



**SOLANO COUNTY GRAND JURY**  
2016-2017

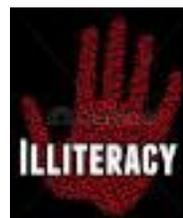
Library Adult Literacy Program

# Library Adult Literacy Program

2016-2017 Solano County Grand Jury

## I. SUMMARY

Literacy is the key to diverse learning experiences which permit people to reach their goals, develop their potential and advance their knowledge to participate dynamically in their community. With that in mind, the Solano County Library system has implemented a program to battle adult illiteracy.



Targeting adult illiteracy is critical as it empowers a person’s ability to provide life skill tools in overcoming poverty and sustaining a self-worth attitude. Thirty percent of adults with household incomes at or below the federal poverty line do not have a high school credential. An educational background helps to improve quality of life. Seventy-five percent of the inmates in the California justice system did not finish high school or are classified as having low literacy. In view of these statistics, the 2016-2017 Solano County Grand Jury determined that it is important to review the effectiveness of the Solano County Library Literacy Program which serves our community.

## II. INTRODUCTION

Historically, illiteracy has been defined as the inability to read or write; however, that definition has been expanded<sup>1</sup>. According to the National Literacy Act of 1993, “Literacy is the ability to use printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one’s goals, and to develop one’s knowledge and potential.”

<b>DEFINITION OF LITERACY</b>	
<b>Pre-Civil War</b>	Read and write name
<b>World War II</b>	Read at 4 <sup>th</sup> grade level
<b>1960’s</b>	Completed 8 <sup>th</sup> grade
<b>1991</b>	“ability to read, write and speak English and compute and solve problems necessary to function on the job and in society, to achieve one’s goals, and develop one’s knowledge and potential.” <b>National Literacy Act 1991</b>
<b>1993</b>	“using printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one’s goals, and to develop one’s knowledge and potential.” <b>National Literacy Act 1993</b>

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<sup>1</sup> The chart below is part of the Solano County Tutor Training materials.

The Adult Literacy Program in Solano County was established in 1994 with a start-up grant from the California State Library System. Through this program free tutoring is provided to adults that reside within Solano County Library jurisdiction<sup>2</sup> and meet certain requirements.

Since the Adult Literacy Program's inception it has served in excess of 6,200 students wishing to improve their reading, writing, and English speaking skills. This service is provided by trained volunteer tutors and is delivered one-on-one or in small groups, primarily held at participating library facilities.

In view of Solano County Library System statistics, which indicate the children of illiterate parents are twice as likely to also be illiterate, the 2016-2017 Solano County Grand Jury determined it is important to review the effectiveness of the Adult Literacy Program serving our community.

### **III. METHODOLOGY**

The Grand Jury used the following techniques in deriving the relevant facts necessary to review the administration and effectiveness of the Adult Literacy Program:

- Interviewed:
  - Solano County Library Administrative Staff
  - Program students
  - Program tutors
  - Program trainers
- Reviewed:
  - Exit surveys completed by volunteer tutors
  - Recommended Budget for Fiscal Year (FY) 2016-2017 for Solano County Library Services
- Examined:
  - Solano County Library Newsletter (“Check It Out!”)
  - Local newspaper articles
  - Library brochures
  - Literacy information published on the Solano County Library and the California Library Literacy Services websites
  - History and Facts concerning Adult Literacy Program provided by library personnel
- Attended volunteer tutor training sessions

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<sup>2</sup> Jurisdiction encompasses 5 of the 7 cities within the County and 8 library branches. Library services in Benicia and Dixon are standalone entities; therefore, they are not included in this report.

#### **IV. STATEMENT OF FACTS**

The Solano County Library System uses available resources to implement a countywide program to provide tutors and computer resources to help adults address their shortcomings in literacy. The 2016-2017 Solano County Grand Jury was informed that the Library Adult Literacy Program needs additional tutor volunteers to be more effective in serving the Solano community. The lack of an adequate number of tutors available is an obstacle to student participation. Students are assigned to various literacy software programs for self-study until a tutor becomes available. This can mean a wait of as long as six months. Often, students become frustrated and drop out of the program. With approximately twenty percent of the Solano County population experiencing some level of illiteracy, the current volunteer tutor staff is insufficient to meet the community needs.

According to program literature, volunteer tutors must:

- be at least 18 years old
- have average or better reading and writing skills
- commit to a minimum of 6 months to the literacy program
- have an interest in helping another adult-no teaching experience needed

Upon exiting the adult literacy program, a volunteer tutor is asked to complete an exit survey regarding their service. This survey helps assure a continued positive experience for other volunteer tutors and suggests possible improvements to the adult literacy program.

Materials collected indicate that most of the communication promoting the Adult Literacy Program is in written format. The target audience, by definition, is limited in their reading/writing skills. A more diversified presentation of information about the literacy program is needed.

During the Grand Jury's interview with Library Administrators, it was found that there is only one peer mentor on staff. It is that person's responsibility to provide outreach to potential students as well as students currently enrolled in the program to assure the participants' needs are met. The peer mentor indicated that by helping students overcome their fears of the process and helping eliminate obstacles, the students are able to continue their work in the program. The peer mentor added that one of the problems encountered was student frustration in having to wait for a tutor match. Because of this important work, additional peer mentors would help reach more students.

Review of provided materials indicates that some of the information that is being distributed is outdated. For example, the Adult Literacy Fact Sheet includes information based on the National Center for Education Statistics dated 2003. Some of the material provided held discrepancies in the number of functionally illiterate adults in Solano County.

The primary funding sources for the County's Library Services are property taxes and 1/8<sup>th</sup> of a cent sales tax devoted exclusively to libraries. Both of these revenue streams are directly tied to the economy and have experienced some stabilization and begun slight upticks after many years of decline.

In fiscal year 2015-2016, approximately \$644,000 was allocated to the three literacy related programs (Adult Literacy, Families for Literacy and Reach Out and Read.) The people in our county that take advantage of these three programs have various needs, ranging from job advancement to helping their children with their homework.

As of November 2016, there were 182 enrolled students and 165 volunteer tutors in the Adult Literacy program. There were 80 individuals on a waiting list.

## **V. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Finding 1** – There is a need for more volunteers in the Library Adult Literacy Program to serve more students.

**Recommendation 1** – To increase volunteer tutor participation, the Library Adult Literacy Program needs to explore additional recruitment options. Such as:

- working with local colleges to create volunteer/intern programs
- recruiting seniors from adult residential communities
- outreach to non-profit, church, service and professional organizations
- outreach to area employers

**Finding 2-** The Solano County Library Adult Literacy Program relies mostly on written communication to reach illiterate adults.

**Recommendation 2** – To increase student participation, the Solano County Library needs to explore additional communication options which do not involve reading. For example:

- speakers at organization meetings (such as PTA's, unions, town hall gatherings, Neighborhood Watch, etc.)
- booths at sports activities, neighborhood gatherings, countywide festivals, etc.,
- pictorial posters at transportation hubs
- public service announcements
- social media

**Finding 3** – Currently there is only one peer mentor to encourage continued student participation. Students would benefit from additional peer mentors for support.

**Recommendation 3** –Expand the peer support mentor program to interface with prospective and existing students on a regular basis.

**Finding 4 -** Some Solano County Library Adult Literacy promotional materials including the website are outdated.

**Recommendation 4** – Review and update promotional materials and include them on the website.

**COMMENTS:**

The 2016-2017 Solano County Grand Jury found that the County Library Adult Literacy Program has undertaken a valuable and much needed service in our community and should be commended for its efforts. The exit surveys from the tutors have expressed an enthusiastic attitude and reflected a gratifying experience in serving the community. In addition, the library system has implemented a tracking system to follow student and program success. The literacy program utilizes the “gains form”, a spreadsheet designed to help implement the program’s roles and goals, and track student progress and skills. It is used in the quarterly progress review. The “gains form” is not required by the California State Library System, but rather is an internal tool used specifically by the California Library Literacy Services and the Solano County Library System.

**RESPONSE:**

Solano County Library Administration

**COURTESY COPIES**

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Solano County Board of Supervisors  
California State Library System