

— The Fall 2025 Issue —

# Literacy Advocate

*A publication of the Kalamazoo Literacy Council*



Adult learners in the Summer ESL program  
Photo credit: KLC

## LOOK INSIDE...

Digital Skills for  
English Language  
Learners

Playing with Purpose  
at Kalamazoo  
Scrabble Fest

Symposium Offers  
Innovations &  
Insights

## Congrats, ESL Learners

The Kalamazoo Literacy Council is proud to celebrate the incredible achievements of the English language learners who completed Spring & Summer sessions at Prince of Peace Lutheran Church and Westwood United Methodist Church. Their passion for learning was beautifully on display as they celebrated each other at potluck meals and certificate ceremonies.

Classes included levels 1A-4, Book Club, Parent Literacy, and Discussion Group. Offering morning and evening classes, both in person and online, provides greater accessibility and helps to accommodate busy schedules.

With each season, our learners continually embrace new challenges for themselves, improve their literacy and language skills, and gain increased confidence to communicate more effectively in their daily lives. Whether they're seeking better jobs or college, helping their children, or simply doing everyday tasks, their progress inspires us and we couldn't be more proud.

Thank you to the new and returning volunteers and instructors who provide lessons with patience, compassion, and care. Your efforts are making a positive impact in the lives of the learners you serve.



kalamazooliteracycouncil

# President's Message

By Sarah Bierema

Hello friends,

The KLC's mission is only possible with your support! As we reflect on the sun and fun of the Summer, we are excited to share some seasonal highlights and a glimpse of what's to come.

## Annual Meeting

The KLC's annual meeting was held in May. It was amazing to spend the evening with so many literacy advocates, and it was also my first appearance as your 2025 Board President. I have been a volunteer tutor for over 10 years, a Friendly Connector for seven, and on the Board for five - all this to say that I am extremely dedicated to our mission and will spend my term as President fighting to make sure we can reach as many learners as possible.

## Congrats!

Let's give a huge round of applause for our English as a Second Language (ESL) learners who completed Spring & Summer sessions. These learners worked so hard and supported each other each step of the way. Many thanks to our friends, volunteers, and instructors at the Community Literacy Centers for providing a successful learning environment.

We also want to congratulate the early learning professionals who received their Childhood Development Associate (CDA) credential! This accomplishment reflects their commitment to providing the highest quality care and education for Little Scholars. Thanks to our partners at Southwest Child Care Resources and YWCA Kalamazoo for the strategic partnership.



Volunteer | Give | Advocate

[kalamazooliteracy.org](https://kalamazooliteracy.org)

## Kalamazoo Scrabble Fest

The KLC's annual fundraiser was a fantastic event that raised much needed funds for adult literacy and helped drive awareness of our mission. It was an afternoon filled with gaming, camaraderie, and a shared commitment to supporting adult literacy...oh, and a bit of competition as well. Thank you to our sponsors, players, and volunteers for another great year!

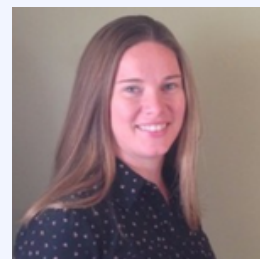
## Annual Symposium

This October, the Adult Literacy Research & Training Symposium returns to WMU for a day of learning, sharing insights, and making connections. The event celebrates innovations in adult education that are "Closing the Literacy Opportunity Gap."

None of this would be possible without your generous support. Please keep an eye out for communication regarding how you can continue to support the KLC in empowering adults. Together we are making a difference in the lives of those striving for literacy, empowerment, and independence. Thank you!

With Gratitude,

Sarah Bierema  
2025-2026 Board President  
Kalamazoo Literacy Council



## Board of Directors 2025-2026

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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 strengthen reading, writing, spelling, and comprehension skills.

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# Digital Skills Instruction for Low Level English Language Learners

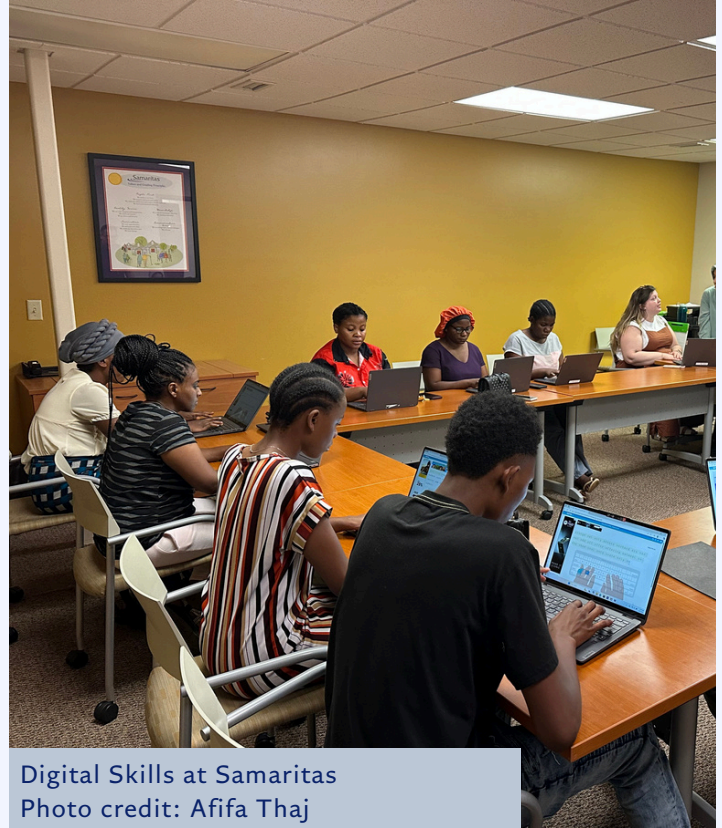
A new program was recently launched to promote digital literacy to highly-motivated ESL learners, and both KLC & Samaritas are impressed with the learners' participation and progress. While the KLC does offer Digital Skills at several Community Literacy Centers, those are typically geared toward English-speaking adults. Charles Miller, KLC's ESL Navigator, worked closely with the team at Samaritas to adapt the curriculum, step by step, to fit the language abilities of these new learners.

One initial challenge was that the variety of different languages spoken - as many as six - between the learners meant that a simple translation would not work for most tasks during a lesson. We created a curriculum that employs modeling, immersion, and exploration. The class is taught in English but we use beginner-level words and phrases. The lesson starts by reviewing and learning new vocabulary such as "mouse" or "keyboard." We then practice new skills, like typing and searching, working with each student to show how to use their fingers to manipulate the keys.

In just three lessons, the learners could type several words per minute and search terms on a website. We also taught how to navigate websites, find photos or videos, and use translation sites.

In addition to Digital Skills, many learners also enrolled in the Summer ESL program to improve their general English skills. They are enthusiastic about embracing their new community and some have even begun to apply for their first jobs in the U.S. We look forward to continuing to support them on their learning journeys and our partners in their advocacy efforts.

***"Digital literacy is no longer a luxury—it's a necessity."***



Digital Skills at Samaritas  
Photo credit: Afifa Thaj

***"These skills open up a whole range of new opportunities for the learners."***  
***-Charles Miller, KLC***

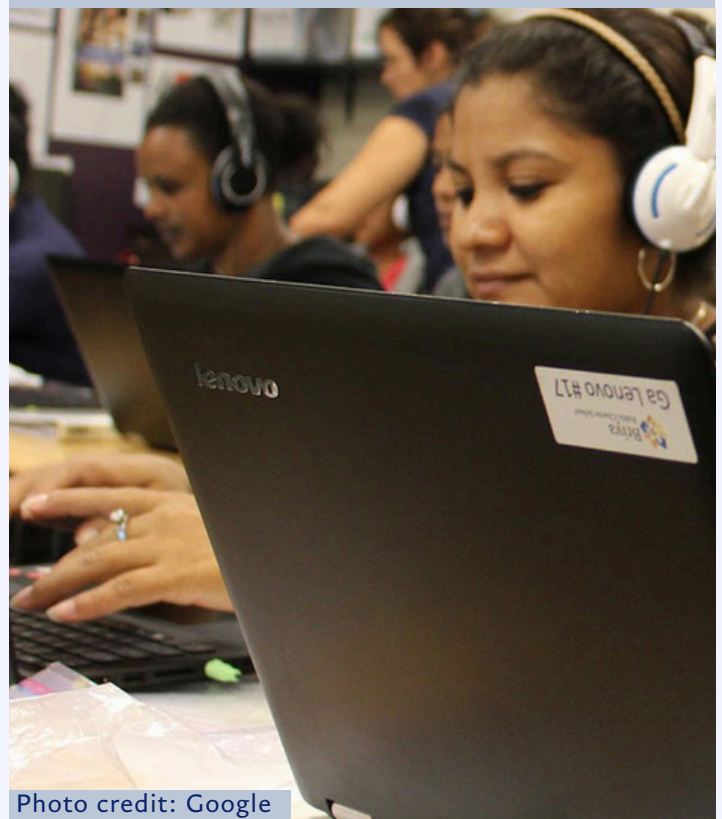


Photo credit: Google

# Thank you, Summer Interns

Western Michigan University's Broncos Lead program is a paid internship opportunity that provides students access to real world experience across a variety of industries and sectors. The Kalamazoo Literacy Council has been a participating employer with Broncos Lead for several years, offering students positions in Marketing Communications, Project Management, and Policy, Systems, & Environmental Change.



Photo credit: KLC

**Antonio Valenzuela**, a senior majoring in Digital Marketing & E-commerce, joined us as a Marketing Communications Project Manager. In this role, he supported the Marketing & Development Manager with brand communications, visual asset creation, and event production, while also helping to develop social media content. Antonio was exposed to marketing in high school, where he says he “fell in love” with the profession and particularly enjoys search engine optimization and the social media aspects of digital advertising. He cites baseball as a personal passion, and says his dream job is to manage the social media account for the Houston Astros.

**Akinyemi Afolabi** was the Policy, Systems, & Environmental Change Project Manager on the EDISON: EDucation IS ON initiative. His responsibilities included helping to coordinate activities between the Edison Resident Scholars, managing project communications, generating progress reports, and making recommendations for key next steps. Originally from Nigeria, Akinyemi is a graduate student studying Applied Economics. He holds a bachelors in Economics and a masters in Governance and Regional Integration. He plans to work with international organizations and to ultimately become an economic researcher.



Photo credit: KLC

## Early Learning Professionals Receive Certification

Congratulations are in order for a cohort of Early Learning Professionals (ELPs) who recently received their Childhood Development Associate (CDA) credential. These ELPs included community members as well as participants in the Edison Early Childhood Education Career Pathway. ELPs who came through the career pathway had access to wraparound services from the KLC including classes, peer mentoring, and peer support. Many are already working in child care settings and with this certification, they can pursue better opportunities, command increased wages, or establish their own child care center. Special thanks to Southwest Child Care Resources, YWCA Kalamazoo, and all the partners involved in helping this group move forward toward their goals.



Photo credit: Kamila Tursunova





# Kalamazoo SCRABBLE FEST 2025 PLAY WITH PURPOSE

Kalamazoo Scrabble Fest celebrated its 14th year on Saturday, August 9, at the Radisson in downtown Kalamazoo. More than 100 word enthusiasts came together for an afternoon of friendly competition in support of adult literacy. Players chose the “Competitive,” or “Just for Fun” division to battle for trophies. The tournament consisted of three games and two crowd-favorite “Cage Matches,” which are fast-paced, high-energy rounds for awesome prizes.

Thanks to your generosity, we raised \$17,000 to directly benefit local adults & families. Congrats to tournament champion Chuck Armstrong, all the division winners, and the brave Cage Match players. Special thanks to WWMT’s Tylor Brummett as our Grand Marshal and to the volunteers for their help.



Kevin Bohannon sizes up his opponent.  
Photo credit: Jeri Love



Chuck Armstrong & Tylor Brummett  
Photo credit: Jeri Love

***“We had a great time and  
are already planning our  
practice strategies in  
preparation for  
next year!”  
-Sherry G., Team AVB***

Kalamazoo Scrabble Fest is graciously supported by Presenting Sponsors Maple Hill Subaru and Kalamazoo Community Foundation, in addition to: Zoetis, Town & Country Supermarket, The Kalamazoo Promise, The Project Group, PNC Bank, Humphrey Products, Harrington Team-Blue Horizon Realty, Bronson, Schupan, Metro Toyota, First National Bank of Michigan, Meijer, Mercantile Bank, Douglas & Son, Plazacorp, Paula & Keith Aldridge, Howell, Parfet, & Schau, Harding’s Markets, Walnut & Park Cafe, Caricatures by Kenjji, NowKalamazoo, and Bell’s Brewery.



Scan here to see the  
photo gallery on  
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## MISSION:

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

## VISION:

Empowering adults to reach their full potential.

*Serving  
Kalamazoo County  
since 1974.*



The Adult Literacy Research & Training Symposium is Friday, October 10, from 8:00 a.m.-3:30 p.m. at the College of Education & Human Development (Sangren Hall) on WMU's campus. This year's content will focus on innovative strategies that remove barriers to success, so adult learners can reach their goals. The symposium is free and anyone who's passionate about literacy is encouraged to attend. Tutors, volunteers, educators, and students alike will gain helpful insights and tactics for teaching adults.

Refreshments and a boxed lunch are provided. Please visit [kalamazooliteracy.org](http://kalamazooliteracy.org) or scan the QR code to register by October 3rd.



Scan to RSVP



## Meetings & Events

### Board Meetings:

Sept. 11, Oct. 9, Nov. 13 3:00 p.m.-4:30 p.m.

### Adult Literacy Collaborative Meetings:

Sept. 22, Oct. 27, Nov. 24 12:00 p.m.-1:30 p.m.

### Family Literacy Days:

Sept. 24, & Oct. 22 5:00 p.m.-7:00 p.m.

**New Tutor Orientation:** Sept. 11 6:00 p.m.-7:30 p.m.

**Training:** Sept. 15, 18, 22, & 25 6:00 p.m.-7:30 p.m.