

On International Literacy Day, recognize that adult literacy leads to a better community (Commentary)



In this 2011 photo, Asli Daat of Somalia follows along with ESL teacher Maria Zapf as she reads "The Little Engine That Could" in an adult English class at North Side Learning Center at 808 N. McBride St. (Michael Greenlar | mgreenlar@syracuse.com)

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By [Special to syracuse.com](#)

on September 08, 2014 at 7:15 AM, updated September 08, 2014 at 7:16 AM

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*Pamela K. Heintz is president of the board of directors of **Literacy CNY**. The agency was founded in 1961 as Literacy Volunteers of Greater Syracuse. Literacy CNY's mission is to provide adults in Central New York with the literacy tools and skills that they need to be contributing, productive, and engaged members of the community.*

By Pamela K. Heintz

As summer comes to an end and a new school year begins, our focus turns to education. But while young students are back in school, thousands of adults in

our community are also in a classroom taking advantage of literacy instruction.

Sept. 8, 2014 is **International Literacy Day**. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) established International Literacy Day in 1965 to call attention to world-wide issues of illiteracy. Illiteracy is certainly a global issue, correlated with unemployment, poverty, poor family health, infant mortality and many other issues.

We have a saying here in New York: "Literacy Leads." Literacy leads to employment. It leads to independence. It leads to opportunity.

Here in Onondaga County, an estimated 60,000 adults have extremely limited literacy or English language skills. LiteracyCNY is one of several adult education providers in the community working to help solve this important community issue. In partnership with other local agencies, LiteracyCNY provided instruction to 235 adults this past program year and provided information and referral to an additional 250 prospective adult students. These adults not only improved their reading, writing, and speaking skills, but also were better equipped to help their children in school, take care of their families' health, obtain or improve employment and contribute to the fabric of life in our community.

In celebration of International Literacy Day 2014, LiteracyCNY has posted a 52-year retrospective of our work in the community to our web site at <http://www.literacycny.org/timeline>. The Retrospective, funded by The Shineman and Gifford Foundations, was created in collaboration with the Onondaga Historical Association.

We have a rich legacy here in Central New York. But there is much more work for us to do. We urge you to visit our website to learn more about LiteracyCNY and consider supporting adult education in our community. Volunteer with LiteracyCNY to help someone improve his or her literacy skills, make a donation, or urge our local elected officials to direct more funds for adult education here. For more information, call 315-471-1300 X 170 or email us at info@literacycny.org.

LiteracyCNY is joining other adult education providers across the state today to raise awareness and celebrate literacy, because we have a saying here in New York: "Literacy Leads." Literacy leads to employment. It leads to independence. It leads to opportunity.