LiveUnited
Yankton Area Literacy Council

YALC Transitions To New Role

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KELLY HERTZ/P&D

Pictured are, from left: The Rev. Molly Carlson of the Yankton Area Literacy Council (YALC), students Xin Zhi Li and Lynnette Uhing, Veronica Trezona of the YALC, and student Lou Thuch.

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Since the 1980s, the Yankton Area Literacy Council has been helping teach adults the fundamentals of reading. But in an ever-changing world, the group is seeing its mission evolve.

Patty Stuelpnagel, president of the YALC board of directors, told the *Press & Dakotan* that the group's services have already seen some change through the years.

"It started out as helping adults learn to read that hadn't learned to read," Stuelpnagel said. "Then it kind of transitioned into English language learners. There were more people looking for English language learning than learning to read."

For a time, YALC partnered with Southeast Job Link until the latter's closure.

With Cornerstones Career Learning Center, Inc., coming to Yankton, the YALC is now looking at providing non-redundant services.

"Cornerstones has come to Yankton, and they do adult GED classes and they're going to start English language learning classes," Stuelpnagel said. "They seem to have a really good handle on what they're doing, they have their own curriculum and they're doing a fine job."

She added the YALC's focus is now shifting towards youth.

"The Literacy Council has kind of reinvented itself, or we're trying to anyway," she said. "As we were giving the English language learning classes, we (found we had) a number of students who had children who had also moved with them who did not know English. We have been trying to help those families and those children learn English, so we have decided that we are going to work on English language learning for individuals under 18 years of age, and also, to do reading, math and computer literacy for people under 18 years of age in the community — not always English language learners, but anyone who might be having difficulty."

YALC is working on starting a program with the Yankton School District to address the issue of math tutoring.

According to Stuelpnagel, in 2015 the literacy council served 30 clients and had a total of 560 contacts with those clients, with 22 current volunteers working with the organization.

Stuelpnagel said it's important to teach students new skills for the ever-changing society we live in.

"The school district has asked for help with math literacy because they have programs in the school for learning to read, but there's no program other than special education — and kids have to qualify for that — for learning math," she said. "I think it's real important for children to learn their math skills to function in today's world. As far as the English language learners, we want those kids to be as successful as they can be in school and as they grow, and it's hard to do that in an English-speaking world if you don't speak English. Kids are great learners — they learn much more quickly than we do — so I just think it's important to help them out."

She added that she hopes the Yankton community will continue to support YALC as it transitions to its new mission.

"We also want to partner with other non-profit agencies and try to offer services that are not being offered," she said. "Right now, we're kind of in this transition stage, so it's really hard to foresee what the future's going to hold, but hopefully, our services are going to be something that the community finds they need and it appeals to them and they will back us and get behind us."

Stuelpnagel said there are opportunities for the community at large to get involved.

"Beginning in November, we will start a contributing membership drive to get funds to help us," she said. "Anyone who is interested in volunteering, we would love to hear from them."

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For more information on the YALC, visit http://www.yanktonunitedway.org/Community-Partners/Partners-Initiatives/Yankton-Area-Literacy-Council

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First-Hand

Two years ago, Lynnette couldn't read or write.

"I didn't know nothing," Lynnette told the *Press & Dakotan.* "I didn't know how to write or anything."

With the help of the Yankton Area Literacy Council, this has changed.

"We do phonics, we do reading and we do workbooks," she said. "I love it."

Lynnette said a desire for a change led her to the Literacy Council in September of 2014.

"Since I'm trying to get my GED and I got taken out of school when I was young, I thought I want to do something right for myself," she said. "Going home from my jobs, I'd sit in my apartment all the time — and do embroidery work too— I was getting old, so I said, 'I have to get out and be around people.'"

She added that she has left the doubters

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far behind and that she's glad she took on the challenge of learning to read.

"A lot of them (said I wouldn't read) and made fun of my disability," she said. "They called me all kinds of names. … It wasn't good, but I just don't pay attention to those kinds of people anymore. I'm kind of glad I did it since, for a long time, I would not say anything to the family. I wanted to do something besides sit in my apartment and (going) to work and back every day. I just wanted to do something different for myself."