children to library story time') are met at a higher rate than long-term goals (i.e. 'pass the GED'). However, even for the more difficult and longer term goals, the goal completion rates recorded from July 2004 to June 2008 are exceptional, considering the initial literacy levels and previous training/learning difficulties encountered by CLLS ALS adult learners. Such goals include 'obtain a license or certification' (27-37%) or 'pass the GED' (15-20%) or 'get a job' (25-30%).

Roles & Goals Approach

Is the Roles & Goals the appropriate approach to evaluating CLLS ALS?

- + The Roles & Goals approach reflects the learner-oriented, life-contextualized design of CLLS ALS and, as such, is appropriate to measurement of CLLS ALS. CLLS ALS does not use test-based measurement techniques, such as literacy proficiency scale scores, that are prevalent in a great majority of other adult literacy service programs (i.e. ABE). This makes comparisons of learner progress between CLLS ALS and these other programs problematic. However, our research indicates that many adult learners may not be as interested in basic, standardized scores, since they are not as useful in their daily lives. That is, increasing a standardized literacy score may not be as meaningful as reading one's religious text or helping children with their homework.

In addition, the particular learners that this program targets have tended to be less comfortable and less successful in the formal classroom-type setting that these tests and standardized scoring imply. The Roles & Goals approach addresses outcomes the learners relate to their everyday lives and provides quantifiable indicators of progress

¹⁷ "U.S Adult Literacy Programs: Making a Difference."

ProLiteracy.org. 21 May 2008

<<http://www.proliteracy.org/downloads/LitOutPDF.pdf>>.

¹⁸ Schwartzberg, Joanne. "Health Literacy: Can Your Patient Read, Understand, and Act Upon Your Instruction?" Aging and Community Health. American Medical Association.

¹⁹ Bartonk, Paul, E. and Lynn Jenkins. "Literacy and Dependency: The Literacy Skills of Welfare Recipients in the United States." New Jersey: Educational Testing Services, 1995.

²⁰ UNESCO. Op. Cit.

the learners make toward those real-life outcomes.

How does the data collected from the Roles & Goals approach compare to that collected by other program evaluation models?

- + Only limited connections can be made between data. Because outcomes measurement is rarely used by other adult literacy service programs (i.e. ABE) only two goals reported in CLLS ALS Roles & Goals can be directly compared to other sources of data, and even then, the comparisons are limited.²¹ Based on these limited comparisons, however, it appears as though adult learners participating in the Adult Education & Family Literacy Act's (AEFLA) program of 80+ hours of federally funded, classroom-based instruction fulfill the two outcomes of 'enter employment,' and 'obtain a high school diploma or GED' more often than adult learners enrolled through other adult literacy service programs, including CLLS ALS.²² Whether the learners served by CLLS ALS would achieve these same results in that setting is unlikely, since CLLS ALS adult learners have been unsuccessful in classroom settings in the past. It is also unknown how the other 58 outcomes included in the Roles & Goals measurement tool would compare in other adult literacy service programs, since those outcomes are not measured by other adult literacy service programs.

CLLS ALS Outputs: Recommendations

The following recommendations were developed based on the CLLS data outputs:

- + **Increase volunteer tutor and adult learner recruitment.** During the past several fiscal years, adult learners in many CLLS ALS programs must wait to be matched with a volunteer tutor. Similarly, volunteer tutors are also waiting to provide services. If possible, CLLS ALS staff should embark upon innovative recruiting strategies. Such strategies include utilizing the AmeriCorps program in sites not already participating, and in those that currently utilize AmeriCorps add additional AmeriCorps members to their teams.²³ CLLS ALS has also recognized the need to increase volunteer tutor and adult learner recruitment, and included this as Strategy Direction #1 for the Strategic Directions for the California Library Literacy Community, 2008-2011.
- + **Increase volunteer instructional hours.** The average number of instructional hours devoted to adult learners, while averaging about 40 hours per learner, has declined steadily since FY 2005-06. This trend is likely associated with the trends noted above: wait-listed volunteers and the need for additional volunteers. By increasing volunteer recruitment and retention, and consequently volunteer instructional hours, adult learners will get the important one-on-one time they need with tutors. Also, incorporating small group tutoring might help increase the flow of serving adult learners.
- + **Continue serving adult learners from diverse backgrounds.** Literature has found that older adults, women and ethnic minorities lag behind in literacy skills compared to the general population. These groups also experience barriers to services. While these groups are not explicitly targeted by CLLS

²¹ Casas DynaReports.
<<https://www.casas.org/dynareps/index.cfm?fuseaction=reports.intro>>

²² Educational Testing Service. "Adult Literacy in America: A First Look at Results from the Adult Education Program and Learner Surveys." 2008. 23 Dec. 2008.

²³ Research has shown that AmeriCorps members are effective in recruiting and training volunteers in various public service sectors. For more information, see the report titled "AmeriCorps Members in California Library Literacy Services" released October 2008.

ALS, local CLLS ALS programs should continue to serve adult learners in their primary age earning years, women and ethnic minorities.

The Roles & Goals Approach: Recommendations

Based on the findings of the Roles & Goals (R&G) analysis, adult learners participating in CLLS ALS are making excellent progress towards their literacy goals. Upon intake, adult learners identify various goals to guide their sessions with volunteer tutors. The R&G approach measures learner-identified outcomes and is a useful tool for monitoring learner progress.

Recommendations for the R&G approach are based on a comprehensive examination of the R&G approach, which yielded key areas of improvement:

Roles & Goals Form

The R&G Form is very useful for several reasons in the CLLS ALS, and already contains more data than is currently required by CLLS. The data contained on the Form is vitally important to understanding the progress and success of adult learners. The following refinements can continue to improve the Roles & Goals approach:

- Improve measurement validity;
- Track long and short term goal attainment;
- Record unintended successes.

Roles & Goals Data Entry

The data entry process is important to understanding the quality and meaning of data collected in relation to the progress and success of adult learners. Several changes to the data entry process can continue to improve the Roles & Goals approach:

- Add critical data collected at the local level to the Internet Database;
- Track goals carried across reporting periods;

- Consider individual client-level data reporting, or refine aggregate-level data reporting in the Internet Database.

Roles & Goals Analysis

Some local CLLS ALS programs may already collect several important data elements linked to individual adult learners:

- Literacy level proficiency;
- Intensity and duration of instruction;
- Indirect outcomes of participation;
- Exit information.

Further investigation into local programs might yield data and processes available to pilot such data collection efforts while maintaining adequate client privacy and not unrealistically adding to the reporting burden of the local CLLS ALS programs.

Summary

Overall, findings from this study suggest that libraries and their adult literacy services play an essential role in the community and the quality of life of residents. Libraries provide a great social return on the investment of taxpayers, through their literacy services as well as the many other community-relevant services they provide. Literacy programs increase reading levels of adults and children, and the effects of such changes move beyond the individual. Society as a whole benefits through increased productivity and a more informed electorate. Additionally, the use of volunteers in literacy programs is not only altruistically rewarding, but essential in providing high quality, individualized services to library and literacy program participants. Based on the findings of our CLLS ALS Outcomes Roles & Goals analysis, adult learners participating in the CLLS ALS are making excellent progress toward meeting their own, self-defined literacy goals.