



Literacy Works, Inc.

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LITERACY WORKS BRINGS "FAMILY FINANCES" TO LANSDOWNE, BALTIMORE CITY AND EASTERN BALTIMORE COUNTY'S HOMELESS

BALTIMORE (Apr. 28, 2005) – Literacy Works, Inc. has expanded its offering of *Family Finances*, a financial literacy program for parents and children. Spring classes were offered evenings at Literacy Works' Community Technology Center in Lansdowne (2934 Lakebrook Circle, T4), and are now in progress at Parkview Recreation Center in Baltimore City (Penn North). A third class is offered exclusively to homeless persons spending time at the Sara's Hope emergency shelter at the Eastern Family Resource Center in Rosedale (9100 Franklin Square Dr.).

During the past year, the organization has offered six-week *Family Finances* sessions to 328 families enrolled in four YMCA of Central Maryland Head Start centers located in Baltimore County. The program was supported by a \$30,000 grant from the American Express Economic Independence Fund. Subsequently, Bank of America provided a \$10,000 grant to bring *Family Finances* to two additional locations.

About Family Finances

The adult program covers family budgeting, banking services, savings, credit management, renting versus home ownership, leases, mortgages, interest rates, down payments, retirement and allowances. Participants prepare a family budget, complete a banking services worksheet with sample checks, balance a bank account, complete a "Your Dream House" worksheet using examples from newspapers, and create a retirement plan.

The children's program focuses on the use of money: earning, purchasing, borrowing, sharing and savings. It includes role playing, art projects, story time and hands-on activities with play money, receipts, adding machines and cash registers.

In addition to having individualized instruction, parents and children participate as a family in a project to include planning, budgeting and implementation with a maximum of \$25. With the completion of a plan, each family will receive up to \$25 for implementation.

"*Family Finances* has proven to be a success among parents and children," said Helene Waranch, executive director of Literacy Works. "We thank American Express and Bank of America for their part in starting and growing the program."

Homeless classes

Waranch noted that financial literacy classes were a natural progression from the organization's reading, writing and math classes – for homeless and non-homeless students alike.

In addition to its regular daytime courses, for the past two years, Literacy Works has offered evening classes to homeless persons spending time at Sara's Hope emergency shelter in Rosedale.

During the program's first year, 19 homeless persons, ranging in age from 16 to 60, became Literacy Works students. Of those:

- 95 percent attained at least one competency (reading, math or writing).
- 84 percent gained computer skills.
- 42 percent passed a practice GED test.
- 70 percent of those entering the program employed retained their jobs.
- 20 percent entering unemployed gained employment.
- 100 percent increased their community involvement;
- 89 percent received citizenship skills, and
- 42 percent of those with children increased their parent/child interaction.

Future of Family Finances

Literacy Works hopes to continue offering *Family Finances* at other locations in Baltimore City and County this fall, if funding is secured.

“Currently, one in five adults in the County is at or below a fifth grade skill level. These individuals have difficulty completing applications and forms, reading cooking instructions, deciphering receipts, understanding information in the newspaper and managing bank accounts,” Waranch said. “They work an average of 19 weeks a year and earn less than \$13,000 annually. Furthermore, their lack of understanding of finances affects their children’s knowledge and their performance in school.”

“Financial illiteracy can be attributed to lack of information, but once you give people that information, they can develop lifelong, healthy spending and savings habits that they can pass on to their children,” Waranch added. “At Literacy Works, our motto is, ‘If you teach the parent, you reach the child.’”

Founded in 1990, Literacy Works, Inc. is a nonprofit organization that coordinates, promotes and supports adult and family literacy services. It operates adult learning centers in Rosedale/Essex, Lansdowne and Randallstown in Baltimore County, as well as family literacy classes at Dr. Rayner Browne Elementary School, Robert W. Coleman Elementary School and Paul’s Place in Baltimore City. For more information about the organization and its programs, call 410-887-2001.

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