

Literacy Advocate

www.kalamazooliteracy.org

Winter 2025

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"Volunteering is the very core of being human. No one has made it through life without someone else's help."

~ Heather French Henry

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Annual symposium celebrates adult literacy at WMU

The Adult Literacy Research & Training Symposium, the KLC's signature professional development event focused on issues in adult education and literacy, was held on December 13, 2024, at Western Michigan University's Fetzer Center. Attendees included educators, volunteers, and advocates who came together from across the state to learn best practices and innovative approaches in areas like Multigenerational Learning, Digital Skills, and tutoring strategies.

Highlights included:

- Welcome remarks delivered by Dean Laura Dinehart and President Edward Montgomery
- Participants were able to connect with each other and collaborate on ideas and tools to improve adult literacy
- Skills-building workshops for using the Language Experience Approach and S.M.A.R.T. Goals with adult learners
- Panel discussion featuring stories of community engagement, educational advocacy, and social activism

50 Years of Empowerment Through Literacy



Special thanks to presenters Michael Evans, Abbey Weathers, Jamie McAllister, Jessi Pavey, Julie Hyatt, Dr. Esther Gray, and Kito Jumanne-Marshall, and to guest panelists, Raymond Gant, Dr. Don Cooney, Lisa Garcia, and Jim Rutherford. To view the presentations, please visit www.kalamazooliteracy.org/2024-symposium.

The symposium is part of a long-standing partnership between the KLC and WMU that serves to foster university/community engagement and achieve broader educational goals. The event is led by the WMU/KLC Advisory Board and was first produced in 2014. It aims to drive awareness of adult literacy initiatives, encourage support for tutoring organizations, promote opportunities for professional collaboration, and expand knowledge of adult teaching strategies.



Michael Evans moderates a lively discussion with special guests from the university, the city, and the community.

Panelists included from left Raymond Gant, Dr. Don Cooney, Lisa Garcia, and Jim Rutherford.

Photo credit: Jeri Love

President’s Message: Winter Greetings

By Spencer Haworth



Spencer Haworth

Dear Friends,

As we embrace the winter season, we’re excited to share the latest updates and achievements from the Kalamazoo Literacy Council (KLC). Together, we continue to make a meaningful difference in the lives of adult learners and their families.

This season, we are thrilled to welcome five new staff members to the KLC team. Please join us in giving a warm welcome to Charles, Jaclare, Caitlyn, Zion, and Richard! Each of them brings a unique set of skills, passions, and fresh perspectives that will help us strengthen our programs and expand our reach. We look forward to the incredible contributions they will make as we continue working toward our mission of improving literacy for all.

In this issue, we celebrate the incredible milestones of our tutors and learners, including the graduation of dedicated tutors who are ready to make a lasting impact in our community. We’re also excited to share updates from our 2024 Annual Campaign, which exceeded its

goal by an impressive \$11,691, setting organizational records—thanks to your unwavering support and generosity!

Additionally, we’re spotlighting the success of our Digital Skills program, recapping the highlights from the 2024 Symposium, and celebrating the return of the Bronson School of Nursing to support our Health Literacy initiatives.

Your steadfast commitment makes these achievements possible. Thank you for being a part of this transformative work. Together, we’re creating a community where literacy opens doors and builds brighter futures.

Warm regards,

Spencer Haworth
2024—2025 Board President

kalamazooliteracycouncil
#EveryoneNeedsToRead

Congratulations new tutors!

In November 2024 and January 2025, we welcomed 15 new volunteers who are passionate about literacy and eager to get into service. Congrats and thank you for lending your time and talents to support our mission.

Ann Berger	Tashina Ozminski
Melissa Dillon	Kelli Page
Linda Mah	Isabela Robinson
Chastity Edlefsen	Jermaine Alton Robinson
Jenal Freman	James Sasena
Amanda Funkhouser	Kari Scare
Deanna Hughes	Francesca Tan
Athena Osburn	

Special thanks as well to the tutor training team of Michael Evans, Nora Evers, Jamie McAllister, and Abbey Weathers.

If you or someone you know would like to become a volunteer tutor or tutor trainer, please contact Abbey at (269) 382-0490 ext. 219 or aweathers@kalamazooliteracy.org.

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Literacy Advocate

is published four times a year by the Kalamazoo Literacy Council — a nonprofit organization committed to quality literacy education that enhances the lives of adults through programs designed to increase reading, writing and spelling skills.

Kalamazoo Literacy Council
420 E. Alcott Street, Suite 400
Kalamazoo, MI 49001
Phone: (269) 382-0490 Ext. 222
Fax: (269) 382-6836
www.kalamazooliteracy.org

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Adult learners gain digital skills to get connected and reach their goals

The Kalamazoo Literacy Council has designed multiple levels of programming to enhance digital literacy and equip individuals with the essential skills for success in today's technology-laden world. The class content and tools cater to various levels, from beginners looking to boost their confidence with tech devices to those seeking to improve their skills to obtain employment. Although some learners come to us having little exposure to computers, they arrive with clear goals for what they want to learn and why. For years, we have met them where they are with easily digestible content, accessible tools, and a compassionate approach to instruction. The material is one component of our ExpressWays 2 Success program and is supported by Grow with Google. Upon completion of a 12-week class, learners receive a certificate of achievement showing the skills gained and they are encouraged to build on that success in the next level class.

Lessons include basic computer introduction (i.e. turning it on, hardware parts, using a mouse), internet navigation, using email, the Google suite, and a module on online safety is being created. One of a learner's first assignments is taking the Northstar Digital Assessment which helps indicate their current abilities. Instruction is provided using an in-person classroom as well as Google Classroom, which allows for greater accessibility and flexibility in learning (and going paperless!). For keyboarding practice, we use Typing.com.

Tameca Black, Adult Learning Services Navigator, says, "I am truly proud of our Digital Skills learners, especially those who are learning later in life. Many come in feeling uncertain about their ability to master technology, but the transformation we witness is inspiring. When one of the learners grasps a new skill and their face lights up with pride and excitement, it's a reminder of the incredible power of learning."

In 2024, the KLC had two highly visible opportunities to showcase our successes in teaching Digital Skills. Jessi Pavey, Operations Manager, and Tameca Black presented at the Fall Conference for the Michigan

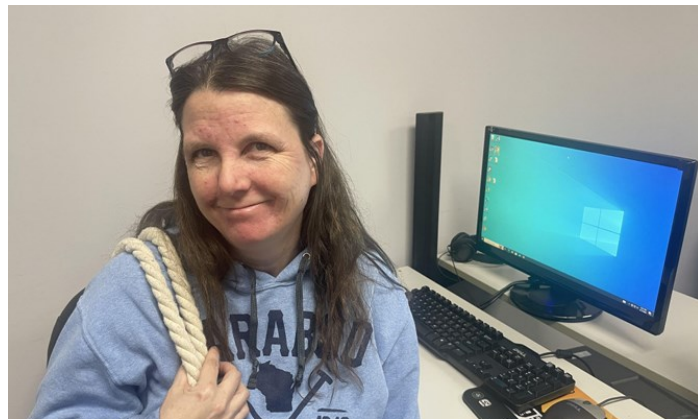


Photo credit: Abbey Weathers

"I'm so glad this class exists!"

- Suzy Geno, Digital Skills 1 Learner

Adult, Community, and Alternative Education (MACAE) Association and again at the KLC's Adult Literacy Research & Training Symposium. The session, titled "Adult Learners' Roadmap to Digital Literacy," introduced our approach and offered practical teaching advice plus resources for effective instruction. As a result of this presentation, MACAE invited Jessi to chair their Digital Literacy Committee, helping to identify needs, streamline strategies, and create alignment at a statewide level. This is a great accomplishment for Jessi and another way we demonstrate our mission of empowering adults to reach their goals.

Through hands-on instruction, supportive volunteers, and relevant course content, the KLC's Digital Skills programming is making a significant impact in the lives of learners. The classes, offered at no cost to learners, help bridge the digital divide in our community, ensuring everyone has access to the tools required for personal, academic, and professional growth.

To learn more about ExpressWays 2 Success, Digital Skills, or how to enroll your learner, please contact Tameca at (269) 382-0490 ext. 253 or tblack@kalamazooliteracy.org.



The Digital Skills class is fired up and ready to learn! This class is one of the most well-attended classes hosted in the computer lab at Goodwill Industries of Southwestern Michigan.

Photo credit: Stacie Jackson

Welcome new team members!

EVERYONE NEEDS TO READ READ READ



Zion Bahre, a WMU senior studying Statistics, is the Policy, Systems, & Environmental Change (PSE) Project Manager. She will work closely with Robin Simpson, Edison Resident Fellow, on projects like the Albert White Literacy Trail. She will also engage with the Edison Resident Scholars, helping to maintain communication and support their needs. Zion has previously worked as a Project Manager, and loves getting hands-on experience with what she's learning in class. She comes to us through the Broncos Lead Internship Program and after graduation, she plans to pursue her masters in Public Administration. Zion is originally from Ethiopia and enjoys traveling and experimenting with different hobbies.



Caitlyn Onderlinde joins the KLC from the Broncos Lead Internship Program as a Scrabble Fest Project Manager. In this role, she will work alongside the Marketing & Development Manager and the Scrabble Fest Planning Committee on sponsorship recruitment and stewardship, as well as event promotion and logistics. She will also help re-energize relationships with downtown retailers that were established in 2024. Caitlyn is a Film Studies senior at WMU and she aspires to be a film colorist or editor who helps filmmakers express their vision. Before her internship, Caitlyn helped produce a series of videos for the KLC and was inspired by seeing the direct impact of the work we do in the community. She's born and raised in the Kalamazoo area, and likes to cook, bake, and play video games.



Charles Miller is the ESL Adult Learning Services Navigator. His public service work includes non-profits, schools, and government agencies. His background includes teaching English in the Dominican Republic and Nicaragua and working for the Collier County Supervisor of Elections in Florida. Charles was attracted to the KLC's role to continue helping English language learners become more productive in their communities and in society as a whole. As a navigator, he will connect adults to ESL services and resources, helping to empower learning and remove barriers. He is originally from Ohio, but he and his wife relocated to Kalamazoo from Florida as they were seeking a smaller community for their outdoor excursions like hunting, fishing, and taking flying lessons.



Jaclare Mitchell is the Neighborhood Network Center Coordinator at New Village Park, leading resident outreach and engagement. Jaclare has a long history as a KLC partner and volunteer. She was first introduced to us through her work with the Edison Neighborhood Association and the Urban Exposure Initiative, and she soon co-led an indoor gardening Health Literacy series. She cites being inspired by the mission and admiring the coordination and synergy among the staff as key reasons for wanting to join our team. Jaclare also likes that her personal passions like gardening and health can be integrated into her role. Fun fact: Her mother, Jackie, is an active and passionate participant in the Edison Resident Scholars group.



Richard Townsend is an Empowerment Specialist at the Kalamazoo Literacy Council. As a doctoral student in the Occupational Therapy program at WMU, he chose the KLC to partner with for his Capstone project. He plans to blend themes of empowerment with principles of occupational therapy to encourage learners as they work toward their goals. He aims to help adults gain independence and confidence from using literacy in daily life and effective tools for learning. Richard was introduced to the KLC through Joe Kretovics, WMU/KLC Faculty in Residence, and looks forward to working one on one and instruction in small groups. He is originally from Indianapolis and enjoys the culture of the Kalamazoo community.

Nurturing a love of literacy and healthy living

For several years, the KLC has enjoyed a wonderful partnership in Health Literacy with Western Michigan University’s Bronson School of Nursing. Between 6-12 students regularly visit us to perform clinical teaching assignments at two Community Literacy Centers. A group has visited the Neighborhood Network Center at Interfaith Homes for “Tune Up Tuesdays,” where they were available on-site to answer residents’ questions and assist with tasks like blood pressure monitoring and health screenings. At the Reading Center at Goodwill, another group hosts “Feel Good Fridays,” offering self-care, nutrition, and wellness lessons that help learners feel confident about keeping their families healthy. To prepare for their assignments in the community, the students go through a Literacy Advocate Orientation with Executive Director Michael Evans, and coaching with staff members Roeshell Ollie and Kamaria Snell, to understand how to interact effectively and teach health content to adults who struggle with low literacy. Their written lessons are revised to include vocabulary words, activities to strengthen comprehension, and usually a physical aspect.

The nursing students consistently report that they enjoy providing direct service to our population as part of their curriculum design and will often encourage their peers to work with the KLC. Likewise, learners are excited when guest teachers return with helpful tips, fun ideas, and important tools for staying healthy. “WMU’s Bronson School of Nursing and the Kalamazoo Literacy Council partnership provides nursing students with invaluable hands-on experience in health education and plain language communication. Collaborating with this program not only deepens their understanding of health literacy’s impact on patient outcomes but also fosters meaningful connections in the Kalamazoo community,” says Rachel Bennett, MSN, RN, Faculty Specialist II at WMU. Thank you, Bronson School of Nursing teams!



Photo credit: Roeshell Ollie

An Interfaith Homes resident gets her blood pressure checked at Tune Up Tuesdays.



Photo credit: Kamaria Snell

A Health Literacy class enjoys learning about the benefits of yoga and meditation at The Reading Center at Goodwill.



Feel Good Friday

March 12 & 21
10:00 a.m.-11:00 a.m.

The Reading Center at Goodwill
420 E. Alcott St.
Kalamazoo, 49001

Contact **Kamaria** at
(269) 382-0490 ext. 263 or
knichols@kalamazooliteracy.org

420 E. Alcott Street, Suite 400
Kalamazoo, MI 49001

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#EveryoneNeedsToRead

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MISSION:

The Kalamazoo Literacy Council is committed to enhancing the lives of adults by improving their reading, writing and spelling skills.

*Serving
Kalamazoo County
since 1974.*

EVERYONE NEEDS TO **READ** EVERYONE NEEDS TO **READ** EVERYONE NEEDS TO **READ**

CALENDAR

Board Meetings

Mar. 13, Apr. 10, & May 8 3:00 p.m. — 4:30 p.m.

Adult Literacy Collaborative Meetings

Mar. 24, Apr. 28 & May 26 12:00 p.m. — 1:30 p.m.

Edison Resident Scholars Meetings

Mar. 20, Apr. 17, & May 15 5:30 p.m. — 7:00 p.m.

Tutor Forums and Workshops

New Tutor Orientation Mar. 4 6:00 p.m. — 7:30 p.m.

Training Mar. 10, 13, 17 & 20 6:00 p.m. — 7:30 p.m.

ESL Tutor Forum

Mar. 25, Apr. 22 & May 27 2:30 p.m.— 3:30 p.m.

Parent Literacy Forum

Mar. 28, Apr. 25 & May 23 12:00 p.m.—1:00 p.m.

Workforce Literacy Forum

April 4 (bi-monthly) 11:00 a.m.—12:00 p.m.

Albert White Literacy Trail Earth Day Clean Up

April 19 10:00 a.m.— 2:00 p.m.

Visit www.kalamazooliteracy.org for details.

We did it!

We extend our deepest gratitude to everyone who contributed, whether through donations, sponsorship, or volunteer efforts.

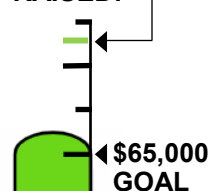
Your support has made a significant impact and will help us to continue our mission to achieve a fully literate community.



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