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FEATURED

## Moore County Literacy Council Growing Its Reach

Laura Douglass, Staff Writer

Jun 13, 2019



Quietly working to improve lives one student at a time, the Moore County Literacy Council provides free literacy tutoring to individuals of all ages. Based in the Read Moore Center in Southern Pines, the organization serves around 100 adult students each year through one-on-one tutoring.

“I feel like we’ve been a best kept secret organization,” said Executive Director Stuart Mills, “but, we have been growing in both size and scope of our programs.”

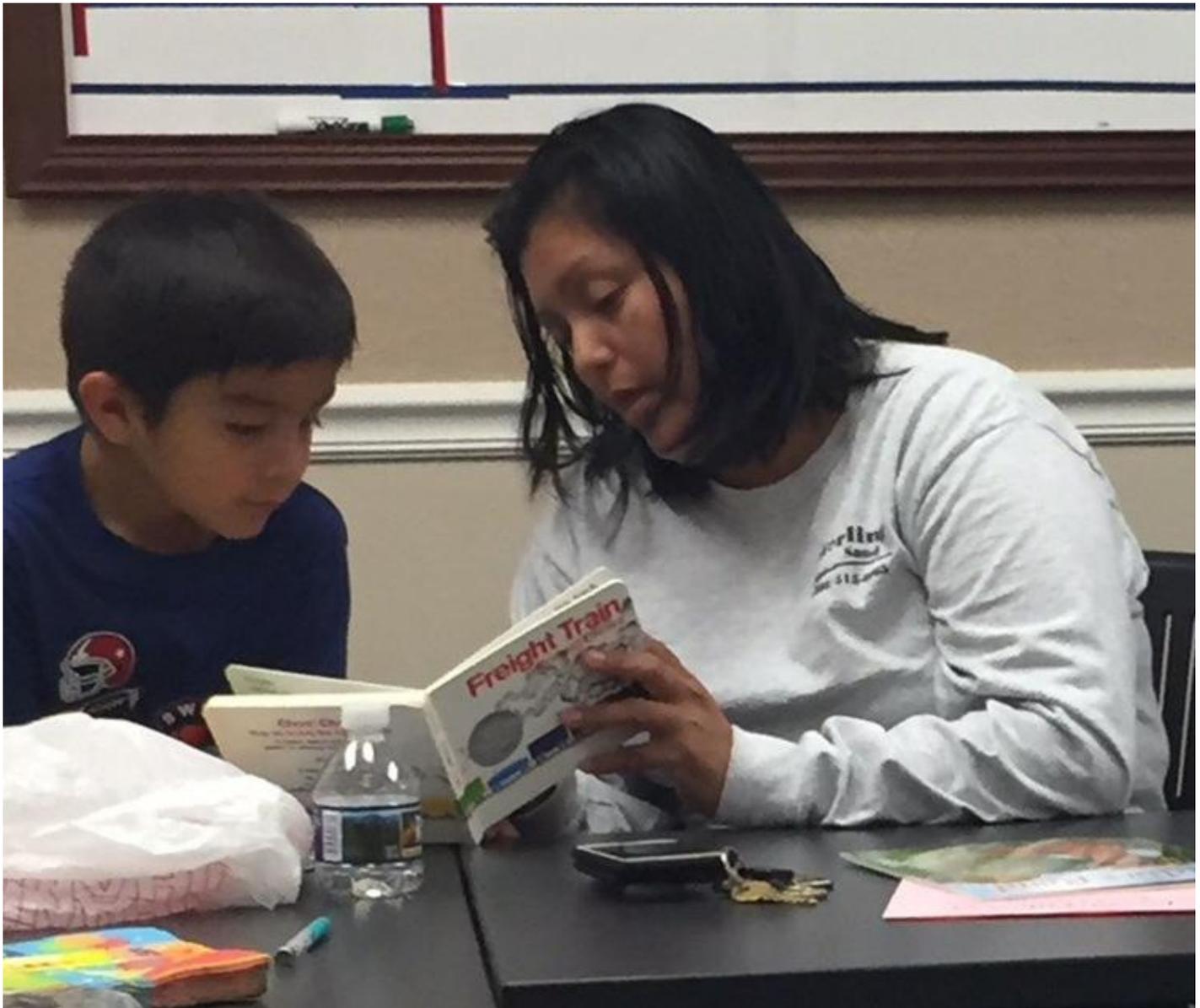
An estimated 10 percent of Moore County’s adult population is functionally illiterate.

The Moore County Literacy Council (MCLC) has traditionally focused on providing free basic literacy education and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). Instruction areas include life skills, citizenship, GED preparation, career readiness, computer skills and family literacy. The majority of MCLC's adult students enter at a third grade level or less.

However, through grant programs and partnerships with Moore County Schools and other local nonprofits, including the United Way of Moore County, MCLC has grown its outreach programming to serve more families and children's literacy needs.

Motheread/Fatheread, an award-winning family literacy program known for the excellence of its teaching approach, was established locally by MCLC in January 2018. Its outreach touches approximately 50 to 60 families a year, usually in collaboration with partners such as The Hope Academy, Sandhills Habitat for Humanity, Headstart programs, and the Lifecare Pregnancy Center.

"The Motheread program encourages low-income parents to read to their children so, when these children get to kindergarten, they've had the brain development needed to thrive in school," said Mills.



The Moore County Literacy Council, a Growing Moore Readers partner, sponsors Motherread classes throughout Moore County to encourage participants to read to their children.

COURTESY OF MCLC

The program requires a “pretty intense” commitment from participating families, and Mills hopes to grow its reach by another 10 families each year.

In addition, MCLC has partnered with Moore County Schools (MCS) on a reading initiative program with trained tutors going directly into classrooms at Southern Pines Elementary and Southern Pines Primary. The Southern Pines Rotary Club provided funding for this pilot program.

Mills said the initiative came from a brainstorming session over lunch between himself, MCLC Board member Andrew Lyons, and Schools Superintendent Bob Grimesey.

“Dr. Bob said they could use some weaponized tutors to help with 2nd and 3rd grade,” he said.

The idea is to support low-literacy students so they can catch up with their peers.

“We work closely with the Schools Office of Curriculum and Instruction. They provided training and connected us with schools in need,” said Terry Taylor, MCLC program coordinator. “It has been positive for the students, teachers and volunteers, and absolutely a positive for MCLC.”

The MCS Reading Initiative tutors sit-in with three or four students at a time, several days a week, in the same room where the teacher is teaching. Currently MCLC has 40 volunteers in the program and each school has a staff member on-site that coordinates with the MCS Central Office, teachers and reading specialists, and volunteers.

“This gives the teachers a single point of contact,” Taylor said. “We tried to create a program where it can ease the workload on teachers, not add to it, while helping children improve their reading.”

“The tutors just love it, they really do. And the schools have been a pleasure to work with,” she added.

MCLC also recently received a grant from Duke Energy to provide a Read Moore Academy for Summer at the Northern Moore Family Resource Center’s Hope Academy in Robbins. The goal of the program is to decrease “summer slide,” or the tendency for students, especially those from low-income families, to lose some of the achievement gains they made during the previous academic year.

Approximately 45 children are enrolled in the program which will be a combination summer camp and reading institute. In addition to literacy support, the children will enjoy various field trips as part of the program curriculum.

“One of the keys to growth we’ve experienced is through reaching out to other partner nonprofits,” Taylor said, “working in conjunction with them for a common goal. That has been very beneficial.”

Mills said MCLC also works cooperatively with Sandhills Community College, serving adult students who may need additional tutoring assistance.

In addition the MCLC Board has initiated discussion around a re-entry program to assist recently-released prisoners with assimilating back into the community.

He noted a study found that up to 60 percent of inmates are functionally illiterate.

“The purpose for this program would be to have less recidivism, less crime, and help them find jobs,” Mills said. “This may not be an area that a Literacy Council would pursue until you think about why people end up incarcerated in the first place. Low literacy plays into it.”

Taylor said based on her own experience, by the time adult students seek assistance from MCLC, “it is clear the lack of literacy and education has also meant there has been a lack of opportunity.”

MCLC is actively recruiting tutors for all of its programs, including the family literacy initiatives, and welcomes calls for more information or assistance.

More than 80 percent of MCLC’s funding comes from Moore County. The organization conducts annual giving campaigns and its biggest fundraiser is Christmas in the Pines, an economical worship service that will be held on December 12 at the Fair Barn in Pinehurst.

For more information, visit the Moore County Literacy Council online at [mcliteracy.com](http://mcliteracy.com), call (910) 692-5954, or visit the Read Moore Center at Ice House Square, 575 SE Broad Street in Southern Pines.

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