



## Mayor's Commission on Literacy Calls on Private Sector to Help Fund Adult Education

Alex Vuocolo | December 4, 2014

The Mayor's Commission on Literacy launched a program nearly one year ago aimed at filling the gap in adult education in Philadelphia. The program, dubbed myPLACE, is a hub for adults who lack literacy, computer, and other education skills to connect with the resources they need to meet their educational and professional goals. Often they are referred to nonprofit partners or placed in online courses offered throughout the city. The program has served over 3,000 adults since January 2014, more than half of which enrolled in online courses, according to the Commission. (Read Generocity.org's profile of the program here).

"This is really a fundamental way of upgrading our city," said Dr. Judith Renyi, executive director of the Commission. "I've worked for decades myself trying to reform urban education — K-12 — and I've realized that I couldn't change the basic poverty and distress that children go home to everyday, unless I could help their parents get work and to bring in a regular income to support their families."

Renyi is confident of the program's value and is now looking to the future. The Commission has been reaching out to the private sector since July for funding to help scale myPLACE. So far Wells Fargo, Lincoln Financial and IBM have each donated \$10,000. The federal Department of Justice has also given a \$122,000 grant for a new aspect of the program involving prisons that the Commission has not made public yet.

"We're calling on the business community, the philanthropic community, but we're also calling on individuals," said Deana Gamble, director of marketing and communications at the Commission.

Although the Commission has sought private funding since its founding in 1983, this is the first time, said Gamble, they are reaching out to individuals: there is currently an option on the Commission website for individuals to donate.

What are the fundraising goals? Renyi said that it's difficult to answer that question due to the scalability of the program.

"The program is very scalable," said Renyi. "Basically, every \$1,000 that we get we can add a couple more seats in classes for people."

The Commission has spent nearly all of its \$1 million budget allocated by the city on myPLACE. Renyi expects that funding will continue, if not increase.

"It's a matter of the more we get, the more we can actually teach," she said.

Renyi echoed the argument that many proponents of adult education and training use: the more people have income and jobs, the more other urban problems such as crime and poverty fall by the wayside.

"When people are stranded and outside of the economy, and they're stranded because their own education levels are so low, improving that education and qualifying them for work is the single answer to all those bad things," Renyi said.

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