



LITERACY IS
**MORE THAN
WORDS.**

2022-2023 ANNUAL REPORT


**LITERACY CENTER
OF WEST MICHIGAN**



Nedith Faro Art & Photography



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LITERACY TAKES

TRUST.

Literacy and language acquisition are hard. They take a lot of bandwidth. And when you're an adult with limited resources, that bandwidth is already stretched thin with the heavy responsibilities of caring for family and earning a living. Initial efforts in literacy can seem pointless given how far it may seem you still need to go.

At the Literacy Center, we show up for folks starting on that journey in a way that gives an immediate value-add to their lives. We work to establish trust with our learners and their communities. We always say, "People will vote with their feet." They will stop showing up if our programming isn't contributing to their lives in a significant way.

This is why we are so encouraged by the explosive growth we saw in this last year. **A 46% increase in learners instructed from the previous year led to waiting lists in all our programming.** This is an indication not only of acute unmet need but also of trust — trust with the 1,128 learners we instructed and their communities.

We also saw a 29% growth in revenue, an indication of the trust we've established with our donors and community partners. We take this trust seriously, and we hold ourselves accountable to be responsive to community need. We work to create immediate impact, but we also celebrate that this impact — the power of literacy — will pay dividends for years to come.



Thank you for trusting us with this powerful mission.

Wendy Falb, Ph.D., Executive Director



THE DIVERSITY OF OUR LEARNERS IS POWERFUL.

Our learners are congresswomen, engineers, and business owners in their home countries who need language skills to work even the most basic jobs in the United States. Just over half of our learners have a high school diploma or some college education in their home country. Almost all of our learners have household income below the Area Median Income.

Our learners are mothers who speak only an indigenous language or refugees who have never attended school. 43% of our learners have less than 12 years of school, which includes a large percentage of learners with no formal education.

Their reasons for learning English are as varied as their backgrounds. But often it comes down to supporting their children, improving their employment, and strengthening their community engagement.

64%

**OF OUR LEARNERS
ARE WOMEN**

20%

**ARE LEARNING HOW
TO READ & WRITE
FOR THE FIRST TIME**

17%

**HAVE A POST-
SECONDARY DEGREE**

58

**COUNTRIES
REPRESENTED**

A YEAR OF TREMENDOUS GROWTH



764
LEARNERS
2022

1,128
LEARNERS
2023

46%

INCREASE IN
LEARNERS

from 2021-2022 to 2022-2023

29%

INCREASE IN
FUNDS RAISED

from 2021-2022 to 2022-2023

LITERACY IS CONFIDENCE.

YOUSRA'S STORY

When Youssra Suliman and her family arrived in Grand Rapids as refugees from Al Fashir, Sudan, they were faced with a number of adjustments: the weather, the language, and the American school system for their young kids. That's when Youssra discovered the Literacy Center's family literacy classes at her children's school, Glenwood Elementary in Kentwood.

Like all parents in our family literacy classes, Youssra began learning the English language needed to understand school communications and meaningfully engage in her children's education. Just as importantly, **she also found a community within her class and the school.**

After making friends in class, Youssra became an active volunteer at the school, helping almost every day in the school garden. This inspired her to start her own garden at home, gardening alongside her children.

In addition, Youssra now has the language skills necessary to help her children. "I'm doing homework with my kids every night," she said. **"It's easier to help my kids with homework than before.** I can help them with reading and math. It's a very good feeling to be able to help them with their homework. My children like to hear me read in English."

While parents and caregivers in our Family Literacy Program set a goal to reach 80 hours of class time per year, Youssra is proud to have achieved over 120 hours of instruction during the last school year.

Youssra says she could tell that her English skills were making a difference in her life during a visit to her doctor's office last year. **Beaming with pride, she shared: "At the doctor's office, when doing a checkup for my pregnancy, I didn't need an interpreter. I can talk to the doctor now."**



**MY CHILDREN
LIKE TO HEAR
ME READ IN
ENGLISH."**

– YOUSRA, LEARNER





77%

**INCREASE IN
CONFIDENCE
WHEN USING
ENGLISH**

per learner surveys



“

I WANT
TO LEARN
EVERYTHING,
EVERY HOUR,
EVERY MINUTE
OF MY LIFE.”

– REZA, LEARNER

90%

INCREASE IN
WORKPLACE
CONFIDENCE

per learner surveys



LITERACY IS A CATALYST.

REZA'S STORY

In his home country of Afghanistan, Reza Nematy was an accomplished software engineer, entrepreneur, and interpreter for U.S. forces. When he and his young family had to flee the country after the collapse of the Afghan government, they left everything behind.

When the family arrived at a military base in the U.S., Reza was asked by his support team to list his needs, and Reza had one answer: a job. Reza remembers, "I was kind of worried about our future."

Reza, his pregnant wife, and their young daughter finally made it to West Michigan where he began working on the manufacturing line at Haworth. While he had strong English language skills, Reza lacked the reading and writing skills necessary to pursue employment in his field.

All that changed when Reza was invited to join the Literacy Center's workplace English classes offered at Haworth. Reza was thrilled to discover that **the free classes would take place at Haworth during work time, eliminating his concerns about transportation, cost, and time.** "I never thought I would have such chances," he says.

Over the course of 15 weeks, the twice-weekly classes covered topics from English grammar to conversational skills, reading maps, understanding instructions, and workplace-specific vocabulary. "This class has helped me a lot, and I learned a lot," Reza says. "So, I can say that that was a big change for me."

Reza's English class not only helped him better communicate on the job, but it also **provided him the opportunity for a promotion at Haworth.** He even took what he learned home to teach English to his wife and children. As he says, "I'm a teacher, and I love teaching."

"I knew that I will face with challenges and difficulties," Reza says. "But because of having an aim and a goal, in my mind, I say I have to do it — and I did it."



LITERACY IS COMMUNITY.

RICH & DAWN'S STORY

"Our [giving] philosophy is simple," writes philanthropists Rich and Dawn Antonini, "we want to support and serve those in need within our community." As donors to the Literacy Center, and early supporters of our current Double the Impact campaign, Rich and Dawn are clearly following their vision to ensure that **everyone in West Michigan has "the same opportunity for success and hope for a bright future."**

Originally drawn to the Literacy Center's impact on the lives of adults in our community, the Antoninis soon began to "imagine ourselves trying to learn a new language in our adult lives." They found it "hard to imagine going each day to our jobs and not being able to understand our job requirements, our healthcare coverage, or simply lacking confidence to engage in conversations with coworkers."

Rich and Dawn also recognized the challenges faced by parents with limited literacy. "We have come to understand that parents who are unable to read and write English find it very challenging to stay engaged with their children's education. That is devastating to us."

The Antoninis have been generous with the Literacy Center beyond simply their own donations, connecting the organization with other donors, literacy coaches, and advocates. "We want to see those 85,000 adults [who read below the 4th grade level in Kent County] build a better future for themselves and their families, which cascades into a brighter future in our community."

"We all win when we all succeed. The ability to read and write is a gift that we are committed to supporting."



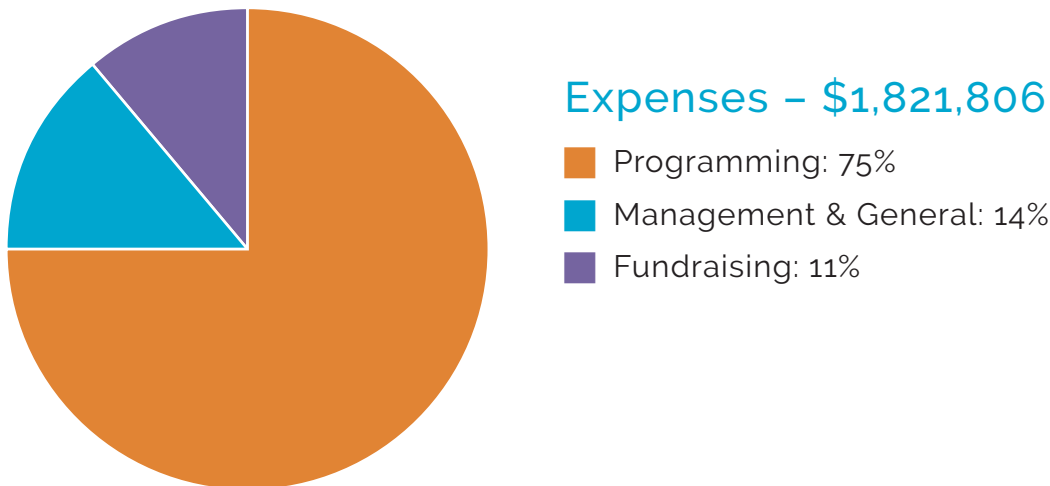
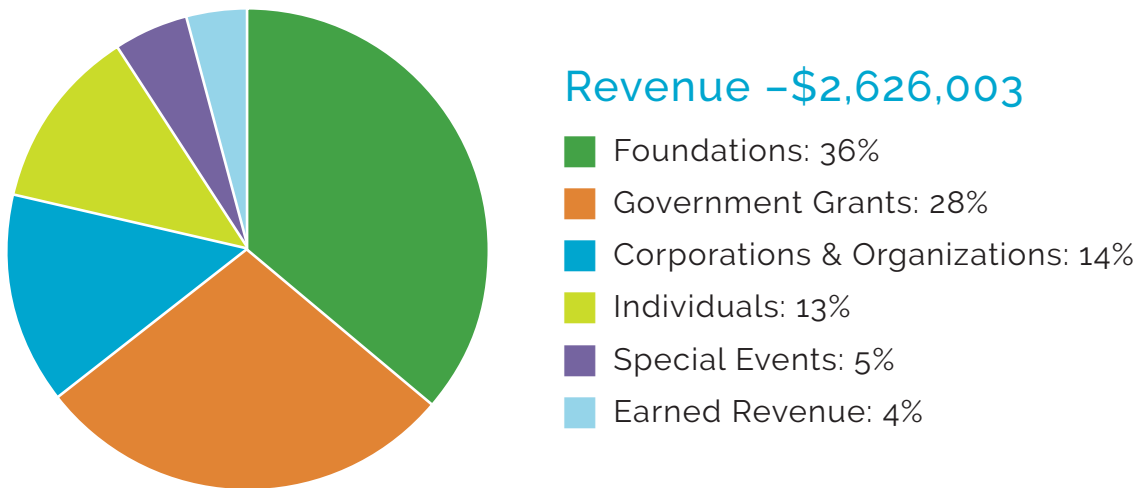
There are 85,000 adults in Kent County reading below a 4th grade level. With waitlists for nearly every program offered at the Literacy Center, we can't do it alone. We have history, expertise, and proven success addressing this critical need.

WE JUST NEED YOU.
literacycenterwm.org/give



2022-2023 FINANCIALS

We are proud to report another year of strong financial support of the Literacy Center's mission. The following financials reflect our 2022-23 fiscal year ending June 30, 2023.



**Source: Fiscal Year 22-23 Audit by Meyaard Tolman & Venlet P.C.*

LITERACY IS PERSISTENCE.

MICHAEL & DELICIA'S STORY

Michael Ripple's story is one of persistence. Born with cerebral palsy and a cognitive impairment, Michael learned to read at 17 but didn't keep up the habit. That was until a year and a half ago when he found the Literacy Center and rediscovered his passion for reading.

"When I started reading, I felt like I would never get there, and sometimes I still feel that way. **Reading taught me that you need to try, and even if you fail, or don't succeed at all, you need to try.**"

His literacy coach, Delicia Francois, is an essential element of Michael's perseverance. She admits that she was nervous when the pair first began working together, but her anxiety was short-lived. "Michael was super excited, and I wanted to do well in helping him achieve his goals. **Michael's positive energy and eagerness to learn has made tutoring him a joy.**"

Delicia is the founding owner of Benevolence Salon in Wyoming, and she's also enrolled at Ferris State University pursuing a bachelor's degree in integrated studies. Drawing on her own experiences, Delicia helps Michael see his potential and pushes him to reach his goals.

"I feel like when she thinks I need to be pushed a little bit more, she knows right when to push and right when to stop to make sure I'm putting in my best effort."

With his sights set on becoming a poet and mystery novelist, Michael says he would most like others to know, **"If you see a challenge and move forward with it instead of running from it, you get to move the world."**

9,000+

TOTAL VOLUNTEER
HOURS DONATED
LAST YEAR

190

LITERACY
COACH-LEARNER
PAIRS



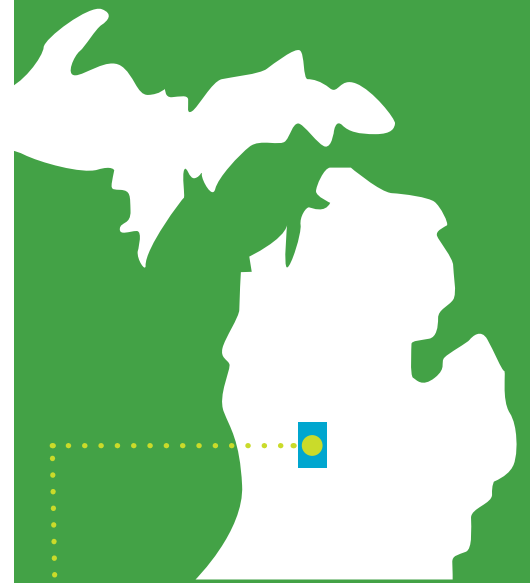
“

READING TAUGHT
ME THAT YOU
NEED TO TRY, AND
EVEN IF YOU FAIL,
OR DON'T SUCCEED
AT ALL, YOU NEED
TO TRY.”

– MICHAEL, LEARNER

FOUNDATIONAL ~~ADULT BASIC~~ EDUCATION

ADULT LITERACY IS THE
FOUNDATION FOR...



85K

ADULTS IN
KENT COUNTY
READING
BELOW A 4TH
GRADE LEVEL

*"NOW I AM HAPPY, AND MY CHILDREN
SEE ME IN MY SCRUBS BEFORE WORK
AND I SEE THEY ARE PROUD. I FEEL
PROUD - I AM A WOMAN, I AM SMART,
AND I KNOW I CAN DO ANYTHING."*

- MOUSUMI, CNA LEARNER



LITERACY TAKES ALL OF US.

As a volunteer, donor, or community partner, you are invested in raising the assets of all our learners, helping them find community, fulfill their potential, and be understood.



VOLUNTEER 2 HOURS/WEEK

Walk alongside an adult learner as they improve their literacy — training provided!

literacycenterwm.org/volunteer



DONATE \$1,500/YEAR

A gift of \$1,500 per year, or \$125/month, supports one learner for a year.

literacycenterwm.org/give



LEAVE A LEGACY FOR LITERACY

Legacy for Literacy donors are committed to the long-term sustainability of the Literacy Center by including us in their estate plans.

For more information: giving@literacycenterwm.org



LITERACY CENTER OF WEST MICHIGAN

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