

The Buffalo and Erie County Public Library Literacy Services Master Plan

Creating a Sustainable Community through Library Literacy Centers: Connecting Learning to Life

Need Addressed:

Issues related to the causes of poverty and under-education are varied, multifaceted and complex. Unemployment, underemployment, special parental circumstances, lack of civic engagement and lack of resources in the home create a cycle of illiteracy and poverty.

To Read or Not to Read, a study published in November 2007 by the National Endowment for the Arts found that, “Poor reading skills correlate heavily with lack of employment, lower wages, and fewer opportunities for advancement.” It goes on to note another alarming association: “... deficient readers are less likely to become active in civic and cultural life, most notably in volunteerism and voting.”

The National Center for Education Statistics’, *Literacy in Every Life: Results from the 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy* published in 2007 reports that “...adults with higher literacy levels were more likely to be employed full-time...” while “...[a]dults with lower literacy levels...generally earned lower incomes.” The study also noted that, “[W]omen with higher levels of literacy were less likely to have received public assistance than women with low levels of literacy. If they did receive public assistance, they did so for a shorter amount of time than women with lower literacy levels.”

Research indicates that student and adult skills can be enhanced by well-focused before, after-school and weekend programming and targeted services. Providing appropriate materials and programming is a primary factor that influences adult, student and family achievement.

The Buffalo and Erie County Public Library (B&ECPL), along with its major partners, will provide a balanced, focused approach to enhancing educational attainment and life skill development in programs and services offered to adults, students and families in Erie County. Buffalo residents live in the City ranked third in the United States for child poverty with over 80% of school children qualifying for the free and reduced lunch. And these children -- along with those living in the rest of Erie County -- grow up in communities that have, on average, 25% of the residents with below basic literacy skills.

The Plan

The Buffalo and Erie County Public Library and key project partners, Project Flight, Literacy Volunteers and Buffalo Public Schools Adult Education are collaborating to present a holistic framework to address issues of academic underachievement, literacy enrichment and remediation for adults, students, children and their families. Programs and services will be offered at the Central Library and selected library branch locations designated as Library Literacy Centers (LLC's). These programs and services will help to extend, promote and reinforce literacy initiatives in homes and throughout the community. These programs will help adults to develop reading skills, enable families to become more literate and help to ensure that children will read at or beyond grade level and develop the life skills necessary to succeed in school and in life. The Buffalo and Erie County Public Library, with its major partners and in collaboration with other service providers including WNED, will focus on literacy and life skill enhancement, tutoring, and on training for volunteers, librarians, teachers and parents in strategies that increase student performance and establish a literacy-rich community and home environment. It will also provide educational resources and materials to the libraries, schools and homes of participating families.

Literacy Square @ Lafayette Square

The B&ECPL is seeking to accommodate the operations of both Project Flight and Literacy Volunteers within the Central Library to foster and support collaborative planning, efficiencies of scale, scope and mission, and to enlist their support in the refinement and implementation of the Library System's Literacy Master Plan. Residing in close proximity will enable these three complementary organizations the opportunity to collaboratively plan services and future endeavors, and more easily partner to apply for literacy grants.

Literacy Square will create an environment at the Central Library where literacy service providers can connect, collaborate and cooperate with other providers, current and potential clients and other literacy services stakeholders.

Literacy Square creates a literacy division for the Library with respected, well-established, professional literacy organizations with virtually no start up costs;

Increases Library's opportunities to **further develop relationships with collaborative partners** and partner Board members

Brings **experienced grant writing** teams in-house for assistance with literacy and education-related grant applications and implementation plans

Enables Library to **forgo hiring Literacy Coordinator position in near term, resulting in more than \$80,000 of cost avoidance** and creates transitional framework for Library System to further develop literacy programs and to coordinate initiatives

Ability to **connect each Library in the B&ECPL System to a partner school** for collaborative endeavors in the future, including summer reading initiatives and after-school homework programs and tutoring services through future Library Literacy Centers

Enables **on-site consultation and training opportunities for literacy** and education-related topics and enhances staff access to professionals in literacy field for mentoring, guidance and continuing education

Provides Library with on-site **access to multi-lingual special education and literacy specialists**

Establishes a permanent **Book Bank** at the Central Library, with materials available for library staff to distribute to children and families through current and future initiatives and programs. These programs could include distribution and collection development through:

Family Place™ Family Literacy centers

Special Events (Library Card sign-up month, Summer Reading Program, The Big Read)

New and enhanced bi-lingual, multicultural collections in more Libraries

Enables Library to expand children's and parenting collections throughout the System. **Access to more than \$200,000 worth of free books each year for collection development and reading incentives**

Establishes ongoing assistance **for implementation of Library System's Literacy Master Plan**

Access to **readily available volunteers and volunteer training opportunities**

Library Literacy Centers

This program will establish Library Literacy Centers (LLC's) in select areas of the City of Buffalo and Erie County over a four year period. The Buffalo and Erie County Public Library, Project Flight, Buffalo Public Schools Adult Education Division, Literacy Volunteers and other partners will come together to assume a collective responsibility for enhancing the literacy of adults, children and their families who reside in the most impoverished and neediest areas in Buffalo and Erie County. The LLC's are located in library branches that are familiar, well-known, neighborhood locations which will provide award-winning literacy programs, safe havens for learning, state-of-the-art technology and rich collections of resources and books to help adults, children and their families fulfill their dreams.

In the first year, LLC's will be established at the Central Library, the Niagara Branch Library, the Lackawanna Public Library and the Anna M. Reinstein Library in Cheektowaga. The East Delevan Branch Library is currently serving as a Read to Succeed Buffalo Success Center, and is within the State's Literacy Zone area. That branch has been adopted by the Josephine Goodyear Foundation for a 3-year grant program, and many of the programs are currently, and will continue to be, administered and sponsored by Read to Succeed; it will also be eligible for state Literacy Zone funding and programming opportunities. The East Delevan Branch Library will continue to play an important role in the Library System's literacy plans and services in years to come and will be considered for transition to a Library Literacy Center at the conclusion of the Goodyear Foundation grant.

The **Niagara Branch Library** serves a characteristically at-risk population. According to 2000 Census figures, of the total population of 24,499 residents, one-fourth of the residents are children and over 3,300 households are headed by a single parent. Nearly 50% of the contiguous population is comprised of a variety of ethnic and racial populations other than white. Nearly 40% of the population speaks a language other than English at home. Nearly one-fifth of the population over 25 did not complete high school or above. Forty percent of the residents qualified as living below the poverty line in 2007.

The **Central Library** serves a characteristically at-risk population drawn from the City of Buffalo. Of the total population of 264,292 residents represented in the 2000 Census, 61% of the households with children under 18 are headed by a single parent. Nearly 11% of the population speaks a language other than English at

home. Nearly 19% of the population over 25 did not complete high school or above. Nearly 24% of the residents qualified as living below the poverty line in 2007.

The **Lackawanna Public Library** also serves a characteristically at-risk population drawn from a community which has lost much of its heavy, industrial base. Of the total population of 19,064 in 2000, 43% of the households with children under 18 are headed by a single parent. Nearly 20% of the population speaks a language other than English at home. Nearly 25% of the population over 25 did not complete high school or above. Nearly 17% of the residents qualified as living below the poverty line in 1999.

While the **Anna M. Reinstein Library** serves a characteristically middle class and demographically more homogenous population than that which is found in the City of Buffalo or in Lackawanna, there are similar deleterious factors that effect this population. Of the total population of 3,831 in 2000, 35% of the households with children under the age of 18 are headed by a single parent. About 25% of these people have below basic literacy skills. Almost 10% of the population speaks a language other than English at home. About 20% of the population over 25 did not complete high school or above while just over 10% of the residents qualified as living below the poverty line in 1999.

In each instance, the libraries selected serve communities with significant numbers of at-risk residents, who not only are impoverished, but may live in unsafe areas, have a language other than English spoken at home, have parents who can not read, have parents that may not have a job and do not live in a home with a literate environment that promotes academic excellence. Once the pilot project has been initiated, and has proven to be effective, other branch libraries in the City and in the County will be added as new LLC's.

Library Literacy Center Services and Programs

While each of the LLC's will strategically structure their programs to meet the needs of the local population, three major components will exist within each center.

- The first component, entitled *Family Place*[™], incorporates comprehensive family-centered services that include family literacy, early childhood education, emergent literacy, parent education, socialization and family support. This component provides a holistic approach to creating a literate environment in the home, at school, and in the community. This component

will be implemented jointly by B&ECPL (program planning and implementation) and Project Flight (assessment, evaluation and testing). The theoretical constructs that created Family Place as a national model were developed as a joint initiative of Middle County Public Library and Libraries for the Future. [<http://www.familyplacelibraries.org/>]. This piece has been awarded grant funding and is scheduled to begin implementation in fourth quarter 2009.

- The second component provides after-school programming for school-age children from kindergarten through grade twelve. This component provides a holistic approach to creating a student-centered support system for academic and social development. The program will include tutor-mentors who will provide after-school tutoring in literacy, math, and other academic subjects. They will also facilitate programs, through service-learning and life skill youth development, to students who are selected by the teacher, school, or librarian to attend, or who self-elect. Each tutor-mentor will be trained to maintain a tutoring log identifying the curriculum reviewed, method used, and outcomes of each tutorial or activity session. This component will be implemented jointly by B&ECPLS, Project Flight, schools and outside organizations. This project is in need of funding.
- The third component, entitled *The Adult Learner Program*, provides a holistic approach to creating an adult-centered support system for under-educated adults and older teens; it brings them to a safe environment which can provide targeted enrichment, educational and social support activities. It will provide any of the following based on need: classes on-line and in-person in basic literacy, GED, vocational education, job training, allied health, leisure learning and provide lifelong learning opportunities through books, computers, tutors and a variety of other modalities to meet the needs and interests of a diverse and changing Adult and ESOL Basic Education population.
 - Elements of this component are currently under way. The Buffalo Public Schools Adult Education Program has introduced daily pre-GED and GED classes at the Central Library. This will soon be expanded to offer basic literacy classes for adults and on-line/distance learning GED classes for adults. Further enhancement of these services will develop over time based on funding availability and collaborative partnerships with other community literacy service providers.

How it Works: Implementation

The Buffalo and Erie County Public Library's mission is to connect our diverse community with library resources that enrich, enlighten and entertain. With 37 branches across the county, the Buffalo & Erie County Public Library System (B&ECPLS) is among the most widely distributed public service available to residents of our community. Public library resources and services contribute to individual, family, and community vitality in a myriad of ways -- culturally, educationally, and economically. And, the System is uniquely positioned to support the expansion of continuous education, technology skills, and networks of information that are the fuel for our local economy.

The B&ECPLS is a logical partner for a community-wide literacy initiative that focuses on people and quality of life and that will serve as a conduit for regional economic development. It provides a broad range of information services to diverse constituencies. It is a part of formal and informal community networks and initiatives that support education, jobs and careers, business and cultural activity, and civic pride. It has the resources, services, and facilities that leverage and expand other local agencies' capacity and expertise.

The B&ECPLS is a unique, open institution, where people have access to information, technology, and training on an individual and as-needed basis. With digital information and greater outreach, the B&ECPLS is transforming the way it interacts with the public. It is becoming much more proactive and collaborative, and contributing in a variety of ways to stronger economic development conditions.

Key Collaborative Partners

Project Flight, LLC

Project Flight is a not-for-profit organization devoted to promoting literacy in children in school and at home through school and family literacy initiatives. It works collaboratively with families, practitioners, libraries, schools, community organizations and businesses locally, statewide, nationally, and internationally to achieve its objectives. Since 1993, Project Flight has been characterized as a community "jewel" enjoying collaborative relationships with senior institutions in the Western New York region such as the United Way Serving Erie County and *The Buffalo News*. Robert Bennett, Chancellor of the New York State Board of Regents, characterized Project Flight by the following: "...literacy has been identified as one of the top three critical economic and social needs in our community. The establishment of Project Flight is precisely what has been needed

to help and is required today more than ever before. The important linkage between Project Flight and schools and community agencies is the correct approach to this serious community issue. The contribution of Project Flight, because of their multiple initiatives to the community, cannot be overstated.”

Literacy Volunteers

Literacy Volunteers of Buffalo & Erie County (LV/BEC) is the region's sole provider of free, one-on-one adult literacy services. Their mission and commitment is to enable Erie County residents to reach personal literacy goals in the areas of Basic Reading skills and English For Speakers of Other Languages. They achieve this through recruiting, training and supporting a dedicated group of volunteers who work one-on-one with adults as tutors and mentors. Literacy Volunteers changes lives, word by word. Literacy Volunteers actively recruits, trains and supports a dedicated group of volunteers; increases literacy for adults and their families; assists students to achieve personal, educational and job related goals; builds innovative collaborations and partnerships with other non-profit and government agencies and with the private sector; adapting our programs, services and technology to address emerging community needs and workforce development goals.

Literacy Volunteers of America (LVA) began in 1962 as a small, grassroots effort to wipe out illiteracy in Syracuse, New York. The Buffalo & Erie County affiliate was founded in 1965. Literacy Volunteers of America merged with Laubach Literacy International in late 2002 and create a "Literacy Superpower" consisting of nearly 1,400 affiliates. The new parent organization is called ProLiteracy America. As a result of this name change, our affiliate became known as ‘Literacy Volunteers of Buffalo and Erie County.’

Buffalo Public Schools Adult Education

The BPS Adult and Continuing Education Division promotes successful adult, family and community outcomes through high quality programs and services to the greater Buffalo community. Residents of Buffalo may participate in the services offered, many of which are at no cost, and complement the programming offered by the public Library system, including: free literacy classes, GED classes, English as a Second Language, math reading and writing, computer classes, vocational education and job training.

Future

This Plan is a living, and changing, organism and it is a work in progress. As our partnerships develop and strengthen, and as funding is available, details about

specific programs will be articulated and disseminated as companion pieces to this Plan. This Plan is the framework from which our Master Literacy Services will grow and develop over time, based on the needs of our users and of our communities.