

The Literacy Council of Southwestern Pennsylvania



Annual Report 2024



**LITERACY COUNCIL OF
SOUTHWESTERN PA**



Changing lives, one word at a time.



United Way
of Washington County
Community Partner



Director's Message



Dear Friends of Literacy,

As I reflect on this incredible year, I'm overwhelmed by the progress we have made and the lives we have touched. What began as a modest endeavor to address literacy gaps in our community has grown exponentially, thanks to the dedication, passion, and support of people like you.

This year, we celebrated some truly remarkable milestones:

1. Community Reach: Our free programs continue to expand across our four-county reach. We have grown 311% since 2020, and we've empowered over 800+ adults and families with the gift of literacy, witnessing their confidence and opportunities soar as a result.

2. Volunteer Engagement: Our family of volunteers continues to grow strong. We now have over 60+ enthusiastic volunteers who contribute their time and skills to mentor, teach, and support our students. Their commitment is the heartbeat of our organization.

3. Digital Literacy Initiatives: In response to the growing demand for digital literacy, we are launching several innovative digital literacy programs. These initiatives will reach our students and families, enabling them to navigate the digital world with confidence and opening new doors for employment and education.

4. Partnerships and Collaborations: We formed beautiful strategic partnerships with local schools, libraries, and businesses, amplifying our impact and resources. These collaborations have been instrumental in expanding our programs and reaching more individuals in need. We owe our success and growth to the invaluable support of our partners at **Intermediate Unit 1**. We are grateful for our partners at **Fairhill Manor Christian Church** for their ongoing support of our mission—they are our rock. A special thank you to our partners at the **St. John XXIII Interfaith Food Pantry**, they help tackle food and basic necessity insecurities faced by our students and families. We truly appreciate your support.

Our journey is far from over. As we look ahead, we are inspired by the stories of our learners, whose lives have been transformed by literacy. We are committed to continuing our mission to eradicate illiteracy and provide opportunities for all to thrive. I want to extend my deepest gratitude to each of you—our supporters, volunteers, partners, and staff. Your unwavering belief in our mission fuels our drive to achieve even greater heights. Together, we are making a tangible difference, one word at a time.

With heartfelt thanks,

Brandi Miller
Executive Director

About Us



Our Mission

The mission of the Literacy Council of Southwestern PA (LCSWPA) is to empower adults and families with literacy skills that enable them to lead successful, fulfilled lives as members of our communities.

Our Vision

Founded in 1985, the LCSWPA has transformed the lives of adults and their families throughout Southwestern Pennsylvania by giving the gift of reading, writing and language skills to adults, thereby empowering economic opportunity, a sense of community and a higher quality of life. The LCSWPA is a volunteer-based, privately funded nonprofit with a mission to promote economic opportunity, a strong and united community, and a higher quality of life for all people through literacy.

The LCSWPA, in collaboration with Intermediate Unit 1, provides adult tutoring services through their Adult Basic Education, English as a Second Language, both TOEFL and Citizenship preparation, and GED Test Preparation programs. It supports the families of the students by offering a Children's Literacy program and the signature Baby Book Bag program.



About Us



Our Staff

Brandi Miller, *Executive Director*

Lauren Piszczor, *Program Director*

Gloria Konwick, *Administrative Assistant*

Jean Wilhem Alcenat, *Part-Time English as a Second Language Staff*

Getro Bernabe, *Part-Time English as a Second Language Staff*

Amy Wang, *Part-Time English as a Second Language Staff*

David Ladouceur, *Part-Time English as a Second Language Staff*

Our Board of Directors

Officers

Danielle Marchesi, *President*

Branch Manager I, Washington Financial Bank

Dr. Sally Mounts, *Vice President*

Director of Development, City Mission (Ret.)

William J. Campbell, *Treasurer*

Audit Manager, Alcoa, Inc. (Ret.)

Rachel Zilcosky, *Secretary*

Supervisor of Educational Programs, IUI

Members

Parker Burroughs

Editor for Observer-Reporter (Ret.)

Dr. Christine Shaffer

Principal of Accelerate Online Academy

Gary Weinstein

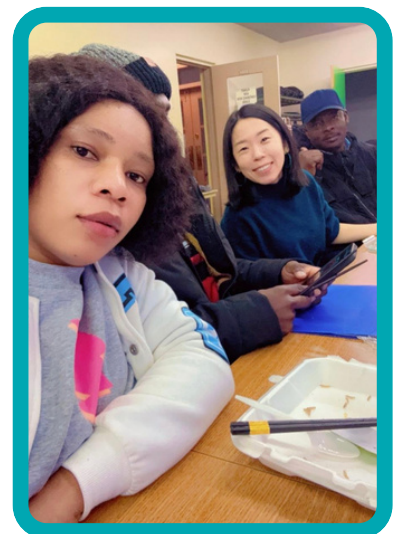
President & CEO, Washington Health System (Ret.)

Omar Brooks

VetPets of SWPA, Co-Founder

Drew Medva

Global Program Manager, UPS Healthcare



Programs & Services



Adult Basic Education

Adult Basic Education services provide reading, writing, and math instruction to low-level literacy adults seeking to improve their skills, and embraces the “Each One, Teach One” philosophy of individual tutoring to help our students.



Whether a student’s goal is to achieve functional literacy, improve job skills, or the ability to help their children with homework, we are prepared to help learners achieve these objectives.

English as a Second Language

We provide free English as a Second Language (ESL) classes to all adults whose first language is not English. High-quality teachers, tutors, and classroom materials are free and accessible to all students.

We are the only tutoring agency in Washington County that provides **free** adult ESL services.



Programs & Services



High School Equivalency Preparation

The GED program offers students who have not completed high school an opportunity to obtain their high school equivalency diploma.

Students attend classes free of charge, and upon completion, the Literacy Council provides the students with vouchers to take the exam. We provide certified tutors who can offer one-on-one support within the classroom.

In addition, students who excel in the classroom may apply for the Literacy Council of Southwestern PA and Intermediate Unit 1 Post-Secondary Scholarship of \$500.



US Citizenship Preparatory Class

For those who are seeking American citizenship, free preparatory classes are offered.

These classes cover the topics present in the United States Naturalization Test and intensive speaking and language skills preparation for the oral exam portion. The course, books, flashcards, and all other materials are provided free of charge. The Literacy Council offers a Citizenship grant for eligible individuals.



Programs & Services



Baby Book Bags

The Baby Book Bags program has existed since 1994 and was founded by the late Executive Director Helen Crunick. The program encourages new mothers to read with their infants soon after birth.



Every baby born at UPMC | Washington in post and prenatal units goes home with a book bag containing a suitable baby book, literature on the importance of engaging babies in reading from birth, early childhood literacy intervention information, and local library locations. We have distributed over 54,000 baby book bags since the program's inception.

Young Adult English as a Second Language

During the summer, we provide ESL classes to all teens whose first language is not English. High-quality teachers, tutors, and classroom materials are free to all students.



Over the past few years, we have experienced explosive growth in our immigrant population in Washington County and, as a result, in our ESL enrollments. The Literacy Council offers teens with little to no English a jump-start in their language skills before school starts in the fall.

Programs & Services



Test of English as a Foreign Language Exam Preparation

We offer Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) exam preparatory classes for advanced ESL students considering taking the TOEFL exam.

This class includes intensive work on listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, as well as strategies for approaching TOEFL tasks and testing on the computer. Students complete mini-exams and one complete practice exam each cycle.



Children's Literacy

In 2013, we realized that many of our potential students lacked the language skills and finances to come to classes because of preschool children in the home. As a result, we started the children's program for these mothers.

Early literacy means helping children develop a rich vocabulary, self-expression, and reading comprehension—tools they need to become successful readers and lifelong learners.

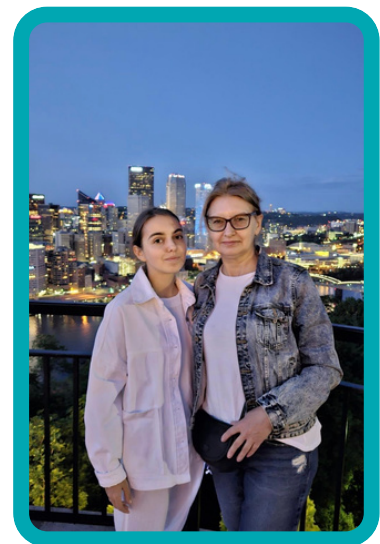


Student Spotlight



Kateryna P. My name is Kate. I came from Ukraine to the United States a year and a half ago. I am 60 years old and I have never learned English. I had a fear that at my age I couldn't start learning another language. But the goodwill and professionalism of the school team gave me a lot of faith. I continue to expand my knowledge and am very grateful to the school for this opportunity. Let good, peace, and harmony reign in every heart. With warmth, thank you for everything.

Vitaliia L. My name is Vitaliia. I am 29, and I am Ukrainian. I arrived to the United States of America about 2 years ago. My level of English was insufficient, so I was going to look for an English language school. Fortunately, my friend recommended me to the Literacy Council of Southwestern PA, where I am still studying. I have loved Literacy Council from day one. It's sincere, open and kind teachers and staff. As well as great classmates who attend school. I am very impressed with the teaching style and interesting school curriculum. Today, for example, my teacher Park brought a record player to class and we had been listening the Beatles, and then analyzed the lyrics of the song. Sometimes we play games, solve crosswords, and very often just talk about random topics. Tutors listen to students' requests and wishes- you can choose more grammar, reading, or practice. I find this individual approach very helpful and valuable. Studying at the Literacy Council brings me not only pleasure but also results— I have significantly improved my level of English, which I am very happy about. I would like to thank everyone who puts their efforts into the existence of this school—you are doing a great job.



Vitaliia & Kate

Student Spotlight



Susanna Roupe began her GED studies in the Intermediate Unit 1's Adult Education class located in the Washington CareerLink in June 2023. Although she was only 19 years at the outset of her studies, everyone around Susanna knew that it would not take her long to finish her program. Susanna had made it a habit to set goals and not stop until they were achieved. After only three months of studying, including some intense math sessions with our volunteer classroom aide, Susanna graduated with her GED. Even before completing her GED, Susanna had begun exploring the LPN program at Penn Commercial. With the help of the Literacy Council of Southwestern Pennsylvania Post-Secondary Scholarship, she was able to enroll in September 2024.



Student Spotlight



David Ladouceur represents the courage and determination of individuals who come to our country to escape the political dangers of their native homes. David came to the United States from Haiti in August of 2023. He made the decision to come to the United States after being kidnapped and held for ransom. David indicated that he was released after four days because he was fortunate enough to be able to meet the kidnappers' ransom demands. Following his release, he arranged for he and his family to come to the United States. The decision was not easy; David had a successful career as a call center manager where he oversaw over 100 employees.



Upon arriving in the United States, he initially settled in Philadelphia until a friend invited him to come to Charleroi where he found employment at a meat packing plant. He first assisted with paperwork but was soon promoted to a stock management role. He also wanted to continue improving his English skills and enrolled in an ESL class offered by the Intermediate Unit 1 at the Charleroi Public Library on Saturdays. David's English skills greatly improved and by July 2024, David began working as an official classroom aide with a focus on helping those students in the class that were just beginning to learn English. Due to his efforts, the English skills of his group have grown significantly. Given his skill with beginning ESL learners, David was recently hired by the Literacy Council of Southwestern PA to teach students at this introductory level. David holds multiple degrees in Sociology, Theology, and can fluently speak English, French, Spanish, and Haitian Creole.

In addition to these achievements, David has a genuine passion to help others in the community. He serves as the translator in the Saturday ESL Class and provides guidance to students seeking to enroll in ESL classes. David also assisted with translation to assist ESL learners obtain a free computer and discounted internet services offered through Computer Reach and T-Mobile. He is also a pastor who provides religious classes to children at City Reach Church in Charleroi. David is married with two children and is residing in the Charleroi area.



Ways to Help



Volunteer

Volunteers are the life blood of the Literacy Council. Without their support, our programs and opportunities would not be possible.

Our volunteers take on a number of roles, including:

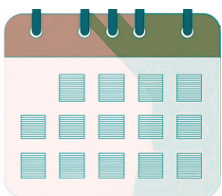
- tutoring
- special events
- fundraising events
- marketing & communications
- web & social media
- administrative
- and much more!

Our
volunteers
have provided
10,130 hours
valued at
\$339,260!

Donate

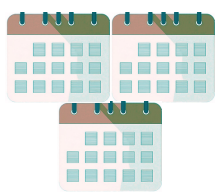
Your donation makes a difference in the lives of the adults and families we serve. For \$250 per month, we can provide everything needed to help gain critically important literacy skills for one student.

Help support literacy services for a student:



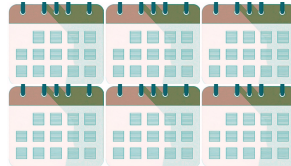
\$250

supports a student for one month.



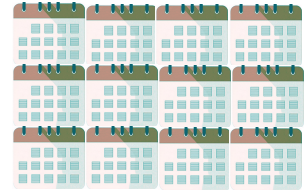
\$500

supports a student for three months.



\$750

supports a student for six months.



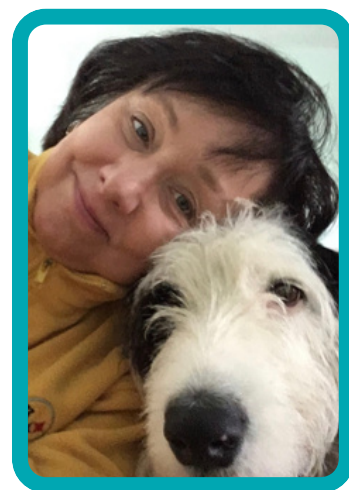
\$1,000

supports a student for one year.

Chartiers-Houston Volunteer Spotlight



Rosemary Curley, a physical therapist, has been volunteering as a tutor for the Literacy Council since 2019. She volunteers because she wants to use her medical background and knowledge of the English language to assist learners in fulfilling their literacy goals. Rosemary states, "I enjoy meeting people from different countries and cultures."



Rosemary is comfortable teaching all levels, but her specialization is teaching medical professionals who want to learn English so that they may be employed in the US. So far, she has taught seven students from countries including China, Brazil, Haiti, Venezuela, and the US. She shares that her students have been "hard-working, goal-oriented individuals with a variety of goals, abilities, and experience."

Her advice for new tutors is to discuss the students' goals and make a plan for success, and to ask for feedback about the classes to see if they are meeting students' expectations. Rosemary says, "Mix things up and have fun while teaching!"

Rosemary's tip for teaching is to integrate interesting activities into the classroom. She has incorporated many activities including asking students to draw organ systems, using putty to build the parts of the brain, bringing in cake mixes to practice reading instructions, using flash cards of English words relating to students' favorite hobbies, role-playing medical jobs, using iPads for practice test questions, and sharing level appropriate library nonfiction books about students' hobbies.

Aside from tutoring, Rosemary fosters dogs, volunteers at her church, and enjoys horseback riding and babysitting her grandkids.

Washington Volunteer Spotlight



Mike Moon began volunteering at the Literacy Council in 2022 after reading an article in the newspaper that mentioned a need for tutors. Because helping others has always been a very rewarding process for him and he enjoys teaching and working with adults, the Literacy Council was a great match. Mike has worked with approximately twenty different students hailing from countries such as Ghana, Myanmar, Vietnam, Mexico, Honduras, Ecuador, Argentina, and Haiti. He currently teaches intermediate ESL classes but shares that he is comfortable teaching any level. He says that working with the Literacy Council “has been a wonderful experience.”



Mike has a lot of experience teaching ESL. He started teaching ESL as part of his job function as a teacher for the Colorado Department of Corrections. After retirement, he and his wife taught English at a school for indigent students in Honduras for a little over two years. He advises new tutors to be enthusiastic about the students' learning and to be well prepared. He believes that being prepared to teach English should involve honing one's grammar skills. He also recommends that new tutors can gain a lot by observing other seasoned volunteers.

Mike's best tool for teaching ESL is a solid foundation in English grammar. He explains, “I don't spend much time making sure that students know English grammar, but grammar provides me opportunities to merge new vocabulary, expanded conversation, and familiarity with improved communication by the students.” Mike gives a great example: a list of irregular verbs will usually have the past participle for each verb, and knowing that the present perfect tense uses a past participle provides him with an opportunity to create learning sessions in which students can increase the depth of their conversation by using the present perfect tense along with this strange list of past participles. A firm grasp of grammar has helped Mike engage students and help them move ahead with their language skills.

Mike was raised in Swaziland (now Eswatini) in Southern Africa and enjoys woodworking, golf, kayaking, and playing pickleball.

Charleroi Volunteer Spotlight



Karen Carter began volunteering with the Literacy Council in 2023 because she saw a need in her community. She teaches at the high-beginner level, and has previous experience teaching English to adults in Germany and Thailand.

Karen encourages new tutors to enjoy what they are doing, and to even incorporate some dancing in the instruction for some fun! She says to “stay positive on purpose.”

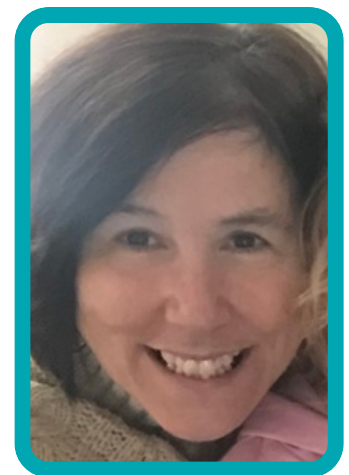
Karen enjoys talking and laughing, dancing, and of course, volunteering.



Tamara Bojsen is a French teacher who has been volunteering with the Literacy Council since 2023. She teaches beginner-level classes and has instructed twenty students, all from Haiti. She says that her students are motivated, hard-working, and respectful. She was drawn to the Literacy Council because she loves teaching language.

Her advice to new tutors is to jump right, be yourself, and be creative. She also recommends varying the lessons, and states that “it’s hard to sit for three hours if you’re not frequently changing activities.” Her husband of many years is an English language learner, so she understands which words and expressions can be confusing to students. She enjoys explaining American idioms and expressions to them.

In her spare time, Tamara enjoys travel, gardening, and letter writing.

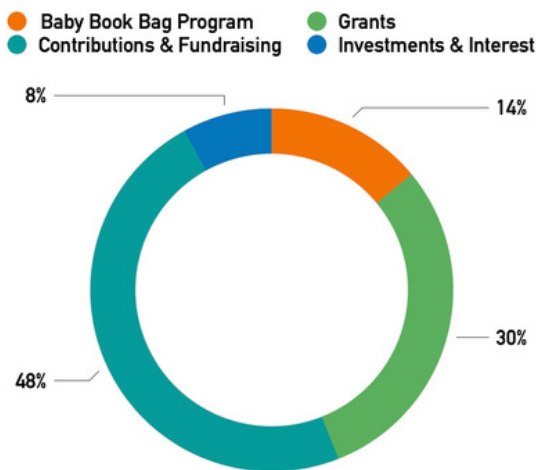


Financial Trends & Highlights



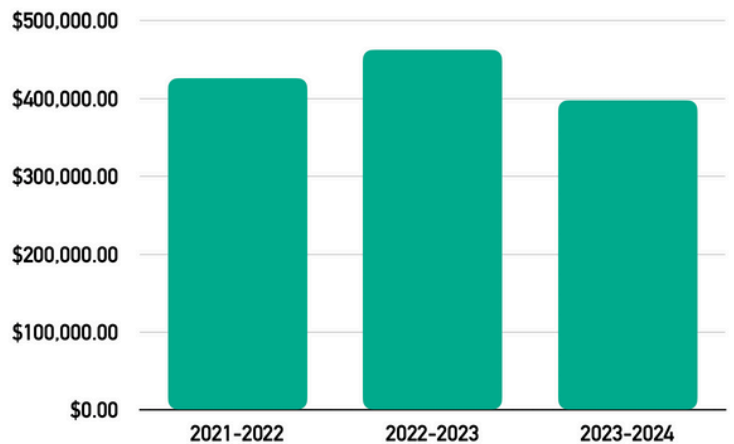
Revenue Sources

The LCSWPA depends on contributions from community members to provide its services.



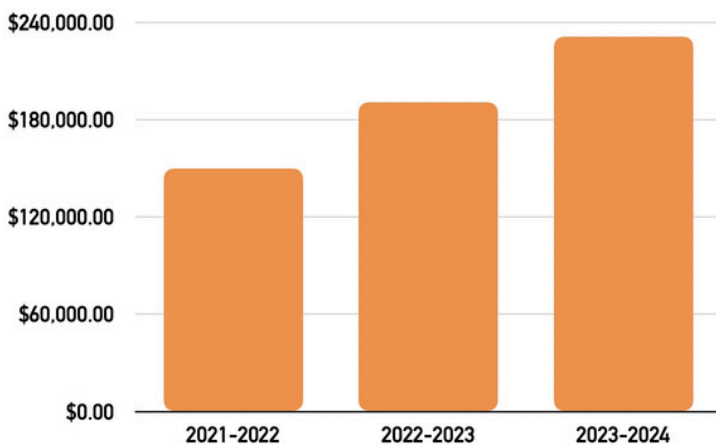
Net Assets

The LCSWPA focuses to boost annual net cash assets to address the expenses associated with ever-increasing programming costs.



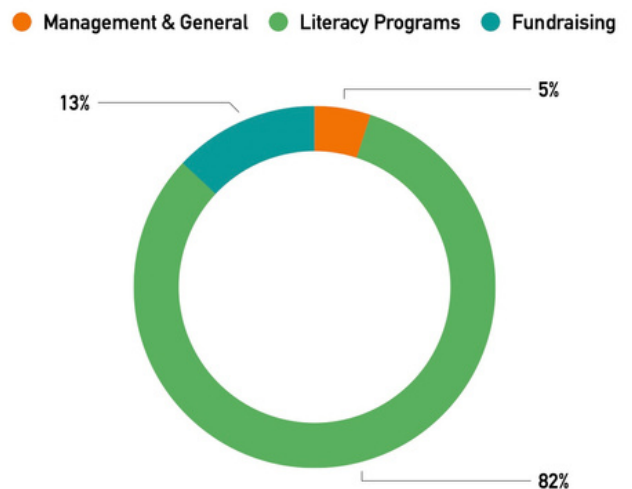
Program Expenses

The LCSWPA experiences significant annual increases in programming expenses.



Expense Categories

The LCSWPA devotes the majority of its revenue to program expenses.



Complete audited financial statements and Internal Revenue Service form 990 are available upon request.

A Year in Review



29
students
passed their
GED or HiSET
exams

813
total students
are enrolled in
our programs

6
students
passed their
US citizenship
test

70+
different
countries are
represented by
our students

311%
increase
in growth
since 2019

3
post-secondary
scholarships were
awarded to our
students

5
top native languages
spoken by our students:

- Haitian Creole
- Spanish
- English
- Ukrainian
- Chinese

**Changing
lives, one
word at
a time.**



351 Montgomery Avenue
PO Box 1584
Washington, PA 15301
EIN 25-1620790



Thank you to our Friends of Literacy Partners:



- Intermediate Unit 1
- Washington City Mission
- UPMC | Washington
- Washington Health System Teen Outreach
- ARC Human Services
- Blueprints
- Southwestern Pennsylvania Human Services
- Fairhill Manor Christian Church
- Our Lady of Miraculous Medal Church
- Presbyterian Church of Charleroi

- Central Assembly of God
- Jewish Family and Community Services (JFCS)
- PA CareerLink Employment Advancement and Retention Network (EARN)
- St. John XXIII Parish Food Pantry
- St. Andrew the Apostle Parish
- Washington County Department of Human Services
- Dorothea P. Hughes Foundation

 [Literacy.Council.of.Southwestern.PA](https://www.facebook.com/Literacy.Council.of.Southwestern.PA)

 [lcswpa351](https://www.instagram.com/lcswpa351)

 [lcswpa1](https://twitter.com/lcswpa1)



www.lcswpa.org

724.228.6188

lauren@lcswpa.org



The Literacy Council of Southwestern PA is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, contributions to which are tax deductible to the fullest extent permitted by law. The official registration and financial information of the Literacy Council of Southwestern PA may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling toll free within Pennsylvania, 1-800-732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement.