

Media Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September is International Literacy Month

Think for a minute about how you would feel if your child asked you for help with her homework but you couldn't read the assignment. How confident would you be in searching for a job if just filling out an employment application was difficult for you? How much courage would it take to admit that you couldn't read and to ask for help?

More people than you may realize experience these and similar situations on a regular basis. Believe it or not, about half of the U.S. adult population reads English at or below the fifth grade level. The National Adult Literacy Survey conducted in 1992 tested adults on various tasks associated with using information in their daily lives. Out of five levels of competence, 50% of American adults scored at Level 2 (which corresponds to about a fifth grade level) or below. This means that tasks like reading the directions on a bottle of prescription medicine or helping their children with homework are difficult or impossible for them. Some of these are folks whose native language is not English; some are fluent English speakers who, for a variety of reasons (poverty, transience, undiagnosed learning disabilities, overburdened school systems, etc.) have not become proficient readers.

Fortunately the Literacy Council of Buncombe County is here to help them. The Council provides area adults with free tutoring in English as a Second Language (ESL) and Adult Basic Education (ABE). The ESL program serves Buncombe County's rapidly growing immigrant population, mainly comprised of Russian- and Spanish speakers. The ABE program serves English speakers who wish to improve their reading, writing, or math skills. All tutoring is done by trained volunteers, at no cost to the student. Each tutor works with a specific student (or group, if they prefer), and tutor-student pairs often stay together for more

than a year. Many tutors and students end up forming close friendships as a result of the valuable time they spend together. Recently, for example, a married couple studying ESL asked their longtime tutor to be the godfather of their new baby girl!

So what does it take to be successful literacy tutor? Mostly patience, empathy, and a sincere desire to help. The Literacy Council provides all volunteers with initial training as well as ongoing support in the form of regular in-services, a Tutor Mentor program, and an experienced and knowledgeable staff always ready to help. Also provided by the Council are a plethora of materials for both tutor and student, from textbooks and workbooks to games, activities, and lesson plans.

I invite you to celebrate International Literacy Month by becoming a literacy tutor or simply by visiting the Literacy Council of Buncombe County to find out more about literacy issues in our area. Orientations are free and open to the public and will be offered on the following dates: August 16, 18, 23, and 25. Please call 254-3442 for times and location.