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California Library Literacy Services Celebrates 30th Anniversary

Events at libraries statewide aim to raise awareness of the need for additional volunteer tutors to help California's 4.5 million low-literate adults improve their reading skills

Sacramento, Calif. – This September, California Library Literacy Services, a program of the California State Library, celebrates 30 years of changing the lives of low-literate adults and their families. Since its inception, California's Library Literacy Services has helped nearly a quarter of a million Californians learn to read and write.

To mark the 30th anniversary milestone of this volunteer-based program, the state is launching a month-long awareness campaign titled "Together, California Reads" to encourage communities to support the efforts of their local public libraries in raising adult literacy rates statewide.

The U.S. Department of Education's [National Assessment of Adult Literacy](#) found that nearly 25 percent of California adults lack basic literacy skills—meaning they can't read a newspaper, a bedtime story to a child or the instructions on a bottle of medicine. Based on the state's current population, as many as 4.5 million Californians over the age of 18 read below fourth grade levels.

Low adult literacy contributes to major socio-economic challenges, with a high percentage of prison inmates and those living in poverty testing at the lowest literacy levels. The children of low-literate parents often aren't read to and have few books in the home, leading to future generations of low-literate adults.

According to [ProLiteracy](#), low adult literacy creates a detrimental cycle that is estimated to cost the U.S. more than \$225 billion each year in workforce non-productivity and loss of tax revenue due to unemployment.

"All over California, trained volunteer tutors are reversing the low adult literacy cycle by working one-on-one with adult learners to help improve their reading skills," said Greg Lucas, California's State Librarian. "The sad fact is there just aren't enough volunteers to meet demand. Nearly 4,000 eager-to-learn adults are on waiting lists across the state."

Last year, California public libraries provided services at 558 locations to 21,192 adult learners through nearly 10,700 volunteers generating over 500,000 hours of service. Working with their volunteer tutors, California adult learners achieved significant literacy goals. Last year, 72 percent of those who set goals were able to share a book with their child and 65 percent were able to help their children with their homework. Sixty-five percent were able to complete a job application and 57 percent wrote their own resume. More adult learner successes can be found in the [2014 California Library Literacy Services Report to the Legislature](#).

“What’s awesome is the magic that happens when learners and tutors come together,” said Carla Lehn, California Library Literacy Services program coordinator. “Not only is the learner’s life changed for the better but so is the volunteer, even though they may be giving just a couple of hours a week.”

Inspirational stories about California adult learners and their volunteer tutors, as well as a complete statewide listing of public library events celebrating 30 years of California’s Library Literacy Services, can be found at www.CalReads.org. For social media updates and other announcements regarding California’s adult literacy issues, please follow the CLLS twitter handle [@CalReads](#) (#CalReads).

About California Library Literacy Services: California Library Literacy Services helps low-literacy adults and their families. Over 20,000 adult learners each year are provided one-on-one or small group instruction by thousands of trained volunteer tutors in over 500 public libraries. Instruction is based on each individual learner's pace and goals. The program targets English speaking adults who struggle with basic reading and writing skills. As a result, these adults are voting for the first time, reading newspapers, reading aloud to their children and securing jobs. For more information, visit www.CalReads.org.

About the State Library: Founded in 1850, the California State Library is the central reference and research library for the Governor’s office, legislature, state employees, and the general public. The State Library administers federal and state grants for programs in historical preservation, library construction, civil liberties education, literacy, volunteering, and broadband connectivity in public libraries. For more information, visit www.library.ca.gov.

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