



**WHERE
LITERACY
MEETS LIFE**

2024-2025

IMPACT REPORT



**LITERACY CENTER
OF WEST MICHIGAN**



WE DID IT ANYWAY!

**THANK YOU TO ALL
THOSE WHO HELPED
SUPPORT AN INCREDIBLE
55 NEW UNITED
STATES CITIZENS
THIS PROGRAM YEAR.**

Front cover: Disney is a learner who, while taking English classes at work, proposed supports for himself and his coworkers' mental health and well-being. A mechanical engineer from Cuba, he's using his growing English skills to strengthen communication, safety, and connection at work.

The Literacy Center's citizenship programming was honored as one of only 36 grantees nationally to receive a USCIS Citizenship Instruction and Naturalization Application Services grant in 2024. This grant, which effectively combined literacy instruction and legal support, was unfortunately and abruptly terminated in January 2025.

We finished the classes that were already underway, but did not have funding to serve our long and growing waiting list. Thanks to the support of donors at Spellebration, we were able to launch another cohort!

LITERACY WHERE WE LIVE

Literacy and language are deeply connected to the places and ways we live. They determine the jobs we hold, the careers and education we pursue, the people we engage with, and how we experience the world around us.

When an adult gains literacy not just in those places but specifically designed for those places, it's transformative. **When language and literacy skills are strengthened, that workplace, school, or health clinic becomes a place of belonging and ownership.**

Literacy may be a high need for the adults we instruct, but traditional delivery models which have a fixed time, curriculum, and location make it difficult for adults to prioritize their education over work and family. We address that difficulty by designing programs that fit into adult lives, making learning not only accessible, but highly relevant.

But our work is not just about the power of contextualizing literacy instruction to physical location and purpose, it's about how literacy and language create our relationship with others. Language and literacy are core to our shared humanity—essential for connection, community and creativity.

The learners you will meet in these pages are beautiful examples of how *literacy for life* has so much power beyond the classroom.

Your contributions, partnership, volunteership, and support fuels our integration of literacy and language skills into life—and to share more of our lives with each other in the process.

Thank you!



Wendy V. Falb, PhD,
Executive Director

**IT IS A PRIVILEGE
TO BUILD COMMUNITY
AND CONNECTION
WITH THE
1,347 ADULT
LEARNERS
WE INSTRUCTED
THIS PAST YEAR.**

LITERACY WHERE YOU LIVE

Founded in 1986 by educators and librarians, the Literacy Center of West Michigan is the largest community-based organization in the state and one of the largest in the country dedicated to adult literacy and English language learning. We are proud to be leading best practice by removing literacy as a barrier for adults in West Michigan.

Your support is not only impacting learners like those on these pages, it is impacting the future of adult education.

In this report, learn more about:

page **5** Where Literacy Meets Employment & Citizenship
FOR JORGE

page **7** Where Literacy Meets Lifelong Learning
FOR ED + ANDY

page **9** Where Literacy Meets Healthcare
FOR MARIA + JESUS

page **11** Where Literacy Meets Family
FOR BRIEN + ABBI



YOUR
GENEROSITY
SUPPORTED

1,347
LEARNERS

from

64
COUNTRIES

145,242
HOURS

of instruction

28%
OF LEARNERS

have an 8th grade or lower level of education, 9% have had no formal education in any language

20%
OF LEARNERS

have a postsecondary degree or professional certification from other countries

WHERE LITERACY HAPPENS

FOR OUR LEARNERS

The Literacy Center meets learners where they are.
In 2024-2025 we met:

405 at **COMMUNITY CENTERS**

242 at **SCHOOLS**

220 **ONLINE**

228 at **WORKPLACES**

195 with **one-on-one coaches**
at **LIBRARIES**

63 at **SKILLED & VOCATIONAL
TRAINING PARTNERS**

55 at **HEALTH CLINICS**

All programming is offered **free of charge** for all learners.





JORGE VALINO

WHERE LITERACY MEETS EMPLOYMENT + CITIZENSHIP

When Jorge arrived in Michigan, he began working long, hot hours in the foundry at RoMan Manufacturing. Though he held a degree in electrical engineering from Cuba, language barriers kept him from doing the work he was trained for.

“Jorge was always a great employee,” recalls his colleague Casey, who met him on the foundry floor. “But we knew he could do so much more.” RoMan placed Jorge in the Literacy Center’s Customized Workplace English class held onsite, where he could learn English language skills customized to his employment.

As his English improved, Jorge began to move up. Today, he runs the R&D lab at RoMan —“the lab where we blow stuff up,” he says with a grin. He’s also a proud U.S. citizen, a milestone he reached in early 2025 through the Literacy Center’s classes.

“I did the training because my teacher at the Literacy Center encouraged me,” Jorge says. “It made everything easier.”

Through the Literacy Center’s workplace English classes, Jorge strengthened his communication skills and his ability to contribute more fully on the job. “Every teacher offers something important,” he says. “I like the classes very much. It’s very important.”

The impact is clear. “English has given Jorge the ability to truly own his role,” says Casey. “He doesn’t need someone else to bridge the gap for him anymore. He brings confidence, clarity, and ideas—and it benefits the entire business.”

Casey puts it simply: “You don’t want a skilled electrical engineer sweeping floors. **When you invest in English, you unlock talent.** Jorge is proof of that.”



Jorge Valino in the lab he manages, after improving his English allowed him to share his knowledge and skill.

228
LEARNERS
instructed at their
WORKPLACES
at
17
DIFFERENT
EMPLOYERS

350
LEARNERS
participated in
WORKFORCE
DEVELOPMENT
TRAINING

55
NEW U.S.
CITIZENS



385
**FAMILY LITERACY
LEARNERS**
instructed at
13
**SCHOOLS
& ONLINE**

2,809
**HOURS OF FREE
CHILDCARE**
provided

70
LEARNERS
upskilled to
**HEALTHCARE
CAREERS**

MARIA GUADALUPE

WHERE LITERACY MEETS HEALTHCARE

Maria Guadalupe's journey with the Literacy Center has taken her from her daughter's school, to her health clinic, and now to her workplace. **At each step, literacy has opened new doors for her and her family.**

She and her husband first connected with the Literacy Center through the Family Literacy program at Godfrey Lee Public Schools, where he still takes classes each week. Soon after, Maria joined a Literacy Center health literacy class. There she learned practical skills—like when to use urgent care instead of the emergency room and how to prepare for doctor's visits. The class also gave her something more: the confidence to reconnect with a dream she had carried since childhood. "I wanted to be a doctor but life happens. I'm very interested in healthcare."

With encouragement from the Literacy Center, Maria enrolled in the MI Impact program, offered in partnership with Corewell Health and WMCAT. She has now been hired by Corewell Health and is starting her journey in Pharmacy Technician training. For her, it is a career step, not just a job. "Now I can study a career so that is a big thing. Before I was looking for something to do to work or in a home, but now I have this opportunity, now I have everything I need to pursue what I need."

Maria admits she was astonished by the level of support along the way. **"I was in shock at how much support they provide, they provide everything! They worry about you getting success in the program and in life. It is incredible the help they give to people."**

Her daughter is her greatest encourager, asking every day how school went and celebrating her progress. That daily motivation, combined with the support of the Literacy Center, WMCAT, and Corewell Health, has helped Maria take steps she once dreamed of.

"I will try to work through and do my best," she says, "so I can have a better future for myself and my family as well."



Maria in class at the Literacy Center to become a Pharmacy Technician with Corewell Health. **Opposite:** Maria and her husband with their daughter outside her school, where her husband also takes English classes.

ED TAYLOR

WHERE LITERACY MEETS LIFELONG LEARNING

When Ed Taylor came to the Literacy Center of West Michigan, he was fighting serious disease and didn't know how much time he had left. But rather than letting the uncertainty of his life stop him, Ed decided it was time to focus on something deeply important to him — improving his reading and writing. "There's a big difference between reading and understanding what you're reading," he told us when reflecting on why he reached out for help.

Ed's goal was simple yet profound: to set an example for his daughter. "I set forth and make an example for my daughter," he said. "No matter what age you is, if you need help you reach out and get it." We were deeply saddened when Ed passed away in May 2025. Yet his commitment to learning, his kindness, and his courage continue to inspire us.

When Ed was paired with his literacy coach, Andy Howland, the two quickly developed a connection. For two years, they met weekly at the Grand Rapids Public Library, turning their lessons into conversations about life and learning. "We talked about life, and it became more of a friendship," said Ed.

Andy remembers Ed as thoughtful and caring. "I'm glad we were able to build a relationship," Andy reflected. "In getting to know him, I got to love the guy. He was mellow, kind-hearted, and introspective. He thought a lot about

things. What a nice quality to have — he was never judgmental of others."

"Ed was really smart — I could have a conversation with him about anything," Andy said. "He had a great vocabulary and knew how to put words together." Every week when they met, they would take out letter tiles and Andy would spell a word for Ed to write down. Then he would switch out one letter to make a new word, 25 words each time. After 15 weeks, both Ed and Andy were impressed at the improvement in his handwriting and spelling.

Ed's story exemplifies the centrality of literacy to our lives and our connections with others, as even in the face of serious disease and limited time, Ed was committed to learning and to building a relationship with Andy. We are honored to have been a part of his life.

**WATCH THIS VIDEO
TO MEET ED + ANDY**

youtu.be/KKa1_JpXBwg





5,595
**VOLUNTEER
HOURS**
contributed by
111
VOLUNTEERS

195
LEARNERS
instructed with
**LITERACY
COACHES**



BRIEN + ABBI MARTI

WHERE LITERACY MEETS FAMILY

For Brien and Abbi Marti, giving to the Literacy Center honors their family's histories while shaping new generations. Both of them have grandparents who arrived in the U.S. from other countries to build new lives, and those stories of starting over have shaped Brien and Abbi's perspective on philanthropy.

"We want our support to go to people who are looking to be better," Brien explains. "For us, it's about helping the person who is working hard to improve their life—just like others helped our grandparents 70 or 80 years ago."

Brien joined the Literacy Center's Finance Committee in 2017 and appreciates the organization's agility and creativity in responding to the community's needs. Brien says, "I tell people that this is a great mission with people who make the most out of every dollar you give. **You're changing the course of someone's life when you give here.**"

The Martis stay busy, balancing work, family, and community life. Brien's nine-year-old son, Jack, and their one-year-old, Moses, keep the household lively—and the family is preparing to welcome a baby girl in January. Even in the midst of this full season, Brien and Abbi remain inspired by the determination of literacy learners. They admire the courage it takes for adults to take on literacy later in life, often for the sake of their families. "It's not easy, but they're doing it for their families and their future. They deserve to have a resource like the Literacy Center," he says.

Brien and Abbi see their giving as part of building the kind of community they want their children to grow up in. "I hope that whatever money we give helps close the gap in moving Grand Rapids to be a better place tomorrow than it was today," Brien says.



Your gifts help bring about a just and vibrant West Michigan through the power of literacy. Consider making a gift today, and your support will go directly to offering free literacy instruction for more than 1,300 learners annually.

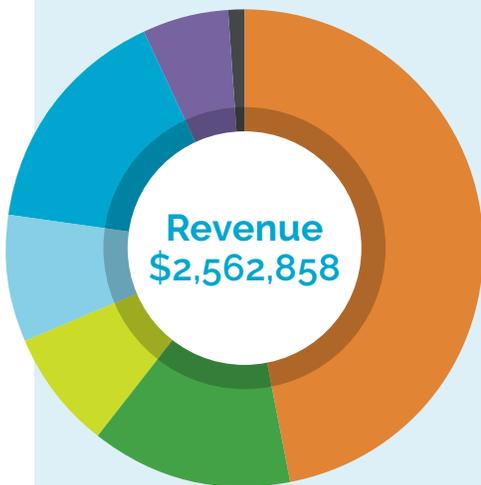
Your generosity is greatly appreciated and a variety of giving options are available. Please consider a monthly contribution or choose the Literacy Center of West Michigan for your Donor Advised Fund.

GIVE TODAY
literacycenterwm.org/give



2024-2025 FINANCIALS

Your support matters. Your gift, through the Literacy Center of West Michigan, makes an enormous impact on the lives of learners and their communities. Here's how we managed our financials for the 2024-2025 fiscal year ending June 30, 2025:



- Government Grants: 48%
- Foundations: 14%
- Individuals: 8%
- Earned Revenue: 9%
- Corporations & Organizations: 14%
- Special Events: 6%
- Interest: 1%

2024-2025 BALANCE SHEET

Assets: \$2,304,042

Liabilities: \$1,341,743

Net assets with donor restriction:
\$481,648

Net assets without donor restriction:
\$480,651

Total net assets:
\$962,299



- Programming: 79%
- Management & General: 14%
- Fundraising: 7%

Your support meets learners
WHERE THEY LIVE.

These financial resources
instructed

1,347
LEARNERS
this year!

The Literacy Center of West Michigan's fiscal year 24-25 audit was performed by Vredevelde Haefner LLC. Further details are available upon request.

WHERE LITERACY MEETS GENEROSITY

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

GIVE \$1,500/YEAR

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

literacycenterwm.org/give



VOLUNTEER 2 HOURS/WEEK

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

literacycenterwm.org/volunteer



LEAVE A LEGACY

As a Legacy for Literacy donor, you commit to the long-term sustainability of the Literacy Center by including us in your estate plan. [Email us at giving@literacycenterwm.org](mailto:giving@literacycenterwm.org) to learn more.



2024-2025 HIGHLIGHTS

- **We moved!** Thanks to everyone who joined us at the Open House on February 12, 2025 to celebrate our new location.
- **Wendy V. Falb, PhD, executive director, testified** to the head of the federal Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE) about the importance of adult foundational education for expanding successful apprenticeships.
- **Our first cohort of learners graduated** from MI Impact programming, a collaboration with Corewell Health, WMCAT, Goodwill Industries, and GRCC that upskills entry-level employees with the literacy and language instruction they need to fill mid-level healthcare positions in high demand.
- **The National Center for Families Learning honored us** with the Sharon Darling Innovation Fund award, recognizing our work in multiple systems that impact family learning as 1 of 3 grantees nationally.
- Our **health literacy programming was featured** in a peer-reviewed research article published by the Coalition on Adult Basic Education, written by Wendy V. Falb, PhD and Bree Straayer, PhD: "Braiding Together Family Literacy and Health Literacy: Insights into New Program Development."
- We **launched Refugee Health Promotions** for new residents, supporting refugee health through contextualized literacy instruction through every program.





LITERACY CENTER OF WEST MICHIGAN

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LITERACY CENTER OF WEST MICHIGAN

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