

Strategic Plan to Address Adult Literacy in Central Arkansas: A Focus on Community Awareness, Engagement, and Development



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Executive Summary

Adult literacy is a pressing issue in Central Arkansas today. In Pulaski and Faulkner counties, about 30,000 individuals cannot read above a fifth grade reading level. Literacy Action of Central Arkansas strives to raise awareness about the issue of adult literacy, to give adults options to learn to read, to teach English to non-native speakers, and to prepare adults with low-literacy skills to enter post-secondary training programs. In collaboration with Literacy Action, four Clinton School of Public Service students have developed a strategic plan to increase community participation in addressing adult literacy. The students spent one year identifying key stakeholders in Central Arkansas, conducting research on community attitudes and awareness on adult literacy, and developing this strategic communications plan which will allow Literacy Action to improve community engagement within the organization and in adult literacy. The ideas and suggestions are drawn directly from stakeholder interviews. The purpose of this strategic plan is to increase community and individual engagement in Literacy Action by changing community attitudes toward low-literate adults, showing the impact low literacy has on other socioeconomic issues, and raising awareness about adult literacy.

Goal

To make adult literacy a priority issue in Central Arkansas by changing attitudes and perceptions, illustrating community impact, raising awareness, and increasing engagement.

Attitudes and Perceptions

Attitudes and perceptions encompass how community members view low-literate adults. Stakeholders are generally confused by the interchangeability of the terms “literacy,” “illiteracy,” and “low-literacy.” They were unsure which term to use, which made it harder for them to discuss the issue. Every stakeholder acknowledged that there is at least one negative perception associated with low-literate adults. For example, 50 percent stated that society views low-literate adults as unintelligent. Most stakeholders agreed that stigmas severely impede the process of outreach to low-literate adults, as well as potential volunteers and donors, thus creating a negative impact on the community at large.

Question 1:

- How can we positively influence the current conversations surrounding adult literacy in Central Arkansas?

Answer:

- Eliminate the negative perceptions of low literate adults by humanizing the issue and changing the language used to describe the issue.

Strategies:

- Deconstruct stigmas by humanizing the issue through personal stories; illustrating how adult literacy affects individuals in every community, regardless of race, religion, socioeconomic class, or geography.
- Decrease the semantic confusion surrounding the language used to talk about adult literacy by establishing uniform terminology to make it easier for individuals to discuss and understand the issue.
 - Conduct research on individual reactions to certain terminology to determine the best language to use when discussing the issue.

Community Impact

Adult literacy in Central Arkansas is an important and systemic social issue that requires community engagement and involvement. Our stakeholder interviews show that many people believe literacy impacts a number of other socioeconomic problems. Accordingly, increasing adult literacy rates will therefore benefit the community at large by positively influencing these issues. Seventy-five percent of stakeholders believe that the community will improve meaningfully if literacy rates increase. Furthermore, 85 percent of stakeholders recognized a link between employment and literacy, while 65 percent stated that an improvement in adult literacy rates would positively impact early childhood education.

Question 2:

- How do we illustrate the benefits of having a fully literate community?

Answer:

- Link low literacy in adults with the socioeconomic issues the community cares about the most, such as employment, poverty, early childhood education, and crime.

Strategies:

- Illustrate that a lack of an employable, literate workforce deters industries from expanding into Arkansas.
- Demonstrate the need for a literate workforce to compete in a knowledge-based economy.
- Show the correlations between higher literacy rates and increased income-potential, decreased crime, and decreased unemployment.
- Explain how breaking the cycle of intergenerational literacy increases childhood literacy and allows parents to take more active roles in their children's educations.
- Illustrate the connection of adult literacy to issues that the Central Arkansas community is already intimately involved with, such as hunger, poverty, homelessness, and healthcare.

Awareness

Raising awareness about low literacy in Central Arkansas is a key component in drawing attention to how adult literacy rates affect communities. Our interviews show that all respondents agree that addressing the lack of awareness about adult literacy within the community is the first step in increasing engagement. Respondents identified a variety of avenues to increasing awareness and establishing a presence, whether physical or digital, within communities. A majority of respondents also voiced that before one is inspired to engage, there must first be a base of knowledge to gauge the problem of adult literacy and to determine how their time or services can help.

Question 3:

- How can we effectively raise awareness about the issue of adult literacy in Central Arkansas?

Answer:

- Create an effective, inclusive awareness campaign primarily targeted toward churches, businesses, and schools. One-on-one interactions should be paired with broader public awareness campaigns.

Strategies:

- Expand and improve Internet presence by studying existing marketing and branding strategies.
- Establish presence in the local media, including television and newspapers, by collaborating with local media leaders and outlets.
- Create community events to increase awareness and support for Literacy Action.
- Tie adult literacy to other socioeconomic issues that affect Central Arkansas communities.
- Tailor messaging to churches, businesses, and schools.
 - Demonstrate how Literacy Action's initiatives fit with the missions of local churches.
 - Illustrate the benefits of having a literate workforce to local businesses.
 - Connect adult literacy with improved educational outcomes for children.
- See Appendix A for stakeholder's specific suggestions on raising awareness.

Organizational Engagement

Getting the community motivated to work toward its future is the final component of the strategy. It is important to develop multiple strategies that target a variety of community assets (nontraditional community leaders, retired educators, business owners, teachers, physicians, librarians, literacy advocates, etc.) in order to increase engagement in Literacy Action. Collaborating with other organizations is a key component in engaging the community in adult literacy. Additionally, recruiting and retaining volunteers and donors are essential to the long-term success of Literacy Action.

Question 4:

- How can we collaborate with other institutions in Central Arkansas to address adult literacy?

Answer:

- Influence organizations to become engaged in Literacy Action of Central Arkansas through purposeful, deliberate action.

Strategies:

- Investigate the establishment of mutually beneficial, value-creating partnerships with churches, schools, and local businesses.
- Develop targeted, specific strategies for each of these three sectors, and communicate specific benefits to becoming involved (see Appendix B).
 - Illustrate how involvement with Literacy Action relates to the outreach and services provided by local churches.
 - Communicate to businesses how partnering with Literacy Action will strengthen the bottom line of the company.
 - Utilize existing programs and spaces in schools and universities to benefit both Literacy Action and the partner institutions.
- Recommend future research to determine specific messaging strategies.
- See Appendix A for stakeholder's specific suggestions on engaging the community in adult literacy.
- See Appendix C for a list of organizations recommended by stakeholders as potential partners.

Individual Engagement

Question 5:

- How can we frame the issue of adult literacy so that individuals understand the issue and what effective actions they can take to assist Literacy Action in fulfilling its mission?

Answer:

- Increase and retain volunteers and donors through purposeful, deliberate action.
- Present specific ways to get involved with Literacy Action, such as providing opportunities for community members to donate materials, time, money, and volunteer services.

Strategies:

- Utilize current volunteers and donors to recruit more individuals to become involved with Literacy Action.
- Consult best practices of volunteer recruitment and retention to guide Literacy Action's efforts to increase volunteers and donors.
- Create incentives for volunteerism by recognizing volunteers' and donors' contributions and achievements, by offering rewards and special events, and by incorporating feedback into the program.
- Recommend future research to determine specific messaging strategies.
- See Appendix A for stakeholder's specific suggestions on engaging the community in adult literacy.

Appendix A: Suggestions from Stakeholders on Raising Awareness and Increasing Engagement

Media and Advertising

- Utilize every form of media to promote Literacy Action and the issue of adult literacy, including television commercials, radio advertisements, and newspaper and magazine advertisements.
- Partner with Lamar and other billboard companies to run ads for Literacy Action and public service announcements about adult literacy on unused billboards.
- Find a local celebrity or personality to become the “poster child” for the issue of adult literacy, such as Craig O’Neill.
- Create a series of Op-Eds, letters to the editor, and press kits (for both staff and supporters of LACA) to conduct a local and national media outreach campaign.
- Put inserts that advertise Literacy Action into electric, gas, and water bills.

Activities and Events

- Create fundraisers and events, such as a charity walk, which can become the “signature” of Literacy Action, or what the organization is known for doing.
- Have a booth at the Literary Festival in April.
- Organize a conference or summit of various education and literacy organizations in the area to synthesize ideas, methods, and objectives. Convene a working group of literacy organizations to create uniform measures such as best practices for volunteer recruitment, training, and retention.
- Hold public forums for general community members about the issue and what can be done.
- Create a Literacy Action Speaker’s Bureau of volunteers to give speeches about adult literacy to any interested civic group, school, business, etc.

Other

- Work with Central Arkansas Library System (CALs) to create a campaign that combines monetary donation and awareness. Librarians can ask patrons if they would like to donate a dollar to help adult literacy in Central Arkansas. Patrons can then write their name on a piece of paper that can be posted in the library to show who donated.
- Have UALR conduct an economic impact study to generate hard facts about how adult literacy affects the community.
- Incentives for volunteers and students work well, so ask businesses for in-kind donations (especially Wal-Mart and Kroger gift cards) for use as incentives.

Appendix B: Suggestions from Stakeholders on Targeting Local Churches, Schools, and Businesses

Churches	Schools	Local Businesses
Garner support from all faith communities, including minority churches and non-mainline traditions	Utilize Parent-Teacher Associations to arrange parallel adult-child reading programs	Partner with local restaurants; utilize proceeds from the "hamburger tax" in Conway to fund adult literacy programs
If partnering with churches, be clear that the organization is not affiliated with any particular denomination, so as not to dissuade students or tutors	Partner with or work through universities: service learning programs, earning credit for volunteering, tie adult literacy into curricula for education and social work majors	Partner with places where people shop regularly (such as Kroger and Wal-Mart), allowing for high visibility in promotion
	Partner with adult education centers or GED programs	Inform and mobilize the human resources divisions of state organizations and businesses in order to address literacy and employment
	Partner with local public school districts to arrange parallel adult-child reading programs	Place on-site resources in businesses and places of employment
	Utilize college and university campuses to hold events: partner with Office of Community Engagement, partner with extra-curricular volunteer groups, pass out information about the organization from a table in the Union, hold a public program or panel about adult literacy	Gain corporate sponsorship from well-known companies that often or could employ low literate workers, like Tyson or Wal-Mart
		Create "community rooms" in workplaces to offer both training for literacy tutors and literacy classes for low literate employees

Appendix C: Suggestions from Stakeholders for Potential Partner Organizations

Organization	Category	Website	Contact
American Medical Association	Healthcare	http://www.ama-assn.org/ama	(800) 621-8335
Arkansas State Board of Public Accountancy	Government	http://www.arkansas.gov/asbpa/	ASBPA@arkansas.gov 501-682-1520
Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department	Government	http://www.arkansashighways.com	Director of the Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department Scott Bennett 501-569-2000
Area Health Education Centers	Healthcare	http://ruralhealth.uams.edu/AHEC-Programs	
Arkansas Association of Counties	Government	http://www.arcounties.org	Executive Director Chris Villines cvillines@arcounties.org
Arkansas Baptist College	Higher Education	http://arkansasbaptist.edu	President Dr. Fitz Hill 501-370-4002
Arkansas Chamber of Commerce	Government	http://www.arkansasstatechamber.com	President/CEO Randy Zook rzook@arkansasstatechamber.com
Arkansas Department of Community Corrections	Government	http://www.dcc.arkansas.gov/Pages/default.aspx	Area Manager Kristie Baker 501-324-9176
Arkansas Department of Education	Government	http://www.arkansased.org/	Assistant to Director Zrano Bowles, Jr. Zrano.Bowles@arkansas.gov 501-683-3442
Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality	Government	http://www.adeq.state.ar.us/	ADEQ Director Teresa Marks marks@adeq.state.ar.us 501-682-0959
Arkansas Department of Financial Administration	Government	http://www.dfa.arkansas.gov/Pages/default.aspx	Office of Tax Credits and Special Refunds 501-682-7106

Arkansas Department of Health	Government	http://www.healthy.arkansas.gov/Pages/default.aspx	Director ADH.Administration@arkansas.gov 501-661-2400
Arkansas Department of Human Services	Government	http://humanservices.arkansas.gov/Pages/default.aspx	Director John Selig 501-682-8650
Arkansas Department of Labor	Government	http://www.labor.ar.gov/Pages/default.aspx	Director Todun Apará-Afolabi Todun.Apara-Afolabi@arkansas.gov 501-320-6456
Arkansas Department of Workforce Services	Government	http://dws.arkansas.gov/	<u>Conway Office Manager</u> Diana Kirkdoffer 501-730-9894 <u>Pulaski Office Manager</u> Walter Oliver 501-682-7719
Arkansas Food Bank	Nonprofit	http://www.arkansasfoodbank.org/	CEO Phyllis Haynes 501-565-8121
Arkansas Game and Fish Commission	Government	http://www.agfc.com/Pages/default.aspx	Director's Office 501-223-6305
Arkansas Head Start	Early Childhood Education	http://arheadstart.org/	Collaboration Director Jackie Dedman jackied@arheadstart.org 501.371.0740
Arkansas Homebuilders Association of Greater Little Rock	Professional	http://www.hbaglr.com	Executive Officer & Events Manager Shannon Smiatek shannon@hbaglr.com 501-758-3646
Arkansas Kids Read of Central Arkansas	Government	http://www.arkidsread.org/	Executive Director Charlie Conklin cconklin@arkidsread.org 501.244.2661
Arkansas Literary Festival	Nonprofit / Event	http://www.arkansasliteraryfestival.org	Central Arkansas Library System Director Bobby Roberts 501-918-3037

Arkansas Municipal League	Government	http://www.arml.org	Executive Director Don Zimmerman daz@arml.org 501-374-3484, ext. 100
Arkansas Professional Engineers Society	Professional	http://arkansasengineers.com/aspe/	President J. Paul Strickland info@arkansasengineers.org 501-376-4128
Arkansas Public Policy Panel	Government	http://arpanel.org/	Executive Director Bill Kopsky bill@arpanel.org 501-376-7913 ext. 12
Arkansas Society of Certified Public Accountants	Professional	http://www.arcpa.org/content/ascpa-home.aspx	Associate Executive Director Bruce Alt balt@arcpa.org 501-664-8739
Associated General Contractors	Professional	http://www.agcar.net/	Executive Vice President Richard Hedgecock rhedgecock@agcar.net 501-375-4436
Baptist Health	Medical	http://www.baptist-health.com/	501-202-2000
Ben E. Keith Foods	Restaurant / Food Purveyor	http://www.benekeith.com/food	flinfo@benekeith.com 501-978-5000
Big Brothers Big Sisters of Central Arkansas	Nonprofit	http://www.bbbsca.org	CEO Renee Burks rburks@bbbsca.org 501-374-6661
Boys and Girls Clubs of Arkansas	Nonprofit	http://www.arclubs.org	CEO Cindy Doramus 501-666-8816
Care Link Little Rock	Nonprofit	http://www.care-link.org/cl/	President and CEO Elaine Eubank 501-688-7493
Central AR Chapter of the Institute of Internal Auditors	Professional	https://chapters.theiia.org/central-arkansas/	Central Arkansas Chapter President Mary Etta Qualls MaryEtta.Qualls@acxiom.com

Central High School Parent Teacher Student Association	Education	http://lrcentralhigh.net/ptsa.htm	Executive Board President Debbie Bass rdawbass@sbcglobal.net Cell 501-517-3436
City and Town Magazine	Government	http://www.arml.org/publications_citytown.html	citytown@arml.org
Clinton Foundation	NGO	http://www.clintonfoundation.org/	President Chris Claybaker 501-374-3484
Club 99	Civic Club	http://www.littlerockrotary.com	501-663-0063
Family Service Agency	Nonprofit	http://helpingfamiliesfirst.org/index.html	Chief Executive Officer Paul McGinnis 501-372-4242
Fifty of the Future	Civic Club	http://www.littlerockchamber.com/CWT/External/WCPages/index.aspx	President and CEO Jay Chesshir jchesshir@littlerockchamber.com 501-377-6002
FOCAL	Library	http://www.cals.lib.ar.us/focal/	
Junior League of Little Rock	Civic Club	http://www.jllr.org/	President Maggie Young maggie@southwesteap.com
Kappa Kappa Gamma Sorority	Greek Life	http://associations.kappakappagamma.org/littlerock/	President Allison Caldarera
Kiwanis	Civic Club	http://kiwanisnlr.webs.com	Public Programs Director Robert Copeland rcopeland@my100bank.com 501-603-3723
Lawyers for Literacy	Professional	http://www.lawyersforliteracy.org/	
Leadership Greater Little Rock	Nonprofit	http://www.littlerockchamber.com/CWT/EXTERNAL/WcPages/Membership/Leadership_Greater_Little_Rock.aspx	Judy Knod, jknod@littlerockchamber.com 501-377-6004
Learning Disability Association	Nonprofit	http://www.ldarkansas.org/	President Becca Green 501-666-8777

Little Rock Advertising and Promotion Commission	Advertising	http://www.littlerock.com/about/apcommission.aspx	Advertising and Promotion Commission Chairman Warren Simpson 501-376-4781
Little Rock Audubon Center	Environmental	http://ar.audubon.org/little-rock-audubon-center	Mary Smith 501-244-2229
Mayor's Commission on Homeless Services	Government	http://www.littlerock.org/citymanager/divisions/homelesservices/	Homeless Services Coordinator Jimmy Pritchett jpritchett@littlerock.org 501-379-1562
Metropolitan Housing Alliance	Government	http://www.lrhousing.org/	Executive Director Rodney Forte rforte@mhapha.org 501-340-4821
Mitchell Williams Law Firm	Professional	http://www.mitchellwilliamsllaw.com	Director of Marketing and Public Relations Holly Hiatt hhiatt@mwillaw.com 501-688-8848
Nehemiah Network	Religious Group	http://www.nehemiahnetwork.org	Servant Leader Ray Williams rwilliams@nehemiahnetwork.org 501-804-1205
Our House	Nonprofit	http://www.ourhouseshelter.org	Executive Director Georgia Mjartan georgia@ourhouseshelter.org 501-374-7383 ext. 201
Philander Smith	Higher Education	http://www.philander.edu	Johnny M. Moore jmoore@philander.edu 501-370-5221
Pi Beta Phi Fraternity for Women	Greek Life / Alumni	https://www.pibetaphi.org/pibetaphi/uaark/	Recruitment Director Gina Marie Densmore ARAlpha@pibetaphi.org
Promise Neighborhoods	Public-Private		Joyce Elliot, former State Senator
Reach Out and Read	Nonprofit	http://www.reachoutandreadarkansas.org/	Executive Director Kathy Vining DeLone 501-226-9444 Cell 501-351-4444
RestaurantNews.com	Advertising	http://www.restaurantnews.com	

		ntnews.com/	
Saint Francis House	Nonprofit	http://www.stfrancisministries.com	501-664-5036
Share our Strength	Nonprofit	http://ce.strength.org/events/no-kid-hungry-little-rock	Rachel Mentzer rmentzer@strength.org 202-649-4339
St. Vincent's Health System	Healthcare	https://www.stvincenhealth.com/	St. Vincent Human Resources 501-552-3690
University of Arkansas at Little Rock	Higher Education	http://www.ualr.edu	Dean of Students Logan C. Hampton, Ed.D. deanofstudents@ualr.edu 501-569-3328
University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences	Higher Education	http://www.uams.edu	UAMS Operator 501-686-7000
University of Central Arkansas	Higher Education	http://www.uca.edu	Library Director Art Lichtenstein artL@uca.edu 501-450-5202
US Bank	Professional	https://www.usbank.com/index.html	Patricia Johnson

General Organizations

- Adult Education Centers
- Chambers of Commerce
- Children's Literacy Organizations
- Civitan Clubs
- Correctional Facilities
- County and State Bar Associations
- Food Purveyors
- Homeless Shelters
- Human Resources Departments
- Immigrant Organizations
- Inter-Agency Training Organizations
- Kiwanis Clubs
- Legal Services
- Lion's Clubs
- Local and State Governments
- Organizations in the same neighborhood
- Parent Teacher Associations
- Probation Offices
- Public School Districts
- Re-Entry Programs
- Retirement Homes
- Rotary Clubs
- Senior Centers
- Social Workers in Government and Non-Profit
- State and Local Literacy Councils
- Youth Centers