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The Mayor's Commission on Literacy launches campaign to raise adult work-ready skills

Investing in Adult Education Pays campaign invites the public-at-large to give, advocate, or volunteer to support The Commission's groundbreaking adult literacy initiative, *myPLACE™*

PHILADELPHIA, PA (December 1, 2014) – The widening economic divide and changing industries have left hundreds of thousands of low-skilled Philadelphia job seekers stranded outside of the knowledge-based economy. In response, [The Mayor's Commission on Literacy](#) (The Commission) created a citywide, technology-based system called *myPLACE™* that can educate our workforce for 21st-century jobs on a large scale. In its pilot phase, *myPLACE™* served 3,000 adult learners. Now poised to expand the program, The Commission asks individuals, employers, and funders to join its *Investing in Adult Education Pays* campaign so that tens of thousands of Philadelphians can set out on their pathways to economic self-sufficiency.

Nearly half of Philadelphia's adults lack the basic education and work-ready skills for family-sustaining jobs. This contributes to the city's high poverty rate and places a burden on the entire regional economy. An average of 500 Philadelphians turn to The Commission each month for the help they need to qualify for good jobs. 67% of those assessed (with and without high school diplomas) test at the 4th-8th grade equivalent in reading, writing, and math. Employment, college placement, apprenticeships, and certification program placement tests are increasingly set at 10th-grade levels, and assume fluency in using computers. Most jobs that will sustain a family require not just the diploma, but also technology skills and post-secondary attainment.

myPLACE™, which stands for Philadelphia Literacy and Adult Career Education, leverages the power of technology to accelerate adult learning in a centralized, citywide system. Currently three *myPLACE™* campuses offer registration, assessment, enrollment, and case management support. In addition, 23 literacy organizations partner with the Commission to deliver face-to-face classes in adult basic education (ABE), English as a Second Language (ESL) and GED[®] preparation. All who can read at the 4th-grade or higher level are enrolled in their first online course, *Introduction to Adult Learning and Careers*, in which learners plan their careers, create a professional résumé, and acquire adult study and digital skills.

[myPLACE™ Online](#) offers the nation's first completely online, cohort-based classes in reading, writing and math for low-literate adults. *myPLACE™* learners are improving their computer skills as they learn basic education. All learning is contextualized in healthcare, manufacturing, and logistics and transportation, three in-demand industries in Philadelphia. Online classes also teach work-ready skills, including collaboration, communication, promptness, analysis and application of instructions, and problem-solving using technology. The Commission's online offerings have increased the city's publicly-funded adult classes by 43% at half the cost of face-to-face instruction.

Nationally, 36 million workers are functioning far below the levels required for entry-level jobs according to a recent international [study](#). As industries increasingly computerize operations, more and more workers find themselves unemployable unless they reskill.

Audrey Adams, 53, was one of the first participants in the program. Despite already having a high school diploma, Audrey knew she had to return to the classroom to achieve her goal of getting a better job. Like many who have been out of school for years, she lacked confidence in her ability to be accepted in higher education. After completing one six-week course, she was accepted to a community college.

“I started the *myPLACE™* program, now I know how important computer skills are. I am now able to do an online reading and writing course. Now that I have some computer skills, I want to know more,” says Audrey. “The skills I am acquiring in this class will be of great value to me in the future. My thirst for knowledge is so great now, and I think that is a wonderful thing!”

Jaime Colon, 27, is having similar success with *myPLACE™* Online. He recently completed *Intermediate Reading and Writing*, including writing and presentations for professional purposes.

“I have learned so much throughout this course. Before starting this course, I thought I knew everything about reading and writing,” says Jaime. “I was proven wrong, and this course has taught me how to write so much better than before. When I originally started this course, my goal was to get my GED®. After starting this course, I realized that my path changed. I want to pursue not only a GED®, but continue my education and start college in computer technology. I would like a better lifestyle for my family.”

Mimi Starks, 49, a single mother and Certified Nursing Assistant says she is grateful for the opportunity to participate in this program. She discovered it when she researched the Electronic Health Records Certificate, a growing and in-demand field, at District 1199C Training and Upgrading Fund. Despite having taken classes at Community College of Philadelphia many years ago, her test scores were far too low for admission to the job-training program.

After Mimi’s first online six-week course, *Foundations of Reading and Writing*, she advanced her reading and writing by three grade levels. She is currently enrolled in *Intermediate Reading and Writing* and her *myPLACE™* learning coach expects her to qualify for the certification program by the end of December. Having built her confidence with online learning, Mimi is now considering pursuing an Associate’s Degree instead of just the certification.

“Online classes are working really well for my schedule. I work two jobs so I couldn’t commit to face-to-face classes on specific days of the week,” says Mimi. “I also love that I’m setting a great example for my eight-year old son about the importance of education.”

The City of Philadelphia supported the costs to develop the *myPLACE™* system, including the three campuses, costs for assessments and case management, the student information systems, and six original online classes. The Commission now calls on individuals, the business and philanthropic community to invest their time, talents, and resources as donors, program sponsors, and volunteers to scale up this project, the first in the nation that moves adults rapidly to their career goals.

“*myPLACE™* has been recognized as a national model for upskilling adult job-seekers,” says **Dr. Judith Rényi**, executive director of The Commission. “It accelerates adult learning, is highly cost-efficient, and is scalable. We’re fortunate to have garnered private support from Wells Fargo and Lincoln Financial Foundation for *myPLACE™* Online. We need

additional funding to expand the three current campuses and add at least two new ones to serve a projected 8,000 learners in 2015, and to build the system to serve 15,000 learners in 2016.”

Adult education is a high-yield investment. A one-time expenditure of only \$5,000 that qualifies one adult for a good job returns \$6,750 to the City and Commonwealth in tax revenues and reduced dependency on public benefits each year. By building a skilled workforce, Philadelphia can attract enterprise, grow businesses, and stabilize neighborhoods. Educated adults who earn family-sustaining wages have more local spending power, provide for their families, and instill a value for learning in their children.

Find out how to give, advocate, or volunteer at philaliteracy.org or call (215) 686-5254. [Watch our public service announcement](#), view [campaign ads](#), or read our [case for support](#).

Recent campaign contributors include Wells Fargo, IBM, and Lincoln Financial Foundation as well as media sponsors Metro Newspaper, iHeartMedia Philadelphia and Comcast.

ABOUT THE MAYOR’S COMMISSION ON LITERACY - The Mayor's Commission on Literacy has worked to equip all adults in Philadelphia with the education they need for work, family, and civic engagement since 1983. Mayor Michael A. Nutter appointed a new 16-member Commission in 2010. Leslie Stiles is the Chair, and Loraine Ballard Morrill is the Vice-Chair. The Mayor has charged The Commission to work on behalf of over 80 literacy and workforce development programs to help the estimated 550,000 adults in the city functioning below basic adult education levels qualify for family-sustaining jobs and post-secondary training and education. For more information about The Commission and its programs, visit philaliteracy.org.