

Training for Literacy Workers

LITERACY THE ISSUE

- an introduction to literacy: what makes someone literate? Use examples (show video) and check with audience to see whether this matches what they were expecting
- give definitions of literacy and distinguishes between the differing levels of literacy discuss issue of functionality (people function at a level they are content with)
- differentiates between literacy, second language issues, learning disabilities, and first language programs that are beyond basic level how these differences impact on library service: collections, readers' advisory
- draw attention to literacy as a social issue that affects everyone; linked to poverty, stress on social system, linked to crime, linked to advancement, workplace injury

PROFILE OF THE ADULT LEARNER

- brief overview of reasons for low literacy levels and for nonparticipation in programs; discusses stereotypes of an illiterate person--rural, older people; unemployed; first language skills nonexistent; stupid or can't learn. Have a speaker or show a video with personal testimonies to speak about why learners never learned how to read, why they decided to learn, and the challenges they face while learning. Also ask them to speak about the changes to their lives reading has made.

REASONS FOR LOW LITERACY LEVELS

- education not stressed when young;
- parents couldn't read;
- negative experiences at school;
- an undiagnosed learning disability;
- had to drop out of school to work;
- reading was a low personal priority;
- frequent moves as child made learning difficult;
- needed extra help at school that was never given

REASONS FOR NONPARTICIPATION IN LITERACY PROGRAMS

- low self confidence
- social disapproval
- situational barriers
- negative attitude toward classes
- low personal priority

WAYS LOW LITERACY LEVEL AFFECTS LIVING

Ask trainees to consider consequences of not being literate
can't understand written directions
hard time shopping for groceries (labels)
can't read drug labels, do taxes, etc.

Ask trainees to consider how this might affect the library service they give to a learner
(see next point)

WHAT A LIBRARY CAN OFFER—WHY LIBRARIES ARE ACTIVE IN LITERACY AREA

libraries serve the community - that means everyone
libraries are committed to lifelong education for everyone

1. Services Available

literacy collection development consists of providing and creating print/AV literacy materials
literacy instructional programming involves recruiting, training and placing volunteers, as well as raising staff awareness of the issue

2. literacy support services involves taking part in collaborative efforts with community literacy groups, publicizing literacy services of other agencies, etc.

3. talk about other literacy providers locally, regionally, nationally; have someone come in from those groups to speak

WHAT STAFF CAN DO

An overview of issues for staff to consider when serving this community and how can staff make the library experience more comfortable

- eye contact and a smile
- learn to recognize signs like "I forgot my glasses" or watching to see what other people do first
- personalized service
- take people to the shelf, take them away from hub of activity
- make people the subject
- tell a story
- show people how to use the information you are giving them
- use ordinary words
 - use present or simple past tense
 - keep sentences simple
 - use examples
 - don't use jargon

CONSIDERATIONS FOR REFERENCE AND READERS' ADVISORY

- start as usual; start with easier materials; watch and discuss; adult tone; nonprint formats; natural writing style

- qualities of suitable materials should include
- size and variation of print: too many variations can be distracting, look for bold heads, and medium to fairly large print while still looking adult in format
- organization of material: broken down into manageable units, use of white space, use of headings and subheadings, gradual introduction of new ideas; easy to find material
- illustrations: should complement the text
- vocabulary: glossary, consider difficulty and repetition of words
- complexity of concepts: item should emphasize concrete information and less abstract ideas
- language and writing: look for materials that follow plain language guidelines