



PROLITERACY

Improving lives and communities through adult literacy

Our Mission

ProLiteracy champions the power of literacy to improve the lives of adults and their families, communities, and societies.

- We believe in the power of literacy to end poverty, injustice, discrimination, and violence.
- We believe that literacy empowers adults to make a better life and world for themselves and their families.
- We believe that collaboration, open communication, diversity, and inclusion are essential in helping communities expand adult literacy programs.
- We know that adults who read raise children who read and do better in school and life.
- We know that literacy helps families, support themselves through work, be healthier, be better citizens, and create a more fair and just society

ProLiteracy works with its members, partners, and the adult learners they serve, along with local, national, and international organizations. ProLiteracy helps build the capacity and quality of the programs that are teaching adults to read, write, compute, use technology, and learn English as a new language by:

- Advocating for public policies and legislation that benefit adult learners and the people and programs that serve them.
- Providing professional development and training, technical assistance, publications, online resources, and credentialing services for program directors, instructors, trainers, and volunteer tutors working with adult learners in the U.S.
- Internationally, ProLiteracy works with existing non-governmental agencies, creating programs that combine native language literacy lessons with community projects related to the environment, economic self-sufficiency, education, health, family literacy, and peace/conflict resolution using a methodology called Literacy for Social Change.
- Publishing educational materials that address learning needs and difficulties for youth in grades 6–10, and for adults. Produces the only weekly newspaper written in plain English. Proceeds from sales of these materials through New Readers Press, our publishing division, support ProLiteracy programs.

In the U.S., ProLiteracy represents --- organizations and ---- individual members.

Globally, ProLiteracy works with 125 grassroots partners in 65 developing countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East.

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Adult Low Literacy to the U.S.

The 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL) estimated that 30 million individuals aged 16 and over read at the “below basic” literacy level. This means that they struggle with such simple daily tasks as: understanding a newspaper story written at the eighth grade level; choosing an item from a menu; using a television guide; and filling out a job application. An additional 60 million adults read at the “basic” level, not well enough for the requirements of today’s high level, high technology jobs.

Low literacy in the United States affects the country’s ability to be competitive in the global market. It can be linked to crime rates, raises the cost of health care, and costs local, state, and federal governments billions of dollars each year:

- Labor economists indicate that 70 percent or more of all future jobs will require some education beyond high school.¹
- The lower an individual’s reading level, the more likely he or she will be unemployed.
- Low literate adults are more likely than strong readers to use taxpayer-supported public assistance and welfare programs and state-funded medical care.
- 22 percent of all inmates in state and federal prisons can barely read and write, according to the 2003 NAAL. In Connecticut, the average yearly cost of keeping an inmate in prison is more than \$44,000.² The average cost of one year of adult literacy instruction ranges between \$500 to \$800.
 - Adult literacy programs in prisons work. The Maryland State Department of Education reports that inmates who participated in education programs while in jail commit fewer crimes after release, are more likely to find work after they are released, and behave better while they are incarcerated.
- The 120,000 California young people who leave high school without a diploma cost the state \$46.4 billion in unemployment, crime, state-funded medical care, welfare, and lost taxes.³
- The District of Columbia would save \$70 million a year in crime-related costs if the male graduation rate increased by 5 percent.⁴
- A study at the Feinberg School and Northwestern Memorial Hospital showed that low literacy impairs people's ability to obtain critical information about their health and can shorten their lives by as much as five years.⁵
- Low health literacy costs the U.S. an estimated \$106 billion to \$238 billion each year. That represents 7-17 percent of all personal health care money spent annually, and is enough to ensure the 47 million Americans without health coverage.⁶

¹ Jones, Dennis and Patrick Kelly, *Updated Profiles for all 50 States and Including International Comparative Data*, National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, May 2007

² Hughes, Paul, *Costs of Prisons Soar. Medical training costs almost as much as a year in medical school*, The Republican-American, March 2, 2008 (The Real Cost of Prisons Weblog)

³ The California Dropout Research Project, February 28, 2008

⁴ Alliance for Excellent Education, *The State Card Report*, March 14, 2008

⁵ Baker, David, MD, *Health Literacy and Death Rates*, Archives of Internal Medicine, July 23, 2007

⁶ Vernon, John, Ph.D., Trujillo, Anthony, Ph.D., Rosenbaum, Sara, JD, and DeBuono, Barbara, MD, MPH, *Low Health Literacy: Implications for National Health Policy*, University of Connecticut, October 2007



Adult Illiteracy around the World

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) estimates that there are 774 million adults who are illiterate in their native languages in the world today. In 2001, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution declaring 2003-2101 the “United Nations Literacy Decade,” with a particular emphasis on adult literacy.

- Two-thirds of the world’s illiterate adults are women.
- The largest numbers of illiterate adults live in sub-Saharan Africa.
- Development economists have shown that parent’s education and literacy translates into healthier lives, reduced fertility, and children who are less disease prone.⁷
- Illiteracy rates are highest in the countries with the greatest poverty.
- Gender inequality goes beyond education to include salary gaps, minimal access of women to certain fields of study and jobs, and lack of political representation. Literacy education that is linked to microenterprise and human rights programs help women become self-sufficient economically and raise their self-esteem so that they are more aware of their rights.
- Women with even a few years of schooling are better agricultural workers, generate more income, and take better care of their families.⁸

⁷ EFA Global Monitoring Report, *Education for All by 2015: Will We Make It?*, UNESCO, Nov. 29, 2007

⁸ *Adult Education in a Polarizing World*, Education for All, UNESCO, 1997.



David C. Harvey
ProLiteracy President/CEO

David C. Harvey is responsible for the organization's advocacy efforts on behalf of adult learners at the national and international levels, oversees the operations of New Readers Press, ProLiteracy's publishing division, leads the domestic and international programs that provide training and resources to the programs that offer adults instruction in reading, writing, and mathematics.

Before joining ProLiteracy in September, 2007, Mr. Harvey served as founding executive director of AIDS Alliance for Children, Youth & Families, a national training, research, and advocacy organization in Washington, D.C. He is the author of peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters, and monographs on health, disability and HIV/AIDS issues. As a project director with the National Disability Rights Network, he directed disability and legal rights education projects; he also directed government relations activities for the National Pediatric/Family HIV Resource Center of the University of Medicine & Dentistry of New Jersey.

Mr. Harvey has a bachelor's degree in political science and a master's of social work from the National Catholic University School of Social Service.