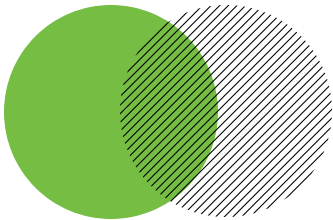




**10<sup>th</sup> Tarrant  
Literacy  
Coalition**  
Anniversary  
Opening the door to opportunity



# TARRANT LITERACY COALITION

OPENING THE DOOR  
TO OPPORTUNITY FOR TEN YEARS  
2009-2019

[www.tarrantlit.org](http://www.tarrantlit.org)  
817.870.0082



## OUR MISSION

**The Tarrant Literacy Coalition empowers adult learners and those who teach them with high quality literacy services and resources so businesses can hire, people can work and families can thrive.**

Improving adult literacy is not glamorous. It is hard work. Every student comes into class with a story. Some are young people who dropped out of school for a variety of reasons - family problems, teenage pregnancy, frequent family moves, learning disabilities, or just a lack of interest in school. Others are older adults who have been out of school for a long time and who now realize that it is hard to get and keep a good job without a high school diploma. Some are adults that may have been pushed through school and graduated yet still cannot read bedtime stories to their children and grandchildren. Other adults whose first language is not English desperately want to learn to read, write and speak English well enough to get a good job to support their family or become a United States citizen.

Regardless of their situation, they all have one thing in common: they want to **learn**.

### **We make meaningful connections.**

Our **Adult Education and Literacy Call Center** helps more than 1,200 adults find an adult education program in their neighborhood or near their job each year. By providing *one number to call* we simplify the process for adults who want to enroll in classes.

### **We educate and develop.**

Whether through classes at **Project BEST** (Basic Education and Skills Training) which prepare individuals to take the High School Equivalency exam, or through individual tutoring in reading with **Project LEARN** (Literacy Education and Reading Network), our adult learners work with trained volunteers to achieve their goals and succeed.

### **We advocate and equip.**

We provide a voice for adult learners and those who work with them by being the source for public information. Teachers, tutors and volunteers get free or low-cost professional training and technical support through our **Literacy and Learning** program. They also benefit through our book and technology donations, ensuring that everyone has the resources they need to serve their students.

# Opening the door to opportunity for 10 years.

Dear Friend of Tarrant Literacy Coalition,

The Tarrant Literacy Coalition grew out of the recognition that there was an increasing need for adult literacy services in the county. Community advocates worked together to define the needs and services that would fill the gap. Now in our tenth year, the variety of literacy services we offer continues to address these needs.

Looking back, even though 'literacy' is in our name, literacy is not really our business: we are in the growth and service profession. Connecting a non-native English speaker to the *right* class, helping a young man or woman to pass a high school equivalency test, or giving new grandparents the tools to be able to read a bedtime story to their grandchild is all about helping them grow as individuals. With honest and real education and guidance, adults in Tarrant County can better support themselves and their families. That education and guidance comes from the dedicated teachers, tutors and volunteers who work with their students week after week. We also help our educators grow by providing high quality professional development opportunities and resources to better help them serve their learners.

The Tarrant Literacy Coalition would not have been able to grow and serve as it has without the support and collaboration of wonderful organizations, volunteers and donors. Whether it is through advocacy and awareness, experience and education, or a passion to help or learn, you all have been instrumental in the success of adult learners - past, present and future. For that, I want to say a sincere "Thank you."

With highest regards and blessings,



Daniel J. Red Goldstein  
Board President and Founding Board Member

# "If I can do it, you can too." ~ Flor Alvarado, Project BEST graduate

Flor came to the Tarrant Literacy Coalition in 2012 to study for the GED exam. Having completed the highest level of English language classes, she was determined to study for and pass the high school equivalency exam so she could go to college. She had attended other GED programs but had not found a class that met her needs. Spanish was her first language; and although she had attended the ESL classes and learned to read, write and speak English, she was still uncertain of her abilities, and she struggled in class.

At our Project BEST class, she met volunteer teachers who had been trained through our Literacy and Learning programs, which were sponsored by United Way. These dedicated volunteers knew how to work with adults who needed to learn to pass the high school equivalency exam.

Each week, Flor attended classes on Tuesday and Thursday nights. Her progress was slow in the beginning. She was not just a student; she was also a wife and a mother to three children, and she worked full-time. However, she persisted.

Flor watched as other students, younger than she, enrolled in the class and graduated. In time, she became discouraged and thought about quitting. She was worried that she would never pass the test. However, her teacher Kathryn, reminded her that she was not only a student in the class, she was a role model and a mentor to some of the younger students; and she continued to attend classes each week.



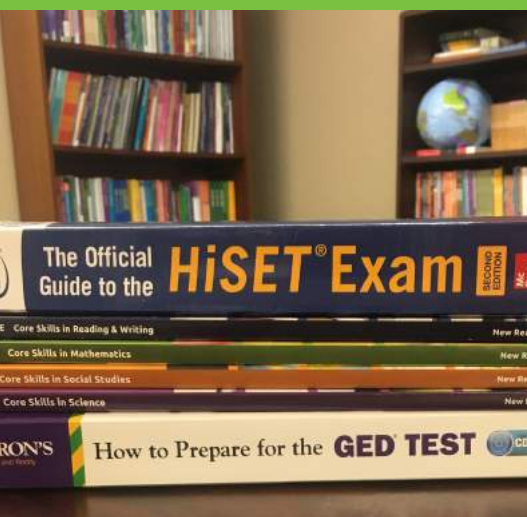
Finally, the day came for her to take her test at the downtown campus of Tarrant County College. After several years of studying, Flor passed all five exams in one day! Her graduation day was very joyful, but Flor knew it was not an end; it was just the beginning. She had a dream of becoming a real estate agent to help others achieve the dream of home-ownership.

Flor enrolled in classes at Tarrant County College and began attending college while working full-time and continuing to raise her children with her husband. She also attended classes to improve her reading and writing skills, because she knew she would need those skills as a realtor.

Becoming a resident of the U.S. was the next step. Flor did not have that designation when she first enrolled in our classes. In the spring of 2017, Flor received her permanent resident card, the first step to becoming a U.S. Citizen. She also completed her classes at Tarrant County College and enrolled in a short class to prepare her for state and national real estate exams. Once she passed those tests, Flor was accepted as a real estate agent at Keller Williams Realty in Fort Worth. Her hard work continued to pay off. In January 2018, Flor was presented with the Fast Track Award as a new agent. After just ten months, she was recognized as a top 2% producer in Tarrant County. Flor also won the Rookie of the Year Award. Since joining Keller Williams, Flor has helped many families realize their dream of finding not just a house, but a *dream home*.



**A true success, Flor loves telling her story to inspire and encourage others to never give up on their dreams.**



## The Gift of Education

Project BEST (Basic Education and Skills Training) students come to class to not just earn their high school equivalency certificate but to enhance their skills, better provide for their families and be self-sufficient, productive members of our community. Simply getting a book into the hands of a learner is a step toward equipping that individual with a key to success.

**\$35** Pays for a set of Pre-HSE books or comprehensive study guide

Earning a certificate of high school equivalency is a watershed moment for an adult learner. It can mean the difference between a lifetime of poverty and a secure financial future. It can also unlock the door to future education and opportunity, setting good examples for the students' own children.

**\$135** Pays for one student to take the HiSET exam

## "In context, I can understand meaning now." ~ Florinka, ESL student

English is very difficult language to learn, and yet it is critical to the success and navigation of everyday life to the 44.5 million immigrants living in the United States. To put that number in perspective, that is one in every seven residents that are foreign born. So it is no surprise that English as a Second Language classes are in high demand throughout communities all over the United States. These classes offer the tools necessary to not just read, write and speak, but to actively participate in daily activities and to be understood. English language learners are often the most eager and engaged students, staying in programs until they reach their goals.

For students like Florinka, who attends ESL classes at Agape Baptist Church, it is not about just completing a book and moving on to the next book; it is about truly learning the language. "I was born in Romania, and I spent 20 years in Germany before I came to the U.S. When I got here, I could read and write a little. It was difficult, and the rules are very confusing," she said. She attended multiple ESL classes to improve on the skills she already possessed. Now, after being in the HOPE Literacy sponsored classes at Agape for two years, she enjoys working in a communications class, "where I can work on syllables and where to stress sounds in words." Florinka added, "I am very happy with the classes I take, and I hope there will be more in the future so I will have more time to practice."



"The classes have made me more confident," Sonia added. She, too, has been coming to ESL classes for the last two years. "I have to know English for my work," she said, "but improving how I speak has helped with the things I need to do every day: things like making appointments, talking to my son's teacher, or even talking with people at the store." Sonia recounted a difficult time, "Before I was afraid to talk to people; I was worried they wouldn't understand me. My oldest son loved sports, but I was too afraid to ask people where he could play or how to join. Now, my youngest is able to play golf and other sports, and I know where to go and who to ask."

For some students, these classes are about more than learning English. They are about community, a safe place where the learner is on equal ground with everybody else in the classroom. It is not uncommon for friendships to develop among students who share the same experiences of learning together. It also provides a terrific insight into other cultures that the students may be unfamiliar with. Students and volunteer teachers hold holiday and end of semester parties where favorite cuisines are sampled and shared with all.

One thing is undeniable - students come to classes, not to assimilate but to be understood. The dedication and commitment of these busy adults is admirable, and it is truly wonderful to watch their progress over the months or years they come to classes.





## Confidence Through Living Language

English Language Acquisition (ELA) classes, those offered at Agape Baptist Church and throughout the community, are the key to unlocking a world of opportunity for so many immigrants. With practice comes added confidence for these adult learners who use their newly attained English skills to find better jobs or promotions within their current jobs, to continue their higher education in local colleges and universities, and to fully participate in their children's school activities.

**\$36** Pays for a student book and workbook at any level

Beyond simply learning a language, ESL students often aspire to become citizens of the United States. Citizenship brings unprecedented opportunities to these learners and allows them to actively contribute to the American process. Citizenship classes prepare students for the civics exam and the written and interview portions of the citizenship test, helping make the American Dream a reality.

**\$725** Pays for one student's citizenship application and biometrics fees

**"I feel confident this program will help me attain my goals."**

**~ Olga, Project LEARN student**

Olga became a student in Project LEARN (Literacy Education and Reading Network) in May 2018, and she began working one-on-one with a trained tutor. After participating in other classes and struggling to pass exams, she decided it was time to get some personalized help. "I've had trouble studying, and I'm a slow reader," Olga said. "I was later diagnosed with ADHD and a learning disorder," she said, which unlocked the reasons she had so much trouble. Olga was able to get diagnostic assessment through our local consortium's partnership with LinkEd. This allowed her to receive the formal accommodations of extra time and a reader, thus eliminating barriers and ensuring success on the HiSET exam. "The one-on-one has helped me develop better study habits," she said. She takes the tools and skills she learned back in to her other classroom, encouraging and motivating her classmates that they can be successful as well. She added, "If they are struggling like I was, maybe they should reach out too."



Olga is one of the nearly two dozen students to benefit from individualized, tailored reading instruction offered by Project LEARN since it began in late 2015. For many struggling adults, it is hard to know where to even begin. "I had been hoping to find a program like this for many years," Robert told us. "I like to say that this program is really great. I am learning the rules of spelling, and I believe there are a lot of people who are seeking such a place."

Having a safe place to learn, free of judgment, is critical to student success. Another student, Victoria, said, "As a native of Africa, I could speak English but could not read it. I used to see signs and words that I could not read, and I had trouble filling out forms. My reading program has helped me to read more words around me in my everyday life. People are helping me, and I want to help others too. In my program, I feel that we are family."

One of our newest learners, Myra, said "I am so very grateful for the hard-working volunteers who take time to help people like me reach the goals I have set for myself. I truly believe I can reach these goals." Debbie, a tutor in the Project LEARN programs adds, "One of the things that I really enjoy about tutoring here is working with someone, like Olga, who is really motivated and puts forth their best effort. That is reinforcing for me. What we do here is just a small part of her development. She is really taking the initiative to be successful."

"I would like to thank the Literacy Coalition for providing their wonderful services to the community," Cedrick said. "Before meeting my reading tutor, I had been attending high school equivalency classes for seven years as I tried to teach myself to read. The reading tutorial program provides stepping stones to progress." Yousef added, "Thank you for your support, courage, love and for seeing potential in me when I never before believed I could accomplish anything in life."





## Beyond Basic Literacy

While it is no secret, it is a fact that largely remains hidden: One in five adults in Tarrant County reads below a fourth grade level. This low reading level is usually a complex picture of cause and effect involving factors such as poverty, interrupted education, learning disabilities for many, and problems with employment throughout life.

Although Tarrant County is very proactive in providing adult education and training for employment, many adults “fly under the radar” in that limited skills place limits on what they can achieve without specific reading help. To address this need, three agencies—the Tarrant Literacy Coalition, LinkedED (formerly The Learning Center of North Texas), and Literacy Connexus—formed Project LEARN (Literacy Education and Reading Network) which provides one-on-one reading tutorial for adults and referral services to other community programs as needed.

Our students place value on education, and our volunteer tutors are dedicated to their success. The desire to learn and the willingness to help are the building blocks of a successful tutorial program.

**\$25**  **Pays for a set of basic literacy books for an adult learner**

**“The mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains. The superior teacher demonstrates. The great teacher inspires.” — William Arthur Ward**

Being a great teacher requires many different qualities to be in sync with students: passion, knowledge, empathy and excitement, among others. The best way to prepare adult learners for success is to equip their instructors with the resources, tools and training needed to reach and engage those learners.

This is at the core of what **Literacy and Learning** is about.

This program of training and technical support provides program administrators, literacy teachers, tutors and volunteers the opportunity to receive the highest quality and most relevant training available, often at very little or no cost. By offering individual workshops and seminars throughout the year and through our annual Metroplex Literacy Conference in March and DFW Literacy Symposium in October, Tarrant Literacy Coalition makes effective teachers and instruction a priority.

The Coalition is also a clearinghouse for hundreds of books and thousands of dollars' worth of classroom materials and computers that are donated and distributed to local literacy programs each year. By cultivating strong relationships with publishers and other providers of literacy materials, TLC gets valuable teaching tools into the hands of instructors and students. These completely free resources help build strong programs throughout our community.





Tarrant Literacy Coalition, throughout its existence, has been a sought-after resource for literacy organizations, teachers, volunteers and adults trying to learn what their next step should be to start a new program or improve their lives. The Literacy Help Line started out providing resource and referral services to a few hundred people each year. Ten years later, the Help Line has developed into the **Adult Education and Literacy Call Center**.

This "ONE number to call" is funded through a Texas Workforce Commission grant and is the only resource of its kind to be funded by the state of Texas. Adults no longer need to contact several different schools to find out information about enrollment or classes. By contacting us, they are quickly referred to the *best* class that fits their needs. With a small but mighty staff of three, Tarrant Literacy Coalition has now referred *thousands* of students into appropriate classes.

**Outreach and Advocacy** is also an important part of the work of Tarrant Literacy Coalition. By keeping the public informed about the importance of literacy and the impact of low literacy on our community, the staff and board of the Tarrant Literacy Coalition know that they can increase resources for literacy programs, improve outcomes for literacy students, and involve more community members in efforts to provide literacy programming at the workplace, in the schools and where families and individuals receive other social services.

Our advocacy has taken local needs and extended them statewide. In 2015, the Coalition, under former Executive Director Kathryn Thompson, courageously led the charge to appeal to the State Board of Education to allow other high school equivalency tests to be offered in Texas. By uniting students, educators and administrators, their powerful testimony opened the door to those additional tests being approved in 2017.





As we celebrate our tenth anniversary, it is natural to reflect on the formation of the Tarrant Literacy Coalition (TLC), a community-wide process that brought existing adult literacy providers together to frame the future for local literacy programming. Over time, this early work resulted not only in establishing a successful coalition but in further collaborative efforts as well.

As community efforts grew, The Learning Center of North Texas (now LinkED) and another key agency, Literacy ConneXus, under the leadership of Lester Meriwether, began to work informally with the Tarrant Literacy Coalition to address the reading needs of a “hidden group” of adults - proficient English speakers who read far below a secondary level. Thus, Project LEARN (Literacy Education and Reading Network), a one-on-one volunteer reading tutorial program, was formed as a result of this partnership and remains strong today at the beginning of its fifth year.

Why is this work important? The adults who seek this reading help typically face challenges directly resulting from low reading ability. Many have experienced “the bumps and bruises” of life. Some have previously undiagnosed learning disabilities. They are often marginally employed, may lack a high-school diploma, and do not read well enough to qualify for or be successful in other education and employment training programs. What these adults all have in common is the desire to succeed.

What else makes Project LEARN work so well? In addition to the powerful partnership of the three agencies, a critical factor is the rich resource of well-trained volunteer tutors. These are people who understand the needs of adult readers, have a heart for helping them, and dedicate hours of time to the process.

One thing that has been made clear is that the needs of adult learners, no matter their background or skill set, cannot be met without a collaborative effort. As the Tarrant Literacy Coalition, LinkED, and Literacy ConneXus continue to work together to address these needs, we look ahead to expanding our reach to continue programs that build basic reading skills for success.