

***Proposed Bill No. 5823***  
***An Act Implementing a State-Wide Coordinated Two-Generational Model***

***February 5, 2015***  
***Testimony***

*I am Maria Simao, Executive Director of Literacy Volunteers of Central CT, speaking in support of Proposed Bill No. 5823, An Act Implementing a State-Wide Coordinated Two-Generational Model.*

Literacy Volunteers of Central CT (LVCC) has been a leader in New Britain and central CT in training volunteers to help low literate adults improve their lives through English literacy for over 35 years. More recently, we have also become a leader in helping low literate parents to support their children's success in school and to fulfill their role as their child's first teacher. Our program is a successful dual generation program that is poised to expand its services when additional resources are available.

We serve sixteen towns in Central CT. Last year 450 low literate adults participated in a variety of programs to help them improve their lives through literacy with the help of 199 volunteer tutors. Ninety –five percent of students made progress toward their work, family, and community goals. The ethnicity of those served was: 40% White (mostly Polish or Arab), 9% African American, 17% Asian, 2% other, and 32% Hispanic. We have expanded the Parenting for Academic Success (PAS) program each year and in 2010 opened the Central CT Family Literacy Center. This is a complete 4 component family literacy center that includes transformative education programs like PAS for parents and children. The four components are Parent Time, Adult Literacy, Play and Learn child program, and Parent and Child Together (PACT) Time.

We receive extensive in-kind support from the YWCA of New Britain where the center is located, from elementary schools, from New Britain Adult Education, the provider of pre-GED and English classes, and from New Britain Family Resource Centers.

Family Literacy is now one our 3 core programs (in addition to English for Speakers of Other Languages and Basic Literacy). In 2011 we changed our mission to include the word "families" as part of a strategic plan and organizational analysis process. The mission is now, "helping adults and families to improve their lives through literacy". This mission statement reflects our commitment to low literate families and to a broader range of literacies that parents and families need to be self-sufficient. As we have gained experience and knowledge, LVCC has become recognized as an expert in the communities we serve in providing high quality family literacy programs to low literate families. This has led to leadership positions in local community efforts. Last year we were asked to oversee a Family Literacy Coalition grant for the Community Foundation of Greater New Britain that loaned e-readers to families and researched its effect on families.

As a result of the PAS program we have helped low literate parents of children from birth to age 8 to:

- improve their English/ basic literacy skills and move on to advanced education;
- learn skills to help their children with homework,
- increase and facilitate literacy activities in their home,
- and become more involved in their child's formal and informal education.

As the PAS program has grown in size and reputation we have been able to attract additional funding and support to leverage funding and expand family literacy services including the prestigious Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy grant in May 2012 and 2013. The Foundation changed its criteria to exclude Connecticut, so we are no longer eligible to apply.

A key component of our success is the strong family literacy collaborative we have developed that includes elementary schools, family resource centers, businesses, local libraries, and other organizations.

Overall, based on pre- and post survey results and instructor observation, 100% of parents in PAS read more with their children, 80% reported attending more activities at their child's school, and 80% reported that they felt more comfortable to volunteer at their child's school. Parents also reported helping more with homework and families engaged in more literacy activities at home. In addition to pre- and post-tests parents tracked the books they read with their child.

Student feedback included:

"Thanks for everything you taught me. I will never forget when you encourage me to keep going and never give up. I never thought that I was going to make it so far. This new step is going to change the future of my family."

-GED Graduate 2013

"After being mother of two children I feel kids are most priority for any mother. In their parenting class they try to guide us how to be a best mother and encourage us to teach our children reading, writing and to be creative in our own way. For me, I feel really thankful to all of my teachers, classmates, friends and overall employees of the Family Literacy program."

-English for Speakers of other Language parent

"My life changed drastically since I started this program. To better myself as a person, to be a great mom. Now that I have my GED I am planning on going to college. My kids and I will have a better future. Thank you for give me the opportunity to realize my dreams."

-GED Graduate 2013

"It was helpful to learn how to read. We obviously all read to our kid, but maybe not know that we can talk to them about the pictures and ask them questions."  
-Language is the Key Workshop Participant

Other outcomes to date include:

- 100% of the families who participated in this program received homework and literacy supplies, books, and snacks each week.
- Over 2,500 new books were donated by Barnes and Noble customers in November and December 2013. Approximately 700 books were given to families participating in the workshops and classes. Many of these families have never had books in the home or basic homework and literacy supplies. We also increased the number of business and civic partners who have donated books and literacy supplies to this project.
- Parents have reported volunteering at their child's school in the classroom and for fieldtrips, fundraisers, and family nights.
- Parents are sharing photos of literacy activities at home like story time, crafts, and cooking activities.
- Some parents are now taking on leadership roles and facilitating activities for other parents at the CCFLC.

The Parenting for Academic Success Program responds to an important need identified by the New Britain Early Childhood Blueprint, supporting mothers with children under age 8 who have low literacy skills many of whom do not have a high school diploma. One of the biggest indicators of a child's success in school is the mother's level of literacy. Children whose parents are low-literate are at a significant disadvantage in school because their parents do not speak English and are lacking in skills to practice literacy in the home, help with homework, or communicate with their child's teacher. In New Britain, the CT State Bureau of Adult Education estimates that in New Britain more than 13,000 adults over age 18 (23.3%) do not have a high school diploma and over 7,600 adults (13.4%) in New Britain do not speak English well. Spanish, Arabic, and Polish are the three most common languages, and we have had more than 20 different native languages represented in our program. The problem continues to grow with 40% of students dropping out of high school each year in New Britain.

LVCC is the only organization in central CT that focuses specifically on the needs of low literate parents and families. Thirty five percent of LVCC students surveyed identified family as the most important reason for improving their literacy. (Other areas included work, education, and citizenship.) With additional funding, we could expand the numbers of people we serve and strengthen our programs and support for families to achieve economic self-sufficiency.

I strongly urge the passage of Bill 5823 and would be happy to provide additional information upon request.