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ABSTRACT

A study examined the services provided by and the role and training of volunteers in adult literacy programs in the United States. Data on a national probability sample of approximately 800 adult literacy programs that was collected by the Center for Statistics through its Fast Response Survey System indicated that in spring 1985 adult literacy instruction was provided in an estimated 2,900 adult education programs offered through school districts, community colleges, and adult learning centers, as well as in an estimated 1,300 local adult literacy programs (LALPs), including volunteer groups, community-based organizations, other private literacy organizations, and libraries. About half of the adult education programs and nearly all the LALPs used volunteers. Five types of programs were offered: basic literacy, pre-General Educational Development (GED) examination, GED, oral English-as-a-second language (ESL), and oral and written ESL instruction. Approximately 729,000 persons received instruction during a 1-month period in 1985. Volunteers were used in the following capacities: one-to-one tutoring, teaching small groups, serving as teacher's aides, and teaching classes. Lack of people to volunteer was cited as the main barrier to using volunteers. Ninety-six percent of the programs using volunteers provided training for them, with 86 percent providing an average of 13 hours preservice training for new volunteers. In 80 percent of the programs training was conducted by program staff or other volunteers. Fifty-nine percent of the programs used Laubach Literacy Actic., materials and 43 percent used in-house materials. Forty percent of the programs surveyed rated their volunteers as excellent, 51 percent as good, 7 percent as fair, and 2 percent as poor. (MN)

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US Department of Education • Office of Educational Research and Improvement
Center for Statistics

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ADULT LITERACY PROGRAMS: SERVICES, PERSONS SERVED, AND VOLUNTEERS

In spring 1985, adult literacy instruction was provided by an estimated 2,900 adult education programs, which are instructional programs offered through school districts, community colleges, and adult learning centers. In addition, instruction was provided by an estimated 1,300 local adult literacy programs (LALP's), which include volunteer groups, community-based organizations, other private literacy organizations, and libraries.¹ About two-thirds of these programs used volunteers. About half of adult education programs and almost all LALP's used volunteers. These estimates² are some of the results of a recent survey conducted by the Center for Statistics (CS) through its Fast Response Survey System (FRSS).

The survey was requested by the Adult Literacy Initiative,³ which needed these data to support a number of activities. These include promoting awareness of the problem of adult illiteracy through a National Awareness Campaign, promoting the coordination of literacy resources in the public and private sectors, and encouraging volunteerism through the Federal Employee Literacy Training (FELT) program and similar efforts. The survey collected information on the literacy services provided by the programs, the number of persons served, and the use and training of volunteers.

¹This survey encompasses adult education and local adult literacy programs as described above. However, there are additional organizations which provide literacy services, including correctional and military programs, and those provided by businesses. Such programs are not included in this survey

²Standard errors for selected national estimates appear in table 10.

³The Adult Literacy Initiative was created by President Reagan in 1983 to coordinate literacy activities, promote awareness and volunteerism, and collaborate with and build on existing literacy efforts

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Services Provided

There is considerable discussion within the adult literacy field as to what levels of training should be encompassed by the term "literacy instruction." An estimated 23 million Americans are below the 8th grade reading level, which is generally considered "functional literacy." Basic literacy and pre-GED services (defined below) are directed toward these individuals. However, an additional 40 million adults are considered to be "marginally competent," with skills below the 12th grade level; GED services are designed to serve this group. For purposes of this report, we have chosen to take the broader perspective and include all of these levels of instruction.

The programs participating in the survey indicated which of five instructional services they provided (table 1).

- o Basic literacy instruction (below 4th grade) was provided by the highest proportion of programs (86 percent).
- o GED (general educational development, from the 9th grade through high school equivalency) and pre-GED (grades 5 through 8) were offered by two-thirds of the programs.
- o English as a second language (ESL), both oral and written, was available at 58 percent of programs.
- o ESL, oral only, was provided by about one-fourth of the programs.

Adult education programs and LALP's differed in the proportion of programs providing each instructional service.⁴ GED and pre-GED instruction were available much more frequently in adult education programs than LALP's, while oral and written ESL was available slightly more often in LALP's. Overall, adult education programs offered more of these five services than LALP's: an average of 3.3 services compared with 2.3.

Most programs employed more than one instructional setting, including classes, group tutoring, and individual tutoring. About three-fourths of all programs offered instruction through individual tutoring, while over half made group tutoring and classes available (table 2). Individual tutoring was more prevalent in LALP's (93 percent) than in adult education programs (65 percent). However, more adult education programs than LALP's provided group tutoring and far more provided classes. These findings reflect the fact that adult education programs are often provided in school districts and community colleges and tend to provide a more formal type of instruction.

⁴This report focuses on differences between adult education and local adult literacy programs (LALP's). Similar differences are found when programs are categorized by volunteer use or volunteer management. Both of these variables are related to program type in that more LALP's use volunteers and more are managed by volunteers, or a volunteer board, when compared with adult education programs.

Persons Served

An estimated 729,000 persons received instruction during a 1-month period in spring 1985 (table 3).⁵ The majority (about 605,000) obtained instruction through adult education programs while the rest were served by LALP's. Although the average number of persons served per program was 175, half of the programs served 50 or fewer. Adult education programs served a larger average number of persons (210) than LALP's (96). More were served in urban areas (260,000) than in either suburban or rural areas, although there were only about half as many programs in urban areas as there were in rural areas.

Almost one-third of the programs had waiting lists of persons wishing to receive instruction. There were about 76,000 people on waiting lists nationally. Per program, the average number of people on the waiting list was 61. A higher proportion of LALP's had waiting lists.

Volunteers

Nearly two-thirds of all the programs used volunteers, and an additional 15 percent plan to do so in the next 2 years (table 4). LALP's used volunteers more frequently than adult education programs (94 percent compared with 51 percent). This difference will probably decrease in the next 2 years however, since an additional 21 percent of adult education programs plan to start using volunteers.

Volunteers were employed in a variety of capacities, most of them directly related to instruction (table 5):

- o One-to-one tutoring (92 percent of programs using volunteers);
- o Teaching small groups (39 percent);
- o Teacher's aides (34 percent); and
- o Teaching classes (8 percent).

Over one-fourth of the programs used volunteers in other roles. These roles included program management, screening and matching clients and volunteers, training volunteers, publicity and outreach, fundraising, clerical duties, and odd jobs.

Adult education programs and LALP's were generally similar in their use of volunteers, except that far more adult education programs used volunteers

⁵ Responding programs were asked to provide the "number of clients/students served in the past month "

as teacher's aides than did LALP's (perhaps because a higher proportion of adult education programs provided classes), while more LALP's used volunteers in the other roles described above.

At the time this survey was conducted, an estimated 107,000 volunteers served in these programs (table 4). The majority of these, about 82,000, were providing services through LALP's. About 80 percent of the volunteers were teaching or tutoring, again, most of these were serving in LALP's. LALP's averaged 68 volunteers per program, with 56 of the volunteers teaching or tutoring. Adult education programs reported markedly fewer volunteers per program: an average of 18 volunteers, of whom 17 were teaching or tutoring (not shown in tables).

Barriers to Using Volunteers

Asked about barriers to using volunteers, or using more volunteers, programs indicated (table 6):

- o A lack of people to volunteer (59 percent);
- o A lack of personnel to train volunteers (36 percent); and
- o A lack of materials for training volunteers (19 percent).

Over one-fourth of the programs identified other barriers. These included a variety of responses mentioned by small numbers of programs, such as the need for funding, staff to coordinate a volunteer program, and volunteers with special qualifications (e.g., certification to teach).

A higher proportion of adult education programs than LALP's cited the need for people to volunteer and the need for personnel to train volunteers

Volunteer Training

Almost all (96 percent) of the programs using volunteers for teaching or tutoring provided training for them. Of these programs, 86 percent provided preservice training in 1983-84, an average of 13 hours of training. Inservice training was provided at two-thirds of the programs in 1983-84, with an average of 9 hours (not shown in tables).

In about four-fifths of the programs, training was conducted by program staff or other volunteers (table 7). About one-third of the programs used a national literacy organization; this was twice as common among LALP's when compared with adult education programs. A relatively small proportion (11 percent) of programs used outside consultants for training.

The types of materials utilized by the most programs in their volunteer training consisted of the Laubach Literacy Action materials (59 percent) and in-house materials (43 percent). About one-third of the programs used

materials from Literacy Volunteers of America. More LALP's than adult education programs had Laubach materials, while more adult education programs than LALP's relied on in-house materials (not shown in tables).⁶

About three-fourths of the programs with volunteer teachers or tutors observed the volunteers to ensure the quality of instruction (table 8). Fifty-two percent observed volunteers more than once a month, and 21 percent did so less than once a month. More adult education programs than LALP's conducted observations of volunteers (about 90 percent compared with about 50 percent). Adult education programs and LALP's also differed in the frequency of observation. Almost three-fourths of adult education programs observed volunteers more than once a month compared with 30 percent of LALP's.

Ratings of Volunteer Effectiveness

Programs using volunteers for teaching or tutoring were asked to rate the effectiveness of these volunteers (table 9). Forty percent of the programs rated the volunteers as excellent, 51 percent as good, 7 percent as fair, and 2 percent as poor. A higher proportion of LALP's (45 percent) rated volunteers as excellent compared with adult education programs (35 percent).

Survey Background

In May 1985, questionnaires were mailed to a national probability sample of 900 adult literacy programs. The sample was drawn from the data base of Contact Literacy, Inc., which maintains a national listing of literacy resources. To the extent that this data base is complete, the estimates in this report reflect such programs nationwide. Available information indicates that the Contact data base is a relatively complete listing.

About 11 percent (97) of the sampled programs were found to be out of the scope of this survey; many of these had closed, or did only diagnostic testing or referral, or provided materials. The response rate among eligible programs was 97 percent. All statements of comparison made in the text are significant at the 95 percent confidence level. Standard errors for selected items are presented in table 10 as a general guide to the precision of numbers in the tables.

The survey was performed under contract with Westat, Inc., using the Fast Response Survey System (FRSS). Westat's Project Director was Elizabeth Farris, and the Survey Manager was Mary Collins. Douglas Wright was the CS Project Officer for this survey. FRSS was established by CS to collect quickly, and with minimum burden on respondents, small quantities of data needed for education planning and policy.

⁶Laubach Literacy Action and Literacy Volunteers of America are two of the largest national volunteer literacy organizations, with member groups nationwide.

For More Information

For information about this survey or the Fast Response Survey System, contact Helen MacArthur, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, Center for Statistics, Washington, D C. 20208, telephone (202) 254-7351 For single copies of this bulletin, contact the Information Services Office at the same address, or telephone (202) 254-6057.

Table --Instructional services provided by adult literacy programs by program characteristic: 50 States and D.C. Spring 1985

Program characteristic	Number of programs	Percent of programs providing instructional services					Average number of services per program
		Basic literacy ¹	Pre-GED ²	GED ³	ESL, ⁴ oral or	ESL, oral and written	
Total	4,180	86	66	66	24	58	3.0
Type of program							
Adult education programs	2,890	88	77	83	27	55	3.3
Local adult literacy programs	1,290	81	40	26	18	64	2.3
Use of volunteers							
Do not use volunteers	1,490	81	72	79	21	44	3.0
Use volunteers	2,690	89	62	58	26	66	3.0
Service area							
Urban	1,030	88	62	60	29	68	3.1
Suburban	780	81	56	59	22	68	2.9
Rural	1,910	87	72	72	20	44	2.9
Combined area ⁵	460	89	67	63	35	78	3.3

¹ Basic literacy includes instruction in reading, writing, and computation below 4th grade level

² Pre-GED includes instruction at grades 5 through 8

³ GED (general educational development) is instruction at the 9th grade through the high school equivalency diploma

⁴ ESL (English as a second language) is provided at all levels to those whose native language is not English

⁵ Programs were asked to indicate which of the following best described their service areas: urban, suburban, or rural. Those who checked more than one category are reported as serving combined areas.

NOTE --Percents do not total to 100 because respondents could indicate more than one type of instruction

Table 2.--Type of instruction provided by adult literacy programs, by program characteristic 50 States and D.C., spring 1985

Program characteristic	Number of programs	Percent of programs offering type of instruction		
		Individual tutoring	Group tutoring	Classes
Total	4,180	74	59	60
Type of program				
Adult education programs	2,890	65	66	77
Local adult literacy programs	1,290	93	44	23
Use of volunteers				
Do not use volunteers.	1,490	51	53	80
Use volunteers	2,690	87	63	49
Service area				
Urban.	1,030	80	60	54
Suburban	780	66	54	58
Rural.	1,910	72	60	65
Combined area*	460	83	61	57

*Programs were asked to indicate which of the following best described their service areas: urban, suburban, or rural. Those who checked more than one category are reported as serving combined areas.

NOTE.--Percents do not total to 100 because respondents could indicate more than one type of instruction.

Table 3 --Number of persons receiving instructional services¹ and numbers on waiting lists, by program characteristic 50 States and D C , spring 1985

Program characteristic	Total number of persons served (in thousands)	Average number of persons served per program	Percent of programs with a waiting list	Average number of persons on waiting lists
Total	729	175	30	61
Type of program				
Adult education programs	605	210	17	103
Local adult literacy programs	124	96	59	34
Use of volunteers				
Do not use volunteers.	188	127	14	191
Use volunteers	541	202	39	36
Service area				
Urban.	260	255	47	56
Suburban	153	196	29	31
Rural. ²	171	90	20	99
Combined area ²	145	313	36	30

¹Numbers represent a 1-month period in spring 1985.

²Programs were asked to indicate which of the following best described their service areas: urban, suburban, or rural. Those who checked more than one category are reported as serving combined areas

NOTE.--Averages exclude programs reporting no persons served during the reporting period.

Table 1. Use of volunteers by adult literacy programs, by program characteristic 50 States and D.C., spring 1980

Program characteristic	Percent of programs that use volunteers	Percent of programs that plan to use volunteers in the next 2 years	Total number of volunteers (in thousands)	Average number of volunteers per program	Total number of teaching, tutoring volunteers (in thousands)
Total	64	15	107	4 ¹	90
Type of program					
Adult education programs	51	21	25	18	23
Local adult literacy programs	94	2	82	68	67
Program management					
Not volunteer-managed	51	21	34	25	31
Volunteer-managed	89	4	73	58	59
Service area					
Urban	72	11	39	54	34
Suburban	63	16	18	38	16
Rural	58	19	25	23	20
Combined area ²	79	11	25	68	20

¹ Only programs that do not use volunteers were asked if they plan to use volunteers in the next 2 years

² Programs were asked to indicate which of the following best described their service areas: urban, suburban, or rural. Those who checked more than one category are reported as serving combined areas.

NOTE --Averages exclude programs reporting no volunteers

Table 1. Use of Volunteers in Adult Literacy Programs by Program Characteristics: 50 States and D.C., Spring 1985

Program Characteristics	Number of programs	Percent of programs using volunteers in roles						
		One-to-one tutoring	Teaching small groups	Teaching classes	Teacher aides	Transportation	Child care	Other
Total	2,694	92	39	8	34	10	7	28
Program type								
Adult education programs	1,470	89	38	8	47	10	6	6
Local adult life adv. programs	1,220	96	40	8	18	10	6	40
Program management								
Not volunteer-managed	1,420	91	38	10	45	9	7	24
Volunteer-managed	1,270	93	39	6	20	11	7	36
Service area								
Urban	740	95	47	9	28	5	5	30
Suburban	490	90	39	6	35	11	7	32
Rural	1,100	89	31	7	34	13	8	24
Combined area ²	370	97	45	12	42	9	7	31

¹Other uses of volunteers include program management, screening and matching volunteers and clients, training or supervising volunteers, clerical work, odd jobs, etc.

²Programs were asked to indicate which of the following best described their service areas: urban, suburban, or rural. Those who checked more than one category are reported as serving combined areas.

NOTE -- Percents do not total to 100 because respondents could indicate more than one type of volunteer role.

Table 6 -- Barriers to the use of volunteers by adult literacy programs, by program characteristic -- 50 States and D.C., Spring 1985

Program characteristic	Number of programs	Percent of programs indicating barriers					
		Personnel for training volunteers	Materials for training volunteers	Materials for students	People to volunteer	Facilities for training or teaching	Other barriers
Total	4,180	36	19	11	59	12	29
Type of program							
Adult education programs	2,890	34	23	12	6	11	27
Local adult literacy programs	1,290	29	9	8	55	13	34
Use of volunteers							
Do not use volunteers	1,490	38	25	11	60	13	25
Use volunteers	2,690	35	15	11	58	11	30
Service Area							
Urban	1,030	36	17	12	59	14	34
Suburban	780	38	19	9	62	17	26
Rural	1,010	37	20	10	58	8	25
Combined area ²	460	26	17	15	57	16	33

¹ Other barriers include need for funding, personnel to manage a volunteer program, and lack of qualified volunteers

² Programs were asked to indicate which of the following best described their service areas: urban, suburban, or rural. Those who checked more than one category are reported as serving combined areas.

NOTE -- Percents do not total to 100 because respondents could indicate more than one type of barrier.

Table 7 --Who trains adult literacy volunteers, by program characteristic 50 States and D C ,
spring 1985

Program characteristic	Number of programs	Percent of programs indicating category of trainer			
		Program staff or volunteers	National literacy organization	Outside consultant	No training provided
Total	2,600	79	36	11	4
Type of program					
Adult education programs	1,400	82	24	14	5
Local adult literacy programs	1,210	74	49	8	1
Program management					
Not volunteer-managed.	1,350	83	25	16	5
Volunteer-managed.	1,250	74	47	6	2
Service area					
Urban.	730	78	39	13	2
Suburban	470	80	43	7	1
Rural	1,050	77	31	11	6
Combined area*	350	84	35	13	2

*Programs were asked to indicate which of the following best described their service areas: urban, suburban, or rural. Those who checked more than one category are reported as serving combined areas.

NOTE.--Percents do not total 100 because respondents could indicate more than one category of trainer.

Table 11--Observation of volunteers by adult literacy programs by program characteristic: 50 States and D.C., Spring 1965

Program characteristic	Number of programs	Percent of programs observing volunteers			Number of programs observing volunteer	Percent of programs whose volunteers are		
		More than once a month	Less than once a month	Not at all		Observed by paid staff	Observed by volunteers	Observed by both paid staff and volunteers
Total	1,600	52	21	27	1,904	75	16	8
Type of program								
Adult education programs	1,400	71	21	4	1,278	89	5	5
Local adult literacy programs	1,210	30	22	48	631	48	37	14
Program management								
Not volunteer-managed	1,350	67	21	12	1,189	88	5	-
Volunteer-managed	1,250	35	22	43	720	55	35	10

NOTE --Because of rounding, percents may not total to 100

Table 9.--Ratings of effectiveness of teaching/tutoring volunteers, by program characteristic. 50 States and D.C., spring 1985

Program characteristic	Number of programs	Percent of programs indicating rating			
		Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Total	2,600	40	51	7	2
Type of program					
Adult education programs	1,400	35	53	10	3
Local adult literacy programs	1,210	45	50	4	(*)
Program management					
Not volunteer-managed.	1,350	35	53	10	3
Volunteer-managed.	1,250	45	50	5	(*)

*Less than 1 percent.

NOTE.--Because of rounding, percents may not total to 100.

Table 10.--Standard errors of selected items

Item	Estimate	Standard error
Percent of programs providing:		
Basic literacy, all programs	86.0	1.4
GED, all programs.	65.8	1.2
Average number of services per program:		
All programs	3.0	.05
Adult education programs	3.3	.05
Local adult literacy programs.	2.3	.08
Percent of programs offering:		
Individual tutoring, all programs.	74.1	1.4
Classes, all programs.	60.4	1.8
Average number of clients per program:		
All programs	174.9	13.3
Adult education programs	209.7	16.6
Local adult literacy programs.	96.4	12.3
Percent of programs using volunteers:		
All programs	64.4	1.2
Adult education programs	51.0	1.6
Local adult literacy programs.	94.3	1.2
Percent of programs that are volunteer- managed:		
All programs	34.1	1.5
Adult education programs	15.9	1.5
Local adult literacy programs.	74.8	2.7
Average number of volunteers per program:		
All programs	40.4	3.5
Adult education programs	17.6	1.5
Local adult literacy programs.	67.5	6.2
Percent of programs using volunteers for one-to-one tutoring, all programs.		
	92.1	1.5
Percent of programs indicating these barriers to the use of volunteers:		
Personnel to train volunteers, all programs.	35.7	1.3
People to volunteer, all programs.	58.9	1.8
Percent of programs rating volunteers as excellent:		
All programs	39.7	2.0
Adult education programs	34.6	2.9
Local adult literacy programs.	45.4	3.0

USE OF VOLUNTEERS
IN ADULT LITERACY

This report is authorized by law 20 U.S.C. 1221e-1. While you are not required to respond, your cooperation is needed to make the results of this survey comprehensive, accurate, and timely.

DEF. A volunteer is a person who provides services to your organization without receiving salary or wages

- 1a. Does your organization provide adult literacy instruction? Yes No
[IF YOU DO NOT OFFER INSTRUCTION, COMPLETE QUESTION 7 AND RETURN THIS QUESTIONNAIRE.]
- 1b. Which of the following services are offered by your program? (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY)
 ABE-literacy Pre-GED GED (ESL, oral) only (ESL, oral) and written
- 1c. What type(s) of instruction do you offer? Individual tutoring Small group tutoring Classes
- 1d. Which best describes your service area? (CHECK ONE) Urban Suburban Rural
-
- 2a. How many clients/students did you serve in the past month? _____
- 2b. Do you have a client waiting list? Yes No (IF YES: How many are on the list? _____)
- 2c. Are there any groups of clients/students that you refer to other programs? (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY)
 Grade 0 to 4 reading level GED only Other (SPECIFY): _____
 Above grade 4 reading level ESL _____
-
- 3a. Is your program managed by volunteers or a volunteer board? Yes No
- 3b. Does your program use volunteers? Yes No
- 3c. (IF NO:) Do you plan to use volunteers in the next two years? Yes No
- 3d. Which of the following are barriers to your using volunteers, or using more volunteers? (Check all that apply.)
 Personnel for training volunteers People to volunteer
 Materials for training volunteers Facilities for training or teaching
 Materials for students Other (SPECIFY) _____
- [IF YOU DO NOT USE VOLUNTEERS, COMPLETE QUESTION 7 AND RETURN THE QUESTIONNAIRE.]
- 3e. Please indicate the total number of volunteers you currently have. _____
- 3f. Do you have enough volunteers to meet the current demand for services? Yes No
- 3g. Do you have a waiting list for volunteers? Yes No (IF YES): How many are on the list? _____
- 4a. How do you use your volunteers? (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY)
 One-to-one tutoring Teaching classes Transportation Other _____
 Teaching small groups (of 10 or more) Child care _____
 (of less than 10) Teacher's aides _____
- [IF YOU DO NOT USE VOLUNTEERS IN TEACHING OR TUTORING, SKIP TO QUESTION 7]
- 4b. How many of your volunteers are used for teaching/tutoring services? NUMBER _____
- 5a. Who trains your volunteers?
 Program staff or volunteers Outside consultant
 National literacy organization (SPECIFY) _____ No training provided SKIP TO Q.6a
- 5b. What type of curriculum or training materials do you use for volunteers?
 Leubach Literacy Action In-house package curriculum Other (SPECIFY) _____
 Literacy Volunteers of America Lutheran Church women _____
- 5c. How many hours of pre-service training did you provide per volunteer in 1983-84? _____
- 5d. What was the average cost per volunteer for pre-service training in the past 12 months?
\$ _____ for materials \$ _____ for training staff
- 5e. What portions of this cost were paid \$ _____ by the program \$ _____ by volunteers?
- 5f. How many hours of in-service training did you provide per volunteer in 1983-84? _____
- 5g. What was the average cost per volunteer for in-service training in the past 12 months?
\$ _____ for materials \$ _____ for training staff
- 5h. What portions of this cost were paid \$ _____ by the program \$ _____ by volunteers?
- 6a. How often are teaching/tutoring volunteers observed?
 More than once a month Less than once a month Not at all
- 6b. Who observes volunteers? Paid staff Volunteers
- 6c. In general, how would you rate the effectiveness of your volunteers for tutoring/teaching?
 Excellent Good Fair Poor

7. Person completing form: _____ Title: _____
Organization: _____ Phone: _____

