



The Literacy Council
of Lancaster-Lebanon

The Literacy Line

Spring 2026

In this issue...

- 2 Brave Space
- 3 Student Story
- 4 Theory of Adult Learning
- 4 A Quiet Act of Kindness
- 5 Learning a New Language
- 5 Digital Skills to Workforce Confidence
- 6 Visuals to Support Learning
- 7 Project-Based Learning in ESL
- 8 Going With the Flow

Community Report 2024-2025:

- 9 Financial Report
- 10 Volunteer Tutors
- 11 Donors



Literacy & Learning
Success Centers

Lancaster | Lebanon

**The Literacy Council of
Lancaster-Lebanon**

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The Literacy & Learning Success Centers, a service of
The Literacy Council of Lancaster-Lebanon.

A Message From the Executive Director

Cheryl Hiester, Executive Director

As I reflect on the stories shared in this issue, I am reminded that our work is about more than lessons, data, or outcomes. It is about the people who put their trust in us to support them on their learning journey. Every student who walks through our doors brings a unique story, shaped by a lifetime of experiences, courage, persistence, and hope for the future. The moments highlighted in this newsletter capture the heart of our work.

In this issue, you will read about the foundations of adult learning practice and how we build programs on that foundation. You will read about classrooms intentionally designed as Brave Spaces—places where adult learners feel safe to take risks, ask questions, make mistakes, and grow. These spaces don't happen by accident. They are created by dedicated teachers who understand how adults learn, who honor student lived experiences, and who build trust one conversation at a time. Small steps like a student volunteering to speak or a class redefining what support looks like all add up to lasting impact.

You will also read a story about a student navigating bus detours, language barriers, and fear, only to encounter unexpected kindness. That story is a reminder that learning does not happen in isolation. Our students live full, complex lives, and their success is often influenced by the compassion of the broader community. Whether it's a police officer walking a student safely to class or a teacher pausing a lesson to listen, these moments of humanity make a big difference to a student.

And throughout this issue, you will see evidence of something we know: progress is not always big and dramatic but is always meaningful and impactful.

Unlike previous issues, the spring 2026 newsletter follows with an abbreviated version of our *2024-2025 Community Report*, sharing highlights from last year. The Community Report reflects a year of steady progress, thoughtful instruction, and renewed commitment to meeting students where they are. You'll read about outcomes that demonstrate accountability and data that confirms what we see every day: stories that highlight transformation. When adults are given the right support, success happens.

As you read through the newsletter and report, I hope you see what we see: students building confidence, educators innovating with purpose, and a community investing in opportunities for success through lifelong learning and learning for life. Thank you for being part of this work. Whether you teach, partner, volunteer, advocate, or support us in other ways, your belief in the mission creates lasting change.

Brave Space

Meredith Aul, Adjunct Instructor

Staff and professional development meetings are always valuable for team building, but the real takeaway is often unpredictable. Some meetings end with little “news I can use,” while others send me back to the classroom with a fresh strategy, a useful website, or a technique I’m eager to try with my students. Occasionally, the most meaningful ideas emerge from something that wasn’t even the original focus of the presentation.

That was exactly the case at our February staff meeting, when our Program Director, Jenny Bair, shared a simple but powerful warm-up activity by introducing a poem titled “An Invitation to Brave Space” by Micky ScottBey Jones. It immediately stood out as an activity with the potential to spark reflection, discussion, and connection. It goes like this:

An Invitation to Brave Space

By: Micky ScottBey Jones

Together we will create *brave space*
Because there is no such thing as a “safe space” —
We exist in the real world.
We all carry scars and we have all caused wounds.
In this space
We seek to turn down the volume of the outside world,
We amplify voices that fight to be heard elsewhere,
We call each other to more truth and love.
We have the right to start somewhere and continue to grow.
We have the responsibility to examine what we think we know.
We will not be perfect.
This space will not be perfect.
It will not always be what we wish it to be.
But
It will be *our brave space together*,
and
We will work on it side by side.

At the staff meeting, Jenny invited us to read the poem and discuss how its message might guide the way we teach, support students, and work with one another. Intrigued, I decided to share the poem with my students and ask how we could create a “Brave Space” in our classroom.

I’ll admit, I wasn’t sure how it would work. My level three students manage concrete language well,

but abstract concepts are challenging. Explaining a metaphor like “Brave Space” felt risky. On the first day, I made the mistake of rushing it—tucking the poem between a “do now” and my planned lesson. I briefly explained metaphor using the familiar phrase, “My love is a red rose,” introduced a few vocabulary words, and asked students to reflect privately on what the poem meant to them. I received one response.

The following class, I tried again—this time more intentionally. We reread the poem together and unpacked key vocabulary: scars and wounds (physical and emotional hurts), turn down the volume, amplify, and side by side. As the discussion unfolded, students began to define “Brave Space” for themselves. They agreed it meant a classroom where people feel safe taking risks, even something as simple as asking a question. One student from Ukraine shared how she tries to create safety at home for her children, who are still frightened by the sound of helicopters. Others talked about the fear of making mistakes when speaking English, especially when they are new to the class.

This time, I asked students to respond in writing to one of three questions:

- What would a Brave Space look like in our online class?
- What is my role in creating a Brave Space?
- What risk do I need to take to grow in my English, and what support do I need from others?

Their answers were thoughtful and honest. One student wrote that a Brave Space is “a place to don’t be afraid to speak and read.” Another said it is where “everyone respects each other and feels comfortable sharing ideas.” Several students focused on personal responsibility: studying independently, practicing more, learning new vocabulary, and speaking without fear of mistakes. Many also mentioned the need for patience and support from classmates.

One response that stood out came from my newest student, a mother of five from Syria who struggles with reading and has had no formal schooling. She rarely misses class and completes every assignment with help from her family. To her, a Brave Space means a teacher who repeats lessons so students can understand, classmates who explain when someone is confused, and the courage to share ideas while continuing to grow more fluent.

continued on page 3...



Student Story: Roger Paccola Simissi



My name is Roger Paccola Simissi, I was born in the Central African Republic (Africa) and graduated in Environmental Science from the University of Paul Cezanne Marseille (France). My school career has not been an easy one, but it has been marked by many moments

of reflection and growth in three different countries (Africa, France, and USA).

1- Centrafrique (Africa)

My elementary school years were quite simple for me. I remember loving creative subjects like drawing and physical education. But things got tougher in adolescence, when I started to lose myself a bit in literary subjects. Middle school was a challenge, especially in English and History-Geography, but I had a teacher who inspired me to persevere by showing me that mistakes are a normal part of learning. On the other hand, I must admit that when it rains I never go to school. It sounds strange, but it's my weakness.

One of the most remarkable moments of my career was my preparation for the baccalaureate. The stress was immense, especially in Literacy science, but I decided to focus on the essentials and ask for help when necessary. This enabled me to overcome my difficulties and graduate with honors, a great pride for me. Then I finished with a master's degree in Chemistry-Biology at the University of Bangui (Central African Republic).

2- France (Europe)

Arriving in France for school, is yet another stage in life. Fortunately for me, the French language was

something I knew and spoke when I was in Africa throughout my school career.

The University of Paul Cezanne in Marseille, France, required me to take a Master's degree in Population and Ecosystem Biology, which I passed with honors. I had difficulty getting a job. I decided to retrain in order to find a promising job. That's how I got a certificate in Quality Security and Environment (Industrial Risks). I started working. I spent over 10 years in France. As nature would have it, I was lucky enough to get the Green card lottery. I'm leaving France for a new adventure in the U.S.

3- USA

Arriving in the USA, there are several challenges to overcome. There's a language barrier if you're not totally at ease with the language of the country. I've never spoken English; so this can make communicating with others and even in everyday life much more complicated.

This culture shock is a common experience—adapting to a new financial system, understanding the cost of living. Being far from family and friends can make you feel lonely. What's more, it can be difficult to make new friends in an unfamiliar environment.

These challenges can seem daunting at first, but walking through the door of Literacy & Learning Success Centers was a great relief. The important thing is to remain patient and open to experience. Mentored by Megan and accompanied in the field by Lauren, the language barrier began to fall. Today I'm autonomous, I'm improving my English and I'm trying to take part in activities that allow me to meet locals.

My project is to speak English well and fluently, so that I can find a good job that reflects my qualities.

Brave Space *(continued from page 2)*

Have things changed overnight? Not entirely. Most students still keep their cameras off. But I've noticed small signs of courage—like the student who rarely speaks volunteering by saying, "Can I try?"

I don't have time to revisit "Brave Space" every

class, but most days I ask two quiet questions: What risk will I take today? and How can I support someone else? Progress may be slow, but the foundation is there. We may not be taking deep dives yet—but we are building a classroom where everyone feels safe, seen, and accepted in our Brave Space.

The Theory of Adult Learning and How to Apply It

Jenny Bair, Program Director

What makes adult learners lean in rather than tune out? The answer lies in andragogy—the art or science of teaching adults. Adults come to our classes with clear goals, life experience, and a need to understand why they are learning something.

Although the term was coined in 1833 by German educator Alexander Kapp, the andragogical theories and ideas that we use in practice today are grounded in the work of Malcolm Knowles, whose ideas help educators design instruction that respects adult learners' self-direction, builds on their knowledge and experience, and connects learning to real life.

In short, Knowles proports that adults learn differently than children and that there are five assumptions that educators must recognize to understand adult learning.

- Self-Concept: Adults want control of their own learning. They want to be part of the decision of what, when, and how they learn.
- Experience: Adult learners bring years of life knowledge to the classroom. Prior experience connects new information to what they already know.
- Readiness to Learn: Adults pursue learning

voluntarily when they realize a need for it and have a distinct objective (e.g., a career goal, basic skill gap, or credential attainment)

- Orientation to Learning: Adults seek learning that is immediately applicable to their goals.
- Motivation to Learn: Adults pursue learning out of intrinsic factors and life goals. They readily engage when they understand the benefit of what they are learning.

These adult learning theories inform suggestions Knowles proposes for effective and impactful adult instruction.

- Create a cooperative learning environment by involving the learner in goal setting and content selection.
- Use the learner's background knowledge by incorporating their experiences in the learning process.
- Make instruction relevant to the learner by assessing the learner's needs and interests and by explaining the reason for learning specific skills.
- Promote critical thinking by involving students in problem-centered learning that connects classroom learning to practical applications.

A Quiet Act of Kindness

Monica Shannon, Program Assistant

Have you driven through Lancaster City recently? With spring has come a flurry of road construction, detours, and heavy equipment throughout the city. While navigating these changes can be frustrating for staff, imagine the confusion and anxiety they can cause for students who rely on public transportation.

That was the case recently when a student—whom I'll call "M"—traveled down Columbia Avenue to attend her bi-weekly Digital Literacy class at The Literacy Council. I was surprised when M arrived late and visibly distressed. After reassuring her that being late was no problem at all, I invited her to join the class already in session. But first, she needed to tell me what had happened.

M described the loud construction and unfamiliar sights along her bus route. Overwhelmed and unsure, she got off the bus at the wrong stop and suddenly found herself lost, frightened, and unsure how to reach The Literacy Council. This situation would be stressful for anyone, but it was especially

frightening for an older student whose first language is not English.

Summoning tremendous courage, M approached a nearby police officer and explained her situation as best she could. What happened next spoke volumes. Rather than simply giving directions or sending her on her way, the officer walked M all the way to The Literacy Council, calmly reassuring her until she reached our door.

This quiet act of kindness reflects the compassion and professionalism of the Lancaster City police officers who serve our community every day. M's story is a powerful reminder of how small acts of humanity can make an enormous difference.

Her experience uplifted my heart—and it is exactly the kind of story we need to hear more often. It is proof that empathy, patience, and a willingness to help can turn a frightening moment into one of hope and connection.

Why Learning a New Language Is One of the Best Things You Can Do for Your Brain

Klaude Larieux, Advisor



Most people associate language learning with vocabulary lists, grammar drills, and frustration. What does not always get mentioned is what is happening inside the brain while all of that is going on. Every time you engage with a new language, your brain is actively working. It is storing new words, recognizing patterns, switching between systems, and building connections it did not have before. That process, repeated consistently over time, changes the brain in ways that go far beyond communication.

Adult learners often underestimate themselves. The assumption is that children learn languages easily and adults will struggle. That comparison misses the reasoning skills, life experience, and discipline that adults bring into the learning process. These qualities support deeper, more lasting learning than most people expect. At the neurological level, language learning touches multiple systems at once. First, your memory strengthens, not just for vocabulary, but in ways that carry over into daily life. Secondly, your focus improves, particularly in environments full of distraction. Lastly, problem-solving becomes

more flexible because language requires the brain to adapt quickly and think in new ways. Over time, this builds what researchers call cognitive reserve. It is the brain's capacity to resist decline as it ages. By creating new neural pathways and reinforcing existing ones, language learning offers real protection against conditions like dementia. You are not just learning words. You are building resilience into the structure of your mind.

The great thing is that none of this requires perfection. It requires consistency. Whether it is listening to music in a new language, reading, watching TV, or scheduling an orientation at the Literacy & Learning Success Centers for HSE and ESL classes, small and regular engagement adds up. Learning something new is an investment in how you think, how you remember, and how your brain holds up over time. In a world where mental fatigue is common and focus is increasingly hard to hold onto, that investment is worth making.

Your brain is more capable than you give it credit for. The moment you start, it starts adapting.

From Digital Skills to Workforce Confidence: A Journey Back into Employment

Taylor Thomas, Digital Literacy Program Coordinator

A learner in our digital literacy program came to us with a clear goal: rebuild confidence using technology and prepare to re-enter the workforce after a period away from employment.

With prior experience in property management and a strong desire to return to work, she began by strengthening foundational digital skills, including basic computer use, internet navigation, email communication, and Microsoft Office applications such as Word and Excel, as well as Google Docs.

As her skills developed, we shifted into more workforce-focused support. In one-on-one sessions, we worked on resume development, including formatting, structure, and how to effectively highlight transferable skills. We also discussed how experience in property

management translates into workplace competencies such as communication, financial tracking, organization, problem-solving, and customer service.

To further support her job search, we introduced strategies for using online job application systems, including creating accounts, submitting applications, uploading documents, and tracking application status. She also learned the importance of reviewing auto-filled information for accuracy before submission.

A significant milestone was her ability to independently revise and update her resume without assistance, demonstrating increased confidence and digital independence.

continued on page 7...

Using Visuals to Support Learning

Cathy Roth, Adjunct Instructor

Pictures are worth a thousand words—or so the saying goes. I am not an artist, but I regularly use free, printable clipart to enhance my lessons and help clarify what I am teaching. These simple visuals can make ideas more accessible and support students with different learning styles.

As an organization, the Literacy & Learning Success Centers continually monitor the value we provide to both our students and the wider community. Each teacher spends time reflecting on his or her own practice, and we collaborate to make sure our individual classes meet the needs of students.

One important indicator of success is student achievement on standardized tests. Another indicator of success is student satisfaction with classes. To better understand how students feel about their class, I use a Likert scale survey (see sample below). At the end of each seven week course, I poll my students using a Canvas BigBlueButton tool. Students are asked to respond to three questions about:

1. This unit's topic (in this case, Personal Information: Multiple Intelligences).
2. This unit's activities (vocabulary, games, and conversations about Gardner's nine kinds of Intelligence; reading selections about Abraham Lincoln; exercises using adverbs and adjectives appropriately; and writing sentences using noun clauses).
3. Their level of comfort in the class this session.

The Likert scale is a practical and flexible assessment tool for teachers at any instructional level. With small adjustments, it can be used effectively with beginning-level students. Students will encounter this tool in real-life, such as reporting pain levels during a doctor visit. Using it in class helps prepare students for everyday experiences.

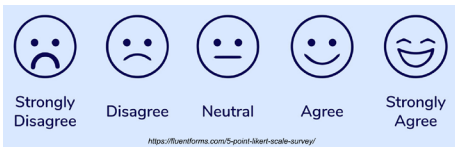
Any time we connect lifelong learning with learning for life, we support our students as they move closer to success.

Sample Likert Scale Survey

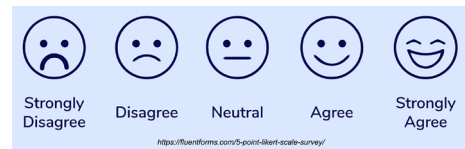
Use this code:

- 1 = strongly disagree
- 2 = disagree
- 3 = neutral/no opinion
- 4 = strongly agree

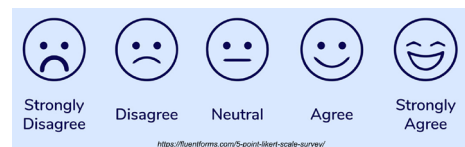
I understand the topic
Multiple Intelligences.



I understand most of the
grammar and vocabulary.



I like this class and feel comfortable
continuing at this level.



Project-Based Learning in ESL

Lauren Swartz, ESL Instructor

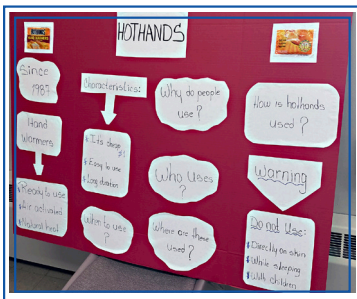


I'm excited to showcase examples of our project-based learning from my online and in-person classes. Implementing project-based learning helps boost engagement and cultivate skills like collaboration and critical thinking. **Marlin's** project was to persuade students to use a particular

household item. She chose Hothands hand warmers and even provided samples to the class. This project strengthened key transferable skills specifically in using action-oriented information and collaborating effectively within a team.

Here is what Marlin had to say about her project:

What motivated you to do the project? "I was motivated to do the project this way to present it with greater clarity, precision, and understanding and to better illustrate it to others."



What did you learn by observing others? "I learned that there are many different ways to present projects."

What skills did you have to use? "I had to use creativity, innovation, imagination, and design skills."

Do you have any ideas for future projects?

"Yes, I would like each classmate to give a short presentation about their country of origin, representing their culture."

Ibrahim's project focused on creating a flyer that advertises when you should go to the hospital. His project helped create transition action statements and develop digital literacy skills.

This is what Ibrahim had to say about his project:



What English language skills did you use to complete the project? "In administrative work, such as occupational safety and infection control, we regularly use medical terminology that is frequently circulated. We develop guidelines that may vary depending on the specialty. Using tools like artificial intelligence, we can create an inspiring presentation that conveys the

intended information in a way that captures the audience's attention. This is part of managing safety, quality, and infection control. In occupational safety, health, and infection control we adopt administrative practices aimed at ensuring a safe working environment. Since hospitals are environments prone to infections, patient safety relies on adhering to guidelines issued by relevant health authorities, which may vary between specialties. Creating posters or instructional boards conveys the messages that occupational safety and health professionals strive to communicate to patients and staff, emphasizing patient safety and maintaining a clean, healthy, and hazard-free work environment for the well-being, health, and happiness of all.

Digital Skills *(continued from page 5)*

As her job search progressed, she began securing multiple interview opportunities and advancing through different stages of the hiring process.

Her journey reflects the broader impact of our program: digital literacy is not just about computer skills, but about helping adults

confidently apply those skills toward meaningful workforce opportunities.

With continued community support, learners can move from building foundational skills to actively participating in today's digital job market with confidence.

Going With the Flow: A Lesson Beyond the Lesson Plan

Kat Ludlow, ESL Instructor

On a recent Monday morning, I arrived at class energized and well prepared. I had crafted a detailed lesson on adjective order, complete with a short story about a couple shopping together, three worksheets, and color coded exercises focusing on adjectives of opinion and clothing. It was a full 2.5 hour lesson, one I worked hard to perfect. I was ready to teach. Adult education, however, continually reminds us that readiness also means being willing to adapt.

Our students come to class carrying the weight of real life. Some finish 12 hour overnight shifts just hours before class. Others are caring for children, navigating medical appointments, or supporting sick family members. I try to meet them where they are, keeping food available for those who haven't had time to eat, coffee ready for a much needed boost, and expectations grounded in understanding rather than rigidity. Tired faces, late arrivals, and shifting realities are part of the landscape, and presence matters most. Showing up is itself an achievement.

On this day, one particular student comes to mind. She was there, an exhausted but determined mother of twin toddlers who had completed an overnight shift an hour earlier. After welcoming the class, I handed out the worksheets and began our usual Monday conversation.

"What did you do this weekend?" I asked. This student responded, "I go to the supermarket. I go to church. On Saturday I am cooking the dinner and cleaning the kitchen."

In that moment, the path forward became clear. This wasn't a day for adjective order. This was an opportunity to strengthen verb usage and review the past tense—an area many ESL learners find especially challenging.

For this student, we slowed down to focus more deeply on tense. I set aside the original lesson and reached for materials that better fit her immediate needs. Together, we reviewed present tense verbs and worked step by step to convert them into past tense. As she practiced, I quickly scanned textbooks for the right exercises. Within minutes, an entirely new lesson had taken shape, one built specifically for her in real time. And it worked.

She practiced with confidence, asked questions freely, and left having strengthened a skill she uses every day. What could have felt like a setback became a reminder of one of adult education's greatest strengths—the ability to respond, adjust, and teach the student, not the lesson plan.

Some days, success isn't measured by how much material you cover, but by how well you meet the learner in front of you. This was one of those days.

Save the Date: Extraordinary Give 2026

Event: Extraordinary Give (ExtraGive)

Date: Friday, November 20, 2026

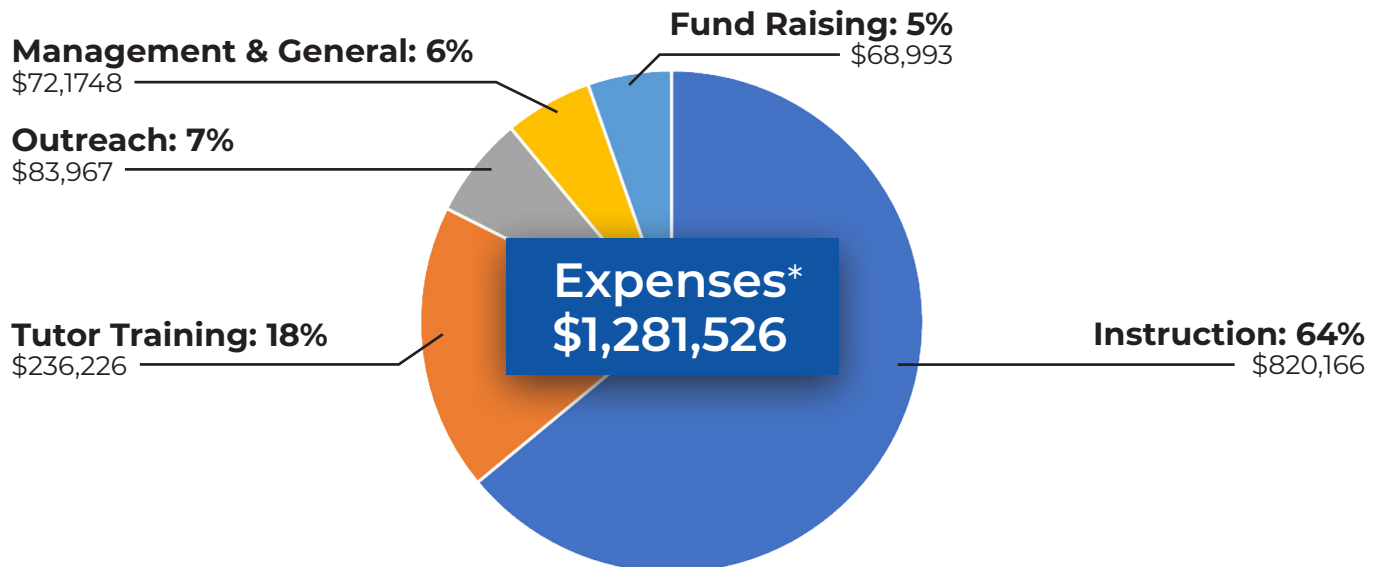
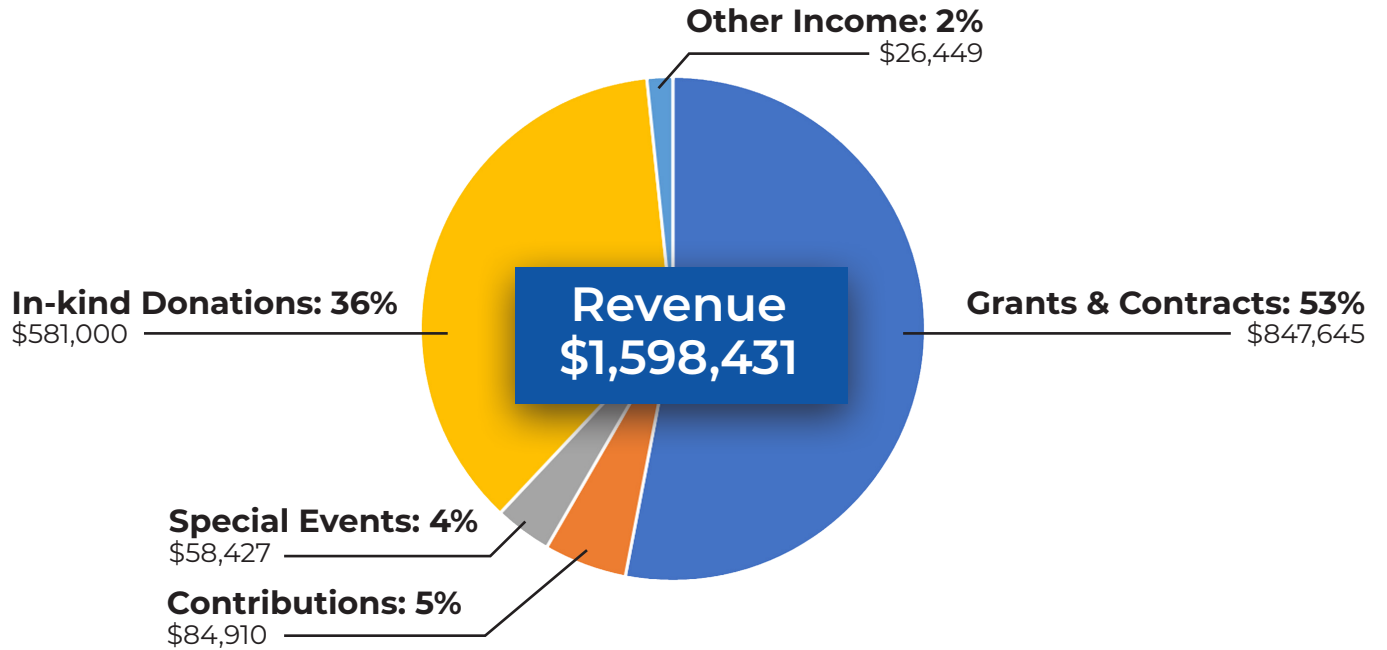
Mark your calendar for this special day of generosity. Support hundreds of Lancaster County organizations, including The Literacy Council of Lancaster-Lebanon!

Visit the [ExtraGive website](#) for additional details.

EXTRA
GIVE



Community Report 2024-2025: Financial Report



Community Report 2024-2025: Volunteer Tutors

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The Literacy Council of Lancaster-Lebanon

We serve the people and communities of Lancaster and Lebanon Counties; working in partnership with multiple stakeholders, including but not limited to nonprofit agencies, educational institutions, business and industry employers, governmental staff, and organizations. Key to our success is a network of highly qualified volunteers, professional staff, and a supportive community.

Mission

Providing opportunities for success through lifelong learning and learning for life.

Vision

Adults have skills to transform their lives, sustain their families, and strengthen their communities.

Values

A place of welcome – We work hard to be a place where each person feels valued, safe, welcomed, and visible at the Success Centers.

Trust and integrity – We do what we say. Our students, colleagues, community partners, funders, and donors entrust us to fulfill our mission and we believe that it is our duty to be worthy of that trust.

Inspire possibilities – Our programs inspire adults to realize their chosen potential. Our programs meet adult learners where they are and help them set and meet their goals. We commit to success for our students, staff, volunteers, and the program.

Staff

Meredith Aul, Adjunct Instructor
Jenny Bair, Program Director
Shawn Gaffney, Adjunct Instructor
Megan Goerner, Program Supervisor
Steven Hess, Program Supervisor
Cheryl Hiester, Executive Director
Mitchell Hiester, Program Assistant
Evan Ippolito, Instructor
Klaude Larieux, Advisor
Deb Linton, Adjunct Instructor
Katherine Ludlow, ESL Instructor
Jane Myers, Volunteer Services Coordinator
Rita Nutter, ESL Instructor
Ilsa Powell Diller, Outreach and Resource Coordinator
Cathy Roth, Adjunct Instructor
Monica Shannon, Receptionist/Program Assistant
Lauren Swartz, ESL Instructor
Taylor Thomas, Digital Literacy Program Coordinator

Board

The Literacy Council is governed by a volunteer board of directors. 2025-2026 board members:

Chad Burgess, President
Martha Guaigua, Vice President
Stephanie Stauffer, Secretary
Philip Heckert, Treasurer
Erik Cianci
Scott Cole
Fernando Garcia
Cheryl Hiester*
Joan Miller
Bill Morgan
Lisa Sides
Tim Steffen
Jeffrey Woodward

*(Non Voting)



Volunteers Needed

Take action today and join us. We need volunteers to teach basic education skills.

To get started, contact:

Jane Myers,
Lancaster and Lebanon Success Centers
jane@literacysuccess.org

The official registration and financial information of The Literacy Council of Lancaster-Lebanon, LVA, Inc. may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling toll free, within Pennsylvania, 1-800-732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement.

"When obstacles arise, you change your direction to reach your goal; you do not change your decision to get there."

–Zig Ziglar