

For those unable to read, navigating everyday life is complicated and frustrating. Roadblocks in childhood education or life in a new country often leads to adults who are functionally illiterate. Adrian Rea Literacy Center (ARLC) on the campus of Siena Heights University has been on the frontlines offering hope and assistance for a decade. "We're in our eleventh year," said Sister Carleen Maly, OP, director of ARLC. "We've served more 1,270 people and that's with the help of more than 980 tutors."

Children who struggle and fall behind in school grow up to be some of the people who benefit from ARLC's assistance. English as Second Language (ESL) or English Language Learners (ELL) are newcomers to the United States who want to be able to read, write and speak in English. Both groups are served by the tutors at ARLC.

The biggest strength of the program is one-on-one tutoring, which increases the speed of learning, and offers flexibility. "Our learners report to us they were in group classes and it was frustrating to them," Sister Carleen said. "They were so far behind, and tell us, 'Everybody seemed smarter than I was.' One to one is the very best way for them to go."

Tutors for ARLC are trained and certified. There is no charge to work with the tutors, who tailor the program to whatever level is needed.

The program runs year-round, and participants can begin whenever they are ready. "We honor their schedules and their jobs," said Sister Carleen. "We try to get an idea when they first come to us where they are in reading. We teach two hours a week for each

pairing — it would be the equivalent to four hours in the classroom," Sister Carleen said. "Phonics is a tried and true method in adult literacy. Adults learn by association."

Computers are also available and for those planning to earn a GED, computer skills are vital to pass the tests. "The GED is done only online," said Sister Carleen. "Learners must have a good sense of using the keyboard because the tests are timed."

The goal for ARLC is discretion and respect in dealing with potential learners, especially those who are ESL/ELL. "We have a dedicated Spanish phone line," Sister Carleen said, which provides a way for people to feel comfortable knowing information will be provided in Spanish.

For many participants, their dedication to education has a positive effect on their children. According to Sister Carleen, individuals share that their entire family does homework together in the evenings, emphasizing the importance of working on academics.

Certificates of achievement are earned throughout the program, and graduation from the program is celebrated. "They have a real sense of accomplishment," said Sister Carleen. "We often hear, 'This is the first thing I've ever gotten from school.'"

Sister Carleen knows there are more people in the area who need the ARLC services and hopes the word can go out that help is available. "If you know someone in your life that needs assistance, encourage them to come. What will serve them in the long run? It will be education," she said. ■

SHINING THE LIGHT ON LITERACY

By Mary Kay McPartlin



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