

## **READ/San Diego Adult Literacy Program San Diego Public Library—City of San Diego**

Since its founding in 1988, READ/San Diego has become one of the largest and most respected adult literacy programs in the United States and is a national field-test site for the U.S. Department of Education. A free service of the San Diego Public Library, READ/San Diego's adult literacy programs develop, promote, and manage the basic literacy instruction of English-speaking adults (16 and older) for the entire County of San Diego. A learner-oriented service, its diverse programs enable adults to attain their personal goals and to participate more fully in society as parents, citizens, and workers.

READ/San Diego is supported by the City of San Diego and the County of San Diego with assistance from Friends of the READ/San Diego Literacy Programs and the State of California. It also relies on contributions from local businesses, civic and service organizations, and individuals.

Functional illiteracy continues to affect up to one-quarter of San Diego County's adult population. That means approximately 422,000 adults cannot read and write well enough to meet everyday needs and pursue professional goals. In California, approximately 5.9 million functionally illiterate adults must compensate for their lack of reading ability by developing effective listening and memorization techniques and relying on a network of trusted helpers.

Current data shows a direct correlation between poverty and literacy achievement. While San Diego's population growth has exceeded projections and continues to climb at an accelerated rate, the poverty rate remains constant, disproportionately affecting children more than any other group. Children whose parents are unable to read and write are deprived of the advantages that having parents as their first teachers would entitle them to.

The need for a literate workforce has never been as pronounced as it is today. Manufacturing jobs have steadily decreased as service jobs, which require greater literacy skills, have proportionally increased. Meanwhile, the role of technology is increasing in all areas of daily life, challenging the minimum literacy levels required to be successful in society. Employers expect increasing skills in critical thinking, problem solving, and technological mastery, all of which have literacy as prerequisites.

Over the past 13 years, READ/San Diego has evolved to meet the ever-growing needs of San Diego County's illiterate adult population. Under the direction of Chris McFadden, the program's founding administrator, READ/San Diego has expanded its

services and countywide reach. READ/San Diego now provides one-on-one tutoring in reading, writing, and math in 67 city and county branch libraries. It also offers group tutoring in English as a second language (ESL) at two locations in San Diego: Logan Heights and Rancho Peñasquitos. READ/San Diego has also extended its outreach through workplace literacy programs at Sea World, Solar Turbines, and the City of San Diego Water Department. In addition, READ/San Diego maintains what is perhaps the best library literacy collection of books and instructional materials in California.

Since 1992, READ/San Diego has been on the cutting-edge of computer-aided instruction. Equipped with IBM and Macintosh computer workstations and comprehensive software systems, READ/San Diego's state-of-the-art computer reading labs offer a wide selection of programs aimed at helping learners improve language skills, reading, writing, spelling, math, typing, and GED and job preparation skills. Training and support are provided by a lab coordinator and trained volunteer assistants at READ/San Diego's headquarters in the Malcolm X Library and Performing Arts Center in Valencia Park as well as at eight branch libraries and neighborhood learning centers (including Logan Heights, North Park, Santee, Clairemont, and Rancho Penasquitos)

Other programs offered by READ/San Diego include its Families for Literacy program (FFL). Started in 1993, this successful program brings parents and their children to the library in order to provide parents the necessary skills to become their child's first teacher. This program is currently available in City Heights, Valencia Park, El Cajon, and Vista. In addition, READ/San Diego's Learner Council offers bi-monthly self-improvement workshops as well as field trips to theaters and museums for students.

READ/San Diego maintains effective support programs for its volunteer tutors as well. Prospective tutors make a minimum six-month commitment and undergo 15 hours of comprehensive training, including intensive training in learning disabilities. They generally meet with students twice a week for a total of three hours at one of the City and County's 67 libraries or at a mutually convenient public facility such as a church, business office, or community center.

Tutors are supported with training resources provided by the City of San Diego, the County of San Diego, the California State Department of Education, the California State Library, and the San Diego Council on Literacy. Additional support is provided through monthly support group meetings, in-service training workshops, the annual READ/San Diego Tutor Conference, and an Annual Learner Recognition Dinner Awards Ceremony.

As the population of San Diego grows, along with the number of non-English-speaking adults, the demand for a literate, technologically sophisticated workforce will become even greater. Through the continuing support of government and private agencies, community partnerships, and its volunteers, READ/San Diego will be able build on an already solid foundation to meet these needs.

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