



# literacy chronicle

SUMMER 2008

NEWS AND BEST PRACTICES FROM THE LITERACY COOPERATIVE OF GREATER CLEVELAND

## Community leaders share their vision of literacy for Cleveland

### Celebrate International Literacy Day on September 8

According to UNESCO, the educational, scientific, and cultural branch of the United Nations, "Literacy is ... essential for eradicating poverty, reducing child mortality rates, curbing population growth, achieving gender equality, and ensuring sustainable development, peace, and democracy." Since its formation in 1946, UNESCO has put global literacy at the forefront of its efforts and campaigns. It began spotlighting literacy as an international day of remembrance in 1966 to raise awareness in the world community about literacy issues.



Photo from UNESCO

These children in Sri Lanka join in the global celebration of literacy.

In the city of Cleveland, more than 100 literacy providers are working in the areas of early childhood development, after-school tutoring, English for speakers of other languages, adult basic education, and GED preparation. This year, on September 8, International Literacy Day, we hope Clevelanders will take time to envision and cultivate all the advancements literacy brings to communities.



Here are some insights on literacy's impact on Cleveland from a cross-section of the community:

*"Literacy is not a luxury. It is a necessity for people to be successful in life. We as a society should make literacy for everyone our priority because it leads to better job opportunities, improved quality of life, and a stronger community."*

**Frank Jackson**  
Mayor of Cleveland

*Continued inside*

### In this issue, learn more about:

- How to conduct writing workshops • The value of financial literacy classes
- Reading vs. literacy in Cuyahoga County • Upcoming events

## Director's Message

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I hope you are having a wonderful summer filled with sun, fun, and of course, reading! And reading is something we in Northeast Ohio are doing at a rate that is higher than the national average, according to a recent survey commissioned by the Cuyahoga County Public Library. See article at right.

September is just around the corner, and our thoughts turn toward school. Fittingly, September is also the month we observe International Literacy Day, created by UNESCO. This is the 42nd year we have set aside September 8 to further the goals of sensitizing and mobilizing international public opinion and eliciting active support for literacy activities.

According to the United Nations, "Literacy is a human right, a tool of personal empowerment, and a means for cultural development." Yet it is estimated that there are 781 million illiterate adults in the world. In the United States, a 2005 National Assessment of Adult Literacy revealed that 30 million adults scored at "below basic" – meaning they could perform no more than the most rudimentary literacy tasks. Another 63 million adults could perform only simple, basic everyday literacy activities. Low literacy levels prevent our citizens from fully engaging in society. I hope you will join us in using this International Literacy Day to reflect on the importance of literacy and the serious implications of low literacy in our country and our community. We asked some of our area's current and up-and-coming leaders to comment on the role literacy plays in their vision for Cleveland, and we are pleased to share their thoughts with you.

Literacy is much more than reading and math. There are many aspects to literacy, including health literacy, work force literacy, and financial literacy. Cleveland Housing Network is doing great work in the latter area, and we feature a story about its financial literacy education programs. With the rising costs of gasoline and food, the need to be more financially literate takes on added urgency.

We also review a recent ILN training session focused on writing. The importance of writing may have diminished in some people's minds due to the advances of technology. However, deficient writing skills remain high on employers' list of concerns for workers entering the work force.

As always, we include our calendar of events in the hope that you will be able to participate and contribute to the Cooperative's goal of promoting literacy throughout our community.

**Robert Paponetti**  
Executive Director  
The Literacy Cooperative

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## DID YOU KNOW

that Cuyahoga County has a high percentage of readers, but a low literacy level?

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### Sound like a paradox? Let's take a closer look.

According to a 2008 survey by TRAIID Research Group, Inc., Northeast Ohioans read more than the national average. Of those surveyed, 78 percent said they had read at least one book in the last year that was not assigned by school or work, compared with 57 percent nationally. Possible reasons for our high ranking include the accessibility of our award-winning library systems, as well as the idea that reading is an appealing pastime during our long, cold winters and for an aging population with more free time.

While many readers are cause for celebration, we must be aware that reading alone is not the same as literacy. Literacy is defined as "an individual's ability to read, write, speak in English, compute, and solve problems necessary to function on the job, in a family, and in society."

The National Adult Literacy Survey, conducted in 1992 and 2005, notes that individuals with the most basic literacy skills are left at a severe economic disadvantage and have difficulty meeting life's daily demands. Although many adults with basic literacy skills can perform some reading tasks, their skills are not sufficient to function well in everyday life. Eighteen percent of Cuyahoga County residents ages 25 and older are at this basic literacy level, with no high school diploma or GED equivalent.

To view the reading survey report, go to [www.cuyahogalibrary.org](http://www.cuyahogalibrary.org), click on Publications and News, under About Us.

To view county literacy levels, go to [www.literacycooperative.org](http://www.literacycooperative.org), click on Resource Links (Technical Report), under Literacy Facts.

# Community leaders share their vision of literacy for Cleveland

## Celebrate International Literacy Day on September 8



*"Literacy is the key principle necessary for students to develop into sound, productive members of society. Literacy is far more than being able to read and write; it is also one's ability to comprehend. As I often say, the future is now, now is the future, and preparing our students to achieve excellence starts with the basics – reading, writing, and arithmetic."*

**Dr. Eugene Sanders**  
CEO, Cleveland Metropolitan School District



*"Poverty is such an overriding issue in our community, and increased literacy skills are the absolute best way out of being economically disadvantaged. Give people the tools they need to help themselves. Then they can successfully navigate all the opportunities available to them."*

**David Reines**  
Chairman of the Board, Literacy Cooperative;  
Vice President of Resource Development,  
Center for Families and Children



*"A literate Cleveland is a place where books and reading are tools to build a strong community, a new economy, and a vibrancy that celebrates the past and embraces the future. Each resident is both a teacher and a learner and adds a wealth of innovation and ideas to Greater Cleveland."*

**Sari Feldman**  
Executive Director, Cuyahoga County  
Public Library; Board Member,  
Literacy Cooperative



*"If I had three wishes, the first would be that all Cleveland parents could read the progress notes and report cards their children bring home and the first books their children author. My second would be that parents could read and compare the labels on food in order to make the best nutritional choices for their families. My third wish is that adult learners would have professional and personal literacy assistants regularly visit them in their homes."*

**Rachel Napolitano**  
Community Organizer,  
Bellaire-Puritas Development Corporation



*"As we face the challenge of competing in the global economy, literacy is arguably the element most critical to our success. Whether or not nations and communities thrive and prosper is dependent upon their ability to conceive, embrace, adapt, and lead technological, social, cultural, or political change. Such ability is itself rooted in the intellectual capacity of a society's members. In Cuyahoga County, literacy is the cornerstone of our efforts to develop a world-class work force in a progressive community that is equipped to compete in the global marketplace."*

**Peter Lawson Jones**  
Commissioner, Cuyahoga County



*"My vision for the city of Cleveland is for everyone to be treated fairly, and for no one to be discriminated against because of race, gender, or age. Literacy would be valued so more people could further their education and more job opportunities would be available. I believe that our crime rates and poverty would also decrease."*

**Tasha Sweeney**  
GED student, Seeds of Literacy

# Instructors learn to conduct a writing workshop

## Process emphasizes feedback to enhance a writer's effectiveness

Because writing is an essential skill in educational pursuits and work place tasks, the Instructors Learning Network (ILN) invited Sarah Willis, author, poet, and creative writing professor at John Carroll University, to speak at its May 9 meeting on how to run a writing workshop.

There is no question about the need for such instruction. Sixty percent of GED test takers marked further education and 48 percent marked employment as their principle reasons for taking the exam, according to the 2006 GED Testing Program's Statistical Report. The higher education and employment sectors both cite the need for developed writing skills; however it is the section of the GED test that receives the lowest score by the most people. In 2006, nearly 30 percent of writing test takers nationwide passed the test with a low score range of 410 to 440, under the passing average score of 450. Another 12 percent failed the test.

The writing workshop provides instructors with a process for developing writing skills in students. The process involves idea generation, first draft attempts, feedback, and revision.

**Here is the structure of Willis' writing workshop, ideally suited for six to eight participants.**

- The instructor gives students a "trigger" or topic (for example, children's games).
- Students individually list all the associations they can for that trigger and then choose the one that creates the most vivid image.
- Based on their chosen image, students write their own personal essay, poem, or fictional story.
- When the pieces are completed, photocopies are made from half the class and shared with all students. (The writings of the other half will be discussed in the next class.)
- Students silently read the writings and make notes.
- Students give feedback to the selected writer one at a time. Each student must start with one positive statement and finish with one critique. (Opening with a positive statement helps the writer be receptive to the critique.)
- The writer takes notes about the feedback. He or she cannot offer any response during the feedback session.

- After all the students have spoken, the teacher summarizes any themes and brings up anything that was overlooked.
- The writer responds to the comments. (For homework, the writer must rewrite the piece, keeping in mind all the feedback.)
- The process continues for the next selected writer.

In this writing workshop approach, writers gain an understanding of how others interpret the message they are trying to communicate. Whether students will be writing an essay for the GED exam, a research paper for college, or a report in a future job, the effectiveness of their message will be determined by the reader.

Willis says that students initially fret over the vulnerability required by the feedback process, but they come to understand that the first draft is not supposed to be "perfect" and that the input of others adds to their development as writers.

Visit the Literacy Cooperative's website calendar at [www.literacycooperative.org](http://www.literacycooperative.org) for future ILN events. The ILN is a community of instructors that come together to have relevant, hands-on training and opportunities to connect and relate with one another.

### **Creative writing resources:**

[www.webenglishteacher.com](http://www.webenglishteacher.com)  
[www.creativewritingprompts.com](http://www.creativewritingprompts.com)  
[www.peppercornbooks.com](http://www.peppercornbooks.com)

Join the ILN Online Discussion Group to share ideas and resources and ask questions.

To register, please go to [www.ideastream.org/moodle](http://www.ideastream.org/moodle) and log in to the discussion group. You will be prompted to create a username and password. You will get an e-mail from WVIZ/PBS Education Services that will provide you with a link to enter the group for the first time. When logging into the discussion group, enter your username, password, and the course key: ILN.

For assistance, contact Sasha Thackaberry at [Sasha.Thackaberry@ideastream.org](mailto:Sasha.Thackaberry@ideastream.org).

# Financial literacy training empowers residents

## Cleveland Housing Network's financial education classes impart valuable life skills

Eleven years ago, Arnetta Pryor could not have imagined herself as the homeowner, landlord, and college graduate she is today. Back then, Pryor was homeless and struggling with addiction. A judge's decision to send her to treatment instead of prison was the beginning of her fresh start. She credits turning back to God, accepting treatment, and using community resources as her sources of change.

One community resource she is still actively involved with is Cleveland Housing Network's Community Training Center. She was introduced to the agency when she was in need of permanent housing. While Cleveland Housing Network (CHN) is best known for its programs around affordable housing, its mission is to help people get out of poverty and build wealth and self-determination.

One of the ways CHN is accomplishing its mission is by offering an array of classes and counseling around financial education. Pryor proudly says, "I've done every class they had. Whatever it was, I did it. It helped me learn how to budget my money and how to put money aside so I can have a savings." Pryor now has two joint savings accounts with her daughter and three personal bank accounts – one for her mortgage, another for bills, and the last for savings and emergencies. Pryor benefits from financial skills that most Americans are lacking.



Photo by Janet Century

Arnetta Pryor gets insights from one of the many CHN financial classes she has attended.

Spending and borrowing to spend more is a popular practice. According to the U.S. Commerce Department, savings rates hit negative 5 percent in 2005, a record low since the Great Depression. This means that a large majority of Americans spent all of their disposable income and then borrowed from past savings. Likewise, the average household carried \$7,782 in revolving debt in 2005, according to a report by the Government Accountability Office. Credit cards and retail store cards are examples of revolving credit. Each month the balance includes activity for that month, plus the unpaid portions from previous months with interest.

Knowledge about finances is commonly referred to as financial literacy. How financially literate you are depends on your understanding and skills regarding earning, spending, saving, and investing. It also includes an ability to read and comprehend billing statements, pay statements, estimates, loan agreements, and other financial documents.

In a 2004 survey conducted by Bankrate.com, Americans received a "D" for financial literacy, with 66 percent of the study group not having basic knowledge in 12 key areas of financial well-being. Sample questions deal with setting a budget, paying for emergency expenses, and more.

Currently only seven states require a personal finance class before high school graduation. In most cases people learn their money habits from their parents or from making mistakes. Learning the hard way is something Pryor is familiar with. She knows the lifestyle she was previously leading was getting her into financial trouble, and then after being diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, Pryor stacked up over \$30,000 in medical bills. With CHN's help, she got her credit report, began

contacting the creditors, filed bankruptcy, and got on Medicaid to cover her medical expenses. She says, "I'm glad I had the opportunity to come through this process because it helped me re-evaluate where I am in my life."

Some of the primary courses CHN offers, such as "My Money," "My Credit," and "My Goals," get participants thinking critically about their current situation and offer a pathway toward more control and stability. Whether someone is creating a monthly budget, improving their credit rating, or planning for something in the future, CHN asks participants to have a plan of action that is specific, measurable, challenging, and realistic.

These classes stress the importance of setting goals and how those goals can fuel the motivation and commitment to budget, keep track of expenses, and live within set means. Living on a fixed income with children at home keeps Pryor focused on meeting monthly expenses and anticipating future costs. An eye-opening new practice she learned is record keeping. For one month she kept track of every cent she spent. She says, "It made me realize how much money I was spending needlessly." Now, instead of going to the snack machine three times in one day, for example, she buys those items in bulk at the grocery store. Not only is Pryor better at handling her daily expenses, but she is now more skillful at planning for future expenses.

Financial literacy classes provided by community-based programs are considered one of the most successful models because the training is offered alongside other needed services. Likewise, these programs know the neighborhoods, build trust, tailor the outreach, and provide convenient locations and times for classes. CHN's training center has served more than 7,000 people.

Pryor says confidently, "There is help out here. This is a very resourceful place. One good thing leads to another. Taking classes here is what inspired me to go back and get my associate degree."

CHN offers computer, money management, and homeownership classes. Family support, employment services, individual counseling for financial planning and foreclosures, plus free tax preparation, are also available. The Community Training Center is located at 4008 St. Clair Ave. Call 216-881-7199 for more information about their programs.

For a more detailed description of CHN's financial education classes, go to the Literacy Cooperative's website, [www.literacycooperative.org](http://www.literacycooperative.org).

**Take a financial literacy quiz:**  
[www.savingadvice.com/quiz.php](http://www.savingadvice.com/quiz.php)

**Financial literacy resources:**  
[www.mymoney.gov](http://www.mymoney.gov)  
[www.federalreserveeducation.org](http://www.federalreserveeducation.org)  
[www.clevelandsaves.org](http://www.clevelandsaves.org)  
[www.mycashcounts.org](http://www.mycashcounts.org)  
[www.bankrate.com](http://www.bankrate.com)  
[www.consumerjungle.org](http://www.consumerjungle.org)



Photo by Janet Century

Director of Community Training Jeanne Morton discusses financial concepts with a full class.

# TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

To register for these programs, contact Erika Mason at 216-393-4549 or [emason@literacycooperative.org](mailto:emason@literacycooperative.org).

## **Adding Work Force Skills to GED Instruction**

Friday, August 15, 2008, 9:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.  
Trinity Cathedral and Commons, 2230 Euclid Ave., Cleveland, OH 44115  
Presenter: Lynne Perry, Towards Employment

Getting a better job is what motivates most adult students to work toward attaining their GED certificate. But how prepared are they for this better job after they have completed their studies and taken the test? GED classes can be an ideal vehicle for imparting necessary work force skills to adult students. This two-hour training will demonstrate how to incorporate various job readiness tools and strategies into current literacy materials and curriculum to make learning more relevant to participants' goals and build their job readiness skills. Instructors will also be given information to increase their awareness of employer expectations.

## **Make It/Take It Workshop**

Friday, September 5, 2008, 9:30 a.m. - Noon  
Northeast ABLÉ Resource Center, 23131 Lake Shore Blvd.,  
Euclid, Ohio 44123

Prepare lesson activities for the fall! This is an opportunity to create, assemble, and reproduce materials for your classroom and students. Assemble manipulatives, create lesson plans, and gather resources from the Internet and our resource library. You can even create a toolkit for your own classroom. Laminator, supplies, and copy machine will be available.

## **Work Force Resources - Information Sharing & Networking**

Friday, September 12, 2008, 9:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.  
Trinity Cathedral and Commons, 2230 Euclid Ave., Cleveland, OH 44115  
Presenter: Lynne Perry, Towards Employment

Come network and learn about available services from some of the best work force agencies in Cleveland. Presentations from Towards Employment, Vocational Guidance Services, Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation, and Youth Opportunities Unlimited will provide insights and information on:

- Connecting students to work force development agencies and resources.
- Developing stronger ties and working relationships between work force and literacy providers.
- Providing skills needed for a career pathway and moving students out of poverty.
- Learning from success stories.

## **Numeric Literacy: Practical Ways to Instruct Mathematics for Adult Learners**

Friday, October 17, 2008, 9:00 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.  
The Hanna Building, Steven A. Minter Conference Center,  
1422 Euclid Ave., 12th Floor, Cleveland, OH 44115  
Presenter: Carmine Burkette, Coordinator,  
ABLE Program at Cuyahoga Community College

Often talking about math is a challenge for both student and instructor. While many of us can arrive at the correct answer, we frequently can't explain how or why. Instead of only focusing on the mechanics of mathematics, we should also be familiar with mathematical concepts. This two-hour interactive workshop will provide experiential learning techniques to help adults learn and retain numeric concepts. The workshop will review current adult learning theory, and participants will acquire new methods to teach numerics in the classroom. Attendees will leave the workshop with sample lesson plans and activities which can be immediately implemented with students.