



The Reading Works Story, 2011-2020

December 2020

Summary

This report summarizes the history, activities, successes, and challenges of Reading Works, a nonprofit adult education and workforce intermediary in Detroit, Michigan, from its founding in 2011 to its retirement in 2020. Over ten years, the organization brought together leaders in the field to solve problems, advocate, train, assess and innovate.

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Reading Works' Origin Story

In 2010, Paul Anger, editor in chief and publisher of the Detroit Free Press, began contacting leaders in business, philanthropy, media and education to launch a non-profit collaborative, Reading Works. The purpose was to raise funds for adult literacy as well as increase the number of learners in programs and improve the capacity to deliver quality services. The timing seemed to be right. The Free Press had recently helped launch with Detroit Public Schools a volunteer tutoring program for kindergarten through third grade. Available statistics showed that almost half of adults in Detroit fell below a middle-school reading level. There was a question that begged to be answered: Now that children were getting help, what about the adults who needed to improve their skills?

The new organization formally launched in 2011 and grew quickly with an illustrious board. Honorary members included Damon Keith, a renowned federal appeals court judge; A. Alfred Taubman, founder of Taubman Centers; and Rochelle Riley, Free Press columnist and long-time advocate for improved adult education in Detroit. The Reading Works board included 16 high-profile members with Anger as chair. Board members set out to better understand the adult literacy ecosystem in Detroit and surrounding areas. Many original members including Deb Scola, community affairs director of the Detroit Media Partnership, did site visits with an education consultant to literacy providers. Reading Works evaluated financial and other documents, interviewed directors and became familiar with the Detroit Adult Education Learning Labs that had opened as part of a state initiative during the Great Recession.

The board's initial goal was to figure out how to raise money to combat functional illiteracy, a root cause of poverty. A secondary goal was to figure out which organizations were effective and channel resources in their direction. Initially, nine literacy providers were identified as Reading Works "impact partners." The hope was to relieve them of some fundraising burdens, improve program capacities, minimize competition among impact partners and allow for maximum collaboration.

Original Reading Works Impact Partners

ACCESS
Another Chance (WSU)
Beyond Basics
Detroit Literacy Coalition
Dominican Literacy
Macomb Literacy Partners
Mercy Education
Oakland Literacy Council
Siena Literacy Center

Raising Awareness and Funds

The Oct. 2, 2011, Reading Works launch made a splash. The ultimate goal of the organization was to eradicate functional adult illiteracy in Detroit. There were major articles in the Free Press on three consecutive Sundays. Columnists such as Stephen Henderson and Rochelle Riley gave passionate descriptions of the plight of those who struggled to read. Henderson wrote, "Boosting adult literacy is about ending the cycle of non-readers ... It's about equipping parents with a gift they can pass on to their most precious assets." Staff writers Naomi Patton and Cassandra Spratling wrote detailed stories with profiles of adult learners, plus information on how potential learners could apply for help and how potential volunteers could contact the Reading Works partners.

Fundraising was at the heart of early efforts. The sense of urgency was so great that the Reading Works board tasked itself with raising \$1 million in the first year and an additional \$8 million over the next five years. They didn't see much likelihood of expanded, consistent funding from public sources and focused on private business, foundations and philanthropists.

As much as fund-raising was a central goal, especially to increase the number of learners served, the Reading Works board recognized that money alone could not solve the literacy problem. Students faced many challenges. They had to be able to work and study at the same time, overcome barriers to consistent attendance and see the hope of a good job at the end of their programs. Many adult learners had never mastered basic skills in K-12 schools. Many faced challenging life circumstances, including learning disabilities, health challenges and a lack of transportation. The statistic frequently cited at the time was that up to 47%, or up to 300,000 Detroit residents 16 and older, were below 6th grade reading level. (Huffington Post, July 8, 2013)

To raise money, Reading Works needed to detail the scope of the problem and the effectiveness of their literacy-providing impact partners. Deloitte donated \$10,000 to build a customized database that could aggregate data – including intake, dropout rates and educational attainment -- from all Reading Works impact partners and present a clearer picture of adult education efforts. Most partners already had to operate multiple databases for other grants including, for some, the state adult education reporting system¹. Many were challenged to add another to the staff load. But for some, the tool enabled them to track progress for the first time.

Within eight months of launch, Reading Works received a \$180,000 grant from A. Alfred Taubman with the express intention of distributing money to the nine impact partners. The funds could be used for support services to enable people to study -- bus tickets, childcare, car maintenance, more. The money was distributed according to need across the partners, signaling to them that Reading Works was at the head of collective efforts.

In the early days of Reading Works, the group announced several ambitious goals to rally the community:

- 80% of adults would be at 9th grade level by 2020.
- 30,000 total adults will be served in adult education by 2017.
- 20,000 will be enrolled in studies by the year 2020 (in 2012, about 2,000 were enrolled at any given time).

Those goals were set deliberately high to underscore both the depth of the problem and the realistic costs needed to solve it. Board members and community supporters – such as Scola, Betty Brooks of The Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History, Cindy Pasky of Strategic Staffing Solutions, Tom McGinnis of Deloitte, Mariam Noland of the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan – were active as Reading Works found office space, developed data systems and arranged marketing support.

There were two high-profile fundraising events in early 2012. “Free Verse: Poetry and Music Celebrating the Life of Martin Luther King, Jr.” was a cultural program advertised citywide where tickets benefited

¹ MAERS (Michigan Adult Education Reporting System) is the database for WIOA II recipients.

Reading Works. Emagine Theater screened the movie “Deadline” and one of the actors, Eric Roberts, was on site for a conversation. A portion of the proceeds was donated to Reading Works.

Reading Works partnered with United Way for Southeastern Michigan (UWSEM) so individuals contacting the 211 information helpline could be directed to the literacy provider closest to their home. And during 2012-2015, Reading Works was featured in an annual report produced by the Community Foundation, one of which was titled “Making Literacy a Priority in Southeast Michigan.” The report profiled both individual students and partnering agencies.

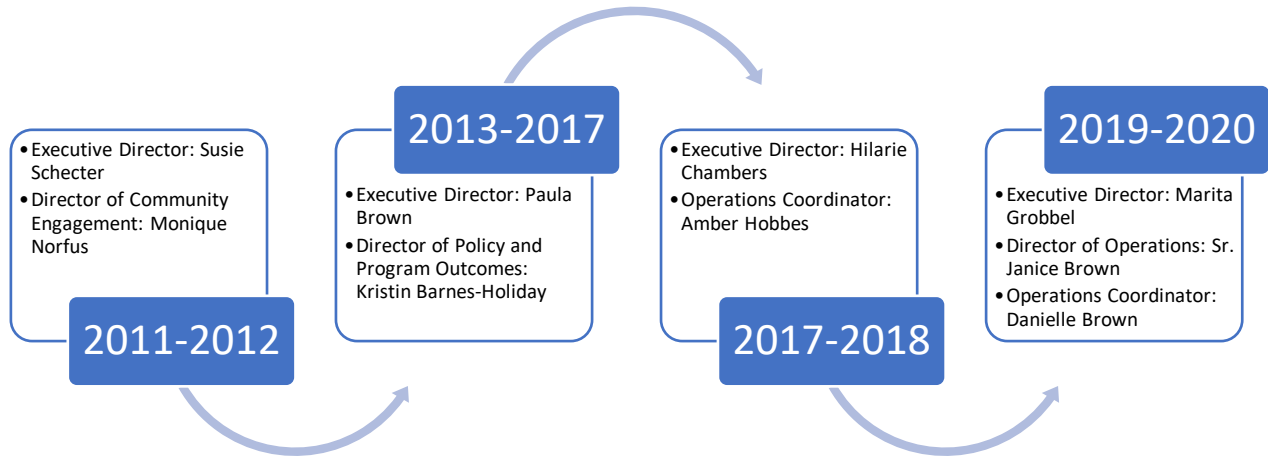
By January 2013, Reading Works’ first executive director, Susie Schecter, had been on the job for over a year and with the support of the board was expanding the goals of the organization. In a Free Press opinion piece (see Appendix B), she talked about Reading Works being a “backbone, providing critical tools, resources and funding so our community partners can build their own capacities, retain more adult learners in their programs and improve their accountability.”² The mission, as stated in an extensive spread in the Free Press that day, included these goals as part of the mission as well:

- **Advocacy** -- Lead a comprehensive community effort to advance adult literacy; sustain a news media campaign to raise public awareness.
- **Connection** -- Bring adult literacy agencies together to share their most effective methods and strategies
- **Pathways** -- Connect adult learners with higher education, businesses and workforce programs.
- **Resources** -- Develop a literacy toolbox to help other agencies start successful programs.
- **National Leadership** -- Make metro Detroit a leader in boosting adult literacy.

The scope of the mission was breathtaking, comprehensive, and much needed.

² Detroit Free Press, January 6, 2013

Reading Works Staff, 2011-2020



Key Initiatives Over the Years

Reading Works launched several initiatives to encourage partnerships, increase services to students and advance the cause of adult education in Detroit.

Evidence-Based Literacy Instruction

Reading Works has worked with the Wayne State University Office of Adult Literacy in several ways. In the early years, Wayne State connected student tutors and mentors to the impact partners as volunteers. Professors sought sites for a study to determine the effectiveness of Evidence-Based Literacy Instruction (EBLI) as compared to the Laubach Method³ most providers were using. Several impact partners -- including Dominican Literacy, Southwest Solutions and St. Vincent Sarah Fisher – worked with researchers on a control group study. Instructors taught two groups of students using one of the methods with each group. The study concluded that the instructor mattered more than the curriculum. Students did better with some teachers over others, regardless of which method was used.

Reading Works members also participated in a WSU study using EBLI on an iPad. Participating agencies received 10 free iPads to use with students for lessons to see whether the device assisted learning. Again, there was a control group. It turned out that students using the iPads seemed to progress more

³ The Laubach method was developed specifically to help adults with limited or no reading skills achieve success and become confident readers. This structured, phonics-based series works even with learners who have had negative experiences with other reading programs.

quickly through the lessons, an interesting discovery in light of the current need for virtual learning during the pandemic.

Vision Screening and Eyeglasses

In 2012, Reading Works partnered with Oakland Optometry and Essilor to offer free vision screening and eyeglasses to adult education students at several impact partners. Many students had been held back by poor eyesight. Success stories were published about individuals whose lives were changed as a result of this support. The effort does not appear to have had the support to continue beyond a year or two, unfortunately a common problem with support services funded by an individual company or philanthropy.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program 50/50

In 2016, the City of Detroit turned to Reading Works to assist in recruiting for the SNAP 50/50 initiative, a U.S. Department of Agriculture workforce program for able-bodied adults without dependents. If organizations could document the monetary value of specific workforce, education and training activities, they could get reimbursed 50% from the USDA for those expenditures. The theory was that people who transitioned to self-sufficiency through work were less likely to rely on food stamps. Reading Works Director Paula Brown promoted the program to providers, encouraging them to get trained and to sign up because the funds were a good source of unrestricted income. Over the next few years, seven Reading Works partners would participate in the program.

Bridge to Construction

In 2016, Reading Works successfully applied for a workforce education and training grant from the Detroit Economic Solutions Corp., together with two impact partners, Southwest Solutions and Dominican Literacy. The program was called Bridge to Construction, intended to help participants enter apprenticeships in the building trades. The course was aimed at adult learners with a high school diploma or its equivalent to improve basic reading and math skills from a 7th to 9th grade equivalent. The program infused work readiness/career exploration into the curriculum. Critical thinking and teamwork instruction honed skills needed for success in the construction industry.

The curriculum was contextualized with outcomes including mastery of grammar, writing styles and math skills required in real-life and workplace situations, familiarity with the construction industry, improved reading comprehension and critiquing work situations to understand one's role and responsibility as part of a work team. This was an early concrete attempt to marry adult education and workforce in a seamless way. The program was six weeks in duration. It was a challenge, however, to find eligible participants, as so few applying had the skill levels necessary to consider an apprenticeship with only six weeks of active academic and workforce training. (See Appendix B).

Nutritional Literacy Pilot

Through Reading Works, the Oakland Literacy Council (OLC) and Forgotten Harvest worked on a Nutritional Literacy Pilot aimed at boosting literacy for adults at the Pontiac food pantry. While people waited for food trucks to arrive, power-point presentations in the cafeteria covered nutritional basics and how to sign up for literacy services, with contact information on cards that were given out. The pilot suggested that integrating basic education into people’s everyday lives can lead to greater uptake and better outcomes.

Financial Literacy

Three Reading Works impact partners worked with PNC Bank to present financial literacy classes: banking basics, understanding checking accounts, reconciling bank statements, budgeting. The goal was to round out the skills needed as adults – an example of literacy instruction expanding to include more aspects of life and work.

The New GED – 2013

That year, the GED Testing Service rolled out a more challenging, computer-based test intended to better predict success in higher education. However, in reducing the gap between GED earners and the skills needed to succeed in college, they increased the gap between many adult learners’ skills and what it would take to pass the GED. Digital skills became essential for success, given the new test was computer-based. Reading Works launched a public relations campaign to educate people about the new test and to alert organizations and employers that in the short term, it would be harder for people to get GEDs. Reading Works assembled impact partners to identify the most effective ways to transition to the new test. It took over a year to adjust, but the mutual support from Reading Works members made it a joint effort rather than organizations struggling alone.

Seat on the Detroit Workforce Development Board

By 2016, Reading Works was an integral part of the Detroit workforce training ecosystem. As a result, Reading Works Executive Director Paula Brown gained a seat on the Mayor’s Workforce Development Board, which raised the profile of adult literacy and highlighted its important role in preparing a pipeline for workforce training and tapping employment as a motivator for students. The Reading Works goal at that time was to raise \$24 million over the next five years through a combination of public support, philanthropy and employer-literacy partnerships.

The PULSE Conference, in Partnership with the Harris Literacy Program at Wayne State University

The Harris Literacy Program at Wayne State University approached Paula Brown in 2016 about launching a conference designed for adult education providers. That had long been a Reading Works desire – as early as 2011, Reading Works and Wayne State had briefly discussed a conference that could draw widespread interest, perhaps with speakers such as Michelle Obama and Laura Bush. The goal of the PULSE Conference (Practice-Based Updates for Literacy Strategies and Education) was to offer an interactive forum for adult literacy providers. For five years, PULSE has enhanced networking and familiarity of programs among service providers, engaged stakeholders in identifying roadblocks and strategies to overcome them, and recruited keynote speakers. The 2018-19 conferences added a strong

focus on workforce development. In 2020, the conference was offered virtually – emphasizing digital learning because of the pandemic. Keynote speakers and conference topics are listed in Appendix C.

Economic Mobility Grant Initiative, in Partnership with the UWSEM and DESC

The Detroit Economic Mobility Grant initiative was launched in mid-2018, fueled by nearly \$1 million from the Detroit Regional Workforce Fund (housed at United Way for Southeastern Michigan) and JPMorgan Chase. Detroit Employment Solutions Corporation (DESC), United Way for Southeastern Michigan, Reading Works and the Corporation for a Skilled Workforce (CSW) partnered on implementation and oversight, and the launch was coordinated by new Reading Works Executive Director Hilarie Chambers. She threw herself into the task with great energy -- helping set up a selection system that identified 10 organizations or pairs of workforce/adult education organizations to receive funding early in 2019. The one-year grants would pilot four evidence-based program models intended to accelerate the progress of adult learners and connect them to workforce training and employment.ⁱ The four models: Integrated education and training, career pathway bridges, accelerated high school diploma or equivalent, and employment-based programs. Of the ten grants, four were for new programs and six were to enhance existing programs. When Chambers left for a position with the Michigan Secretary of State’s office, Reading Works hired Marita Grobbel as executive director. She took over shepherding the programs and championed the integration of adult education and workforce development throughout her tenure.

“My goal is to work with adult ed agencies to make sure they have access to best practices and can design programs that prepare students for employment.”

Marita Grobbel, Executive Director

The mobility grants represented a major effort, offering hope that workforce programs could be scaled up with these innovative models, and bringing together the organizations with the expertise to accomplish that. UWSEM managed the grants, DESC provided guidance and support, Reading Works and CSW provided professional development and technical assistance. From mid-2018 through 2020, Reading Works and CSW organized monthly professional development workshops for grant applicants, grantees, and the larger adult education and workforce community. In addition to expounding on the four strategies, workshops provided opportunities for grantees to showcase their work. Managers and staff frequently sat on panels to discuss their progress and brainstorm solutions to challenges. Learnings were shared and discussed in real time. The Professional Development workshops are listed in Appendix D.

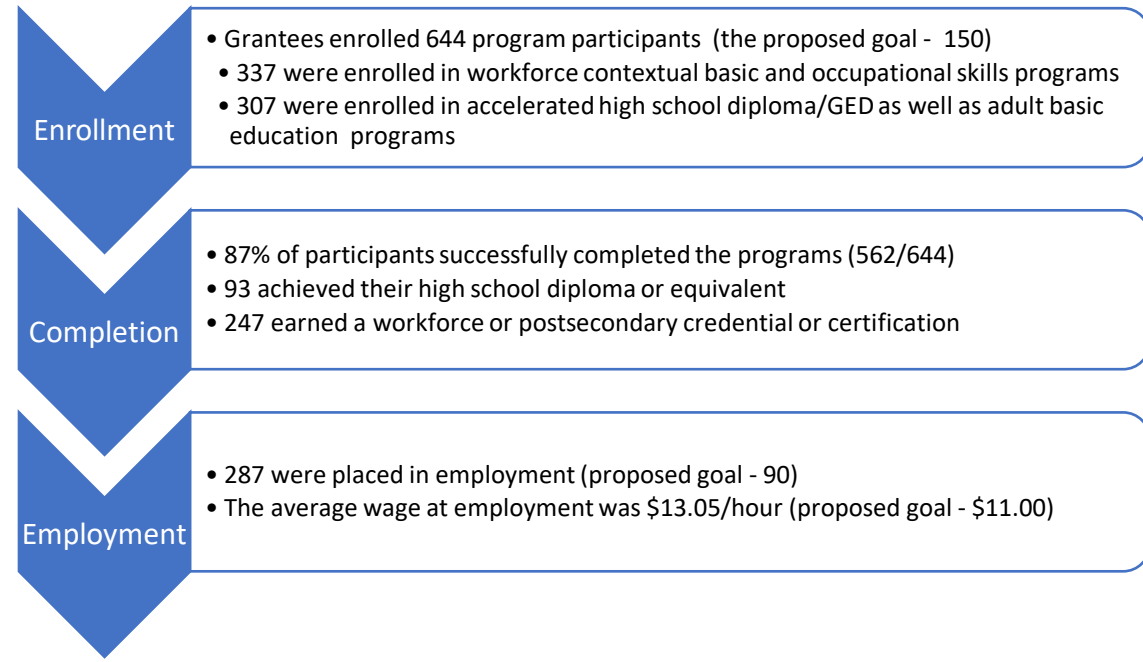
The Reading Works board saw participation in the economic mobility grants as a key step toward achieving its mission. Board member Deb Scola said, “These programs showed that in 12-26 weeks, students can advance to higher level skills and employment. It was a moment when I wanted to stand on the mountain and shout ... now we can move forward, now we can get to those numbers served.”

Economic Mobility Grants

In 2017, Jeff Donofrio, Detroit’s Director of Workforce Development, took a strong interest in adult education and worked with the JPMorgan Chase Foundation to support research and development of a strategy to advance adult education’s connection with employment. Corporation for a Skilled Workforce (CSW) led this effort, working closely with the mayor’s office and other stakeholders including Reading Works to develop components of the strategy, laid out in Detroit Adult Foundational

Skill Development: Challenges and Solutions⁴.* The CSW report promoted four strategies emulating the best practices to be found nationwide: a) accelerated high school equivalency, b) integrated education and training, c) career pathways and d) employment-based learning.

The Economic Mobility Grant outcomes, summarized below, speak volumes about what can be accomplished with concerted training, clear strategies and support for strong organizations.



⁴ [Detroit-Adult-Found-Skill-Development-6_18_18-1.pdf \(skilledwork.org\)](#)

COVID-19

The Economic Mobility Grants wound down in the same few weeks in March-April 2020 as the statewide shutdown of almost all activities due to Covid-19. As organizations wrapped up reporting for the grants, they were forced to turn their energies toward an entirely new way of relating to clients – remotely. Sister Janice Brown at Reading Works initiated a conference call on Tuesday morning, March 17, just after everything in the Detroit metro region initially shut down. It was still a week before Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer made the March 23 announcement about a stay-in-place order. But agencies were closed and not sure how to proceed. Network partners talked for an hour that morning, trying to process what was happening. Right away, issues such as access to Wi-Fi and devices, resources for online learning and concerns about WIOA applications and reporting were on the agenda. People began preparing action plans for how to manage their staff, how to move forward. The group met three mornings that first week, two mornings the following week, and then fell into a rhythm of weekly and then bi-weekly calls to discuss and learn about a wide range of issues.

On April 23, the group made the transition to the online platform, Zoom, and a new era had begun. This connection became a professional and sometimes personal lifeline during highly uncertain times. Reading Works network members had many questions: What are the best digital tools? How should we document attendance, progress and teacher effort? How can parents proceed with their adult education when children are also learning at home? What do students do if they don't have Wi-Fi or devices to learn remotely? They began reaching out to leaders in the field who might be able to answer these questions and the group organized a series of guest speakers to participate in these vital sessions. (see Appendix E)

When there wasn't a guest, there were updates and shared information about trainings, tools, and pivoting. Virtual testing was of particular concern, as many students were close to passing their final GED test and a delay could mean losing the opportunity to complete. The 2020 Census outreach came up as did Covid-19 testing locations, parking lots with good Wi-Fi and a mask marketplace. The students in Zaman International's sewing class shifted to producing and selling masks to the community. ACCESS trained staff and volunteers to handle food and began distributing packages to meet increasing hunger. Oakland Literacy Council invited the impact partners to their trainings on Zoom (over 70 attended) about how to run virtual

Reading Works Members as of June 2020

- 482 Forward
- ACCESS
- All Saints Literacy
- Dearborn Adult Education
- Detroit Public Library
- Detroit Public Schools Community District
- Detroit Training Center
- Dominican Literacy
- EDSI
- EITI
- The Empowerment Plan
- Focus: HOPE
- Goodwill
- International Institute of Metropolitan Detroit
- Macomb Community College
- Matrix Human Services
- Mercy Education Project
- Oakland Literacy Council
- Per Scholas
- SER Metro
- Siena Literacy
- Southwest Solutions
- Streetwise Partners
- Saint Vincent Sara Fisher
- Teach.Empower.Achieve. (T.E.A.), Rebel Nell
- Troy Continuing Education
- Wayne State University Harris Literacy Program
- Zaman International

conversation groups. Their tutors modified lessons to include vocabulary about Covid-19, safety precautions and addressing isolation. Southwest Solutions contacted all 200 of its students, created study packets for learners to pick up, and each instructor followed up with their learners -- using Google Hangouts, Facebook, text, email, or Zoom. St. Vincent Sarah Fisher found that the contacts it made with almost all 300 students was an important social connection.

The creativity, collegiality and collaboration of these sessions motivated people to come back week after week. What had started in 2011 as an effort to tackle Detroit's immense adult literacy challenges became a hub that allowed many social services agencies to adapt and survive during the greatest public health crisis in a century.

"Reading Works was great for collaboration. It was always good to learn from one another. It put adult literacy on the map."

Amy Amador, Interim Director, 2017

Taking Stock

Reading Works was originally set up to a) raise visibility of the adult literacy issue; b) raise funds to increase the scale of activity; and c) support professional development and collaboration among quality adult ed providers. These three goals have remained constant over 10 years. Professional development was enhanced with the first annual PULSE conference in 2016 and strengthened by the monthly workshops in coordination with the economic mobility grants and the larger learning community during 2018-2020. Convening and collaboration have been a powerful force from the beginning – regular meetings, annual luncheons, discussion and sharing of tools, curricula, training opportunities, strengthening the case for adult literacy and adult education locally and at the state level. Network members attended national conferences together and shared materials with colleagues. In recent years, there has been a heightened focus on connecting with the workforce system. Many partnerships developed that advance the integration of academic and occupational skills. Educators began to accept that many students are more motivated to improve basic skills if support services, workforce and other opportunities were integrated.

"Creating a connection between adult literacy providers who were too often overlooked and a role within the workforce system stand as important achievements."

Hilarie Chambers, Former ED

The City of Detroit has embraced integrating adult education into the workforce system. In 2020, the Detroit Public Schools Community District adult education program was relocated to nine DESC career centers. Community-based organizations that offer adult education were given contracts to manage career centers, and literacy organizations also received contracts to offer services on site. Now, when clients enter the public workforce system, pursuing adult basic education or high school equivalency is an offering available right on site. Reading Works contributed significantly to the visibility of the adult education issue that led to these far-reaching changes.

For many reasons, fundraising has been a consistent challenge for Reading Works, starting long before the pandemic. RW struggled to support itself after the first few years, and its educational partners did not have the funds to support the organization through membership. Reading Works initially had high visibility via the Free Press, plus the Michigan Chronicle/Channel 7/other media, but that lessened over time. Fund-raising for Reading Works as a backbone organization leading the community's collective efforts was also hampered by the complexity and slow pace of the work required. With traditional models, it can take 12-24 months for students to significantly improve their education levels. Many funders lose patience or are drawn to programs that show more rapid results. And there is some

tension connected to forthrightly dealing with the issue of low-literacy adults – a city with workforce issues does not make it a magnet for employers.

Conclusion and the Future of Reading Works

Reading Works has always tackled head-on the challenges of raising adult skill levels and building a better Detroit workforce. If Detroit is to reach its full potential, low-literacy and basic adult skills must be addressed once and for all as a community-wide effort. But despite successes, Reading Works has found it difficult to get funders (public, foundation or corporate) to consistently provide grants to an organization whose roles are convening, collaboration building, assessing the quality of service providers, providing professional development, raising public awareness, sharing best practices, and connecting community dots in a true collective effort. The question remains after a decade: Who will fund this work consistently? Without it, the pace of change in adult education policy and practice won't keep up with the need.

By October 2020, it became clear to Executive Director Marita Grobbel and the board that it would be impossible to fund operations in the current environment, which has been so taxed by the pandemic. Reading Works plans to close operations by Dec. 31, 2020. As impact partners were informed of that reality, conversations about life after Reading Works made it clear that organizations place a high value on the collaboration established under Reading Works. Southwest Solutions, a longtime Reading Works partner, has volunteered to host collaborative meetings. Wayne State and the Harris Literacy Program pledge to continue the annual PULSE conference and stay connected to stakeholders to ensure community input and relevance.

The Economic Mobility Grants that Reading Works helped shepherd have pointed to concrete steps that can be taken once the pandemic abates -- literacy and basic skills programs can resume in earnest, promising innovative models can be scaled up, and more employers can hire qualified workers. The challenges are as formidable now as when Reading Works began in 2011, but the pathways to success are clearer than they've ever been.

Over the years, Reading Works has supported the growth, development and collaboration of the adult education community in and around Detroit. It has provided opportunities for professionals to organize, advocate, develop their skills, test new best practices and advance the possibilities for growth for adult learners.

Best of all, Reading Works has galvanized the commitment of agencies to build on the deep roots they have set -- and to keep collaboration alive.

**Written by Mary Freeman
Senior Policy Associate
Corporation for a Skilled Workforce
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- Ilitch Charities
- Kresge
- McGregor Foundation
- Oakland Optometry
- Quicken Loans
- Scripps-Howard Foundation
- Strategic Staffing Solutions
- The Gannett Foundation
- The Keith Center for Civil Rights
- The Knight Foundation
- The Law Firm of Miller Canfield
- Verizon Foundation
- Wayne State University

Those Who Served Reading Works

Over the years, Reading Works benefitted from dozens of community-minded, selfless supporters. Here are those who served from 2011-2020 as officers, honorary chairs, board members, executive directors or staff members:

Ismael Ahmed, Maggie Allessee, Amy Amador, Paul Anger, Kristen Barnes-Holiday, Elizabeth Brooks, Sister Janice Brown, Danielle Brown, Paula Brown, Hilarie Chambers, Michael Cheatham, Daniel Cherrin, Robert Cohen, Gary Dembs, Ahmad Ezzeddine, Mary Freeman, Gabrielle George, Marita Grobbel, Eve Haley, Stephen Henderson, Jerry Herron, Rev. Georgia Hill, Tanise Hill, Amber Hobbs, Kendra Howard, Tamara Izzo, Janine Janosky, Joyce Jenereaux, Judge Damon J. Keith, Doug Kuiper, Kevin Lignell, Thomas Linn, Thomas McGinnis, Anastasia Minor, Keith Mobley, Monique Norfus, Jonathan Parks, Cynthia Pasky, Rochelle Riley, Chuck Stokes, A. Alfred Taubman, Bankole Thompson, Susie Schechter, Debora Scola, Alissa Sevrioukova, Robert Shaner, Carolyn Shields, Daniel F. Smith, Loretta Smith, Tim Smith, Joni Thrower, Nisanth Varanisi, Wendy Wagenheim, James Wile, Donnell White.

2W WWW.FREEPRESS.COM SUNDAY, JAN. 6, 2013 11

What is Reading Works?

Reading Works is a collective partnership of community leaders from the business, education, media, civic and faith communities dedicated to improving adult literacy in metro Detroit. The organization is partnering with adult literacy agencies and other organizations to provide resources to help more people learn to read, improve retention rates in literacy programs and measure key metrics.

READING WORKS MISSION

- Raise the level of adult literacy in metro Detroit.
- Promote the idea that reading works—in families and in workplaces.
- Lead a comprehensive community effort to advance adult literacy.
- Bring adult literacy agencies together to share their most effective methods and strategies.
- Provide valuable resources and tools to a growing network of literacy agencies to help them build capacity, do a better job of retaining learners and improve accountability.
- Connect adult learners with higher education, business and workforce programs.
- Develop a literacy toolbox to allow other agencies to start a successful literacy program.
- Sustain a new media campaign to raise public awareness.
- Make metro Detroit the national leader in boosting adult literacy.

THE READING WORKS ALLIANCE

CHAIR OF THE BOARD

■ Paul Anger, Editor & Publisher, Detroit Free Press

HONORARY CHAIRS

■ Honorable Damon T. Keith, Judge on the U.S. 6th Circuit Court of Appeals

■ A. Alfred Taubman, founder of Taubman Centers

■ Rochelle Riley, columnist, Detroit Free Press

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

■ Jerry Heron, Vice Chair, Deans, Irvn O. Boyd Honors College Wayne State University

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■ Deborah Sola, Secretary, Community Affairs Director Detroit Media Partnership

■ Tamara Lazo, Treasurer, Partner, Ernst & Young

■ Maggie Akse, Community Activist

■ Ahmad Ahmed, Associate President for Integrated Learning and Community Partnerships, University of Michigan-Dearborn

■ Robert Cohen, Executive Director, South Community Relations Council

■ Eve Haley, Director Programs Detroit Public Television

■ Rev. Georgia Hill, Associate Minister Plymouth United Church of Christ, Detroit, Detroit Literacy Council

■ Joyce Jeneraux, President Detroit Media Partnership

■ Thomas Linn, Chairman Emeritus, Miller, Canfield, Paddock & Stone

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■ Barkula Thompson, Senior Editor Michigan Chronicle

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■ Susie Schechter, Reading Works Executive Director

■ Monique Norfus, Reading Works Director of Community Outreach

■ Detroit Free Press Detroit Media Partnership The Michigan Chronicle WXYZ-TV Channel 7 WDET-FM Public Radio 101.9 Detroit Public Television

A successful year one — and more growth ahead

By Susie Schechter

It's hard to believe that more than a year has passed since I joined the committed alliance of community leaders called Reading Works, dedicated to the idea that to build up our community we must help adults who struggle with reading.

We're working with literacy agencies that have agreed to join forces with Reading Works—and collectively, we will move more adults up literacy levels so they can land good jobs and make their homes a good learning environment.

Over the last year, Reading Works has acted as the backbone of this community effort, providing critical tools, resources and funding so our partners can build their own capacity, retain more adult learners in their programs and improve their accountability. With the help of generous supporters, we've provided a range of benefits in our first year: One-on-one tutoring, materials, vision screening and eyeglasses, plus helping learners with transportation, child care or other barriers that keep them from their lessons.

We are extremely thankful to our

partners and supporters for taking a leap of faith and banding together with us. And while we have much to celebrate, we are even more excited about what's to come. We've recruited Monique Norfus as director of community outreach, and we're recruiting more adult learners and volunteers. She'll be working with others who can spread the word that there is no shame in getting help.

And we will continue to promote our partnership with United Way, rebranding potential learners that their first stop can be as simple as calling 211.

It's been quite a year of hard work and inspiration. I remember our board members visiting the Mercy Education Project, sitting at a conference table, and then a literacy student started to speak. She shared how her husband and children did not know she struggled with reading, how it took all of her courage to enroll at Mercy, how she had started dreaming of words she was learning.

When she finished, there wasn't a dry eye in the room. Betty Brooks hugged her. In that moment, I not only got chills—I got a rush. I remember how meaningful this work can be. Just last month, I had the opportunity to hear her speak again and I felt such happi-



Monique Norfus, left, and Susie Schechter at Reading Works in Detroit.

ness to hear that she was no longer keeping her struggle a secret. She had opened up to her family and was no longer ashamed.

As we move into Year Two, we're determined to increase our network of adult literacy agencies. We will join forces with other social service providers that do not offer structured tutoring but have adults coming to them for other needs—and could benefit from a formal adult literacy program. Reading Works will provide our partners with a literacy toolbox, giving them the support they need to launch a successful program.

A year later, I am even more convinced that adult literacy is

a root cause of many community challenges, including low school performance from too many children, unemployment, poverty, homelessness and hunger. That's why I get so excited at the difference our collective is making. We are not just teaching adults to read better and land a good job, we are improving the chances that their children will excel in school and—here's the ultimate payoff—find their own rewarding careers.

While our rebuilding effort is focusing on this most fundamental building block, we know that by repairing literacy skills, our impact will be far-reaching.

New glasses — and new outlook

Partners give grants to boost adult literacy levels

By Cassandra Sprating

Wilhelmina Hart has been trying to improve her reading skills for two years.

A part of her problem was that she couldn't see well. The glasses she had were no longer effective and the unemployed Detroit resident could not afford new ones.

Hart, 45, received an eye exam and a new pair of glasses in November through the Pathways to Literacy Fund, established by A. Alfred Taubman, the Woodward Hill real estate magnate. The fund seeks to remove barriers facing people learning to read.

In addition to giving Hart a grant for glasses, the fund gave Patricia Moore, 56, of Detroit, a grant to have her car repaired so she could continue taking literacy lessons at the Dominican Literacy Center on Detroit's east side.

The Pathways to Literacy Fund is one of several initiatives that have grown out of Reading Works, a nonprofit organization aimed at supporting agencies trying to raise adult literacy levels in metro Detroit.

Hart said she decided to learn to read after she got clean of a 15-year crack and alcohol addiction.

"I realized it was time for me to come out of my shame and learn to read," she said.

Hart hopes to earn her GED through classes she is taking at the Seneca Literacy Center. She wants to become a cosmetologist to help others whose livelihoods have been limited, like hers, by early pregnancies, drugs and poor education.

The glasses paid for on a grant track to that dream.

Many others also have joined forces with Reading Works since it officially launched in fall 2011.

Among them are the employees in the Michigan offices of Deloitte, a consulting and accounting firm.

They have contributed \$10,000 for the



Wilhelmina Hart, right, of Detroit is tutored Dec. 6 by retiree Nancy Lehner of Dearborn.

design and implementation of a state-of-the-art data collection and assessment system that will be used by Reading Works' nine partner agencies and others interested in joining the effort.

Mark Davidoff, managing partner for Deloitte in Detroit, said the company created a unique way for its employees to get engaged in reducing illiteracy.

The company's 130 Michigan employees were offered an opportunity to invest in the system by purchasing



Mark Davidoff

units of the system at \$600 a unit. Within a week of announcing their philanthropic project in October, Deloitte reached its goal of \$10,000 to cover the cost of the system.

"We understand the need to help others help themselves," Davidoff said. "If someone is illiterate, that provides an extra challenge in doing all the things we take for granted. It is difficult to find employment or take care of your family if you can't read."

The entire company wanted to get engaged in helping correct a major problem in the Detroit community, he said.

Reading Works lays groundwork for partnerships

Several initiatives have been or are being developed since the launch of Reading Works. All the initiatives will enhance the ability of partner agencies to help adults learn to read, among them:

■ **Pathways to Literacy:** A project funded by philanthropist A. Alfred Taubman that gives grants to literacy agencies so the agencies can help individuals remove various barriers to learning to read. Grants help cover needs such as child care, bus fare, car repairs and eyeglasses.

■ **A partnership with United Way's 211 Referral Line:** Trained United Way representatives will connect callers to adult literacy programs connected to where they live. Use all 211 calls, the service is available 24/7.

■ **Free reading glasses:** In April, two eye care companies—Oakland Community and Esprit—contributed 1,000 free pairs of reading glasses to learners at all nine partner agencies. Reading Works is exploring partnerships with other places to ensure that readability to see is not an obstacle to reading. People needing assistance must be participants with a partner agency. Some agencies

will have reading glasses available.

■ **Literacy Toolkit:** This will provide information and resources to agencies wanting to develop successful literacy programs. The toolkit will include, for example, a recommended curriculum for students as well as outreach material designed to help recruit learners and volunteer tutors. The idea is to get agencies that do not have tutoring programs right now to establish such programs. Social service agencies, for example, often have adults coming to them for other needs but who also would benefit from a literacy program.

Agencies interested in learning more about the toolkit should contact the Reading Works Office of Community Outreach at 313-222-2561.

■ **National Library of Medicine With Forgotten Harvest:** Reading Works and the Oakland Literacy Council are piloting a program aimed at boosting literacy for adults at the Fortham food pantry. Representatives will present a series of nutritional literacy workshops. Topics could include, for example, how to read food labels and guides to making healthy food choices. The pilot project, still being developed, aims to improve

literacy while customers are at the pantry, and also encourage those who may need help to sign up for literacy lessons at the literacy council.

■ **Financial Literacy Program:** PNC Bank and Reading Works will offer financial literacy training for adult learners. PNC Bank will begin with three partner agencies to introduce learners to the foundations of money management. Workshops will include topics such as banking basics, understanding checking accounts, reconciling bank statements and overcoming common budgeting challenges.

■ **Data Collection and Assessment System:** Reading Works, in partnership with analytics, is providing partner literacy agencies access to an online tool that collects all data, its own over employee system that will allow them to keep better track of students as they move through reading programs. In addition, thanks to the generosity of the Michigan employee of the Deloitte consulting and accounting firm, ardenCase is building a literacy-specific database system that will allow partner agencies and others interested in joining the literacy effort to have a more efficient means of

capturing data. "Our agencies will be able to more efficiently track the number of learners they see, the retention rate and their abandonment in literacy," Reading Works Executive Director Susie Schechter said. The system is to launch by March. It will be part of the literacy toolbox.

■ **Evidence-Based Literacy Instruction:** Tutor at Seneca Literacy Center and Dominican Literacy Center, two Reading Works partner agencies, have been trained in instruction that is meant to help people read to their highest potential in an efficient and effective manner. The EBI system offers a set of strategies to optimize reading for learners of all ages. Research at Wayne State University are doing a study on the effectiveness of the EBI system compared with more traditional teaching methods. Results are expected later this year. The EBI system was created by Nora Chantel of Lansing, a former turned reading advocate. For information, go to <http://ebl.com>.

HOW TO HELP: Go to readingworksdetroit.org For more information, call 313-222-6870

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Appendix C: The P.U.L.S.E. Conference Keynote Speakers and Topics

Keynote Speakers

- 2016: Dr. Craig Boykin, Consultant
- 2017: Dr. Lennox McLendon, Adult Ed Consultant
- 2018: Dr. Nicolai Vitti, Superintendent, DPSCD
- 2019: Jeff Donofrio, Director, State of MI, LEO
- 2020: Dr. John Valverde, CEO, YouthBuild USA Inc.



The topics of the PULSE conferences show the development of stakeholder interest over time. They also show how the conference grew to include additional sessions each year.

Topics

- 2016
 - “Cultural Awareness Panel”
 - “Attracting Adult Literacy Audiences with Storytelling”
 - “The Intersection between Public Policy, Grant Making and Funding”
- 2017
 - “Creative Approaches for Cultivating Math Competency”
 - “Integrating Reading and Math Education with Workforce and Career Training”
 - “Innovative Strategies for Promoting Reading Comprehension”
- 2018
 - Barriers to Learning
 - Reading Comprehension Strategies in Math
 - Online Resource and Strategies for Building Adult Literacy
 - Data-Driven Decision Making
 - Bridging the Digital Use Divide
- 2019
 - Engaging Employers
 - Digital Literacy in the Classroom
 - Adult Ed for Working People
 - Engaging Adult Learners in Storytelling
 - Trauma Informed Teaching
 - ESL & Diversity in the Workplace
 - The Power of the Arts in Adult Education
 - Math Strategies for Everyone
- 2020
 - Creating Real Connections in a Socially Distant World
 - Family Literacy
 - Advocacy, Covid-19 and Beyond
 - Leading from a Posture of Equity
 - Leading Remote teams
 - Accessible Technology for All Learners
 - Mindful Mandalas – Attaining More Peace in our Lives
 - Common Chords – Common Ground Through Music
 - Employer Panel
 - Building on All Voices During a Pandemic

Appendix D: Professional Development Offerings Provided by Reading Works During the Economic Mobility Grant Initiative

Date	Title
July 19, 2018	Improving Economic Mobility of Detroiters
August 20, 2018	Contextualized IET
October 12, 2018	Adult Foundational Skills Forum
November 30, 2018	PULSE conference
December 11, 2018	Career Navigation
February 6, 2019	Accelerated HSE Programing
April 3, 2019	Partnership & Collaboration
April 23, 2019	Integrated Education & Training
May 17, 2019	SNAP 50 50 TA
May 15, 22, 29, 2019	Contextualized IET-DPSCD
June 19, 2019	Employer Engagement
July 9, 2019	Career Pathways/Bridge Programs
August 21, 2019	LINCS Resources
September 26, 2019	Recruitment, Outreach and Motivation to Learn
October 17, 2019	Employment based programs
November 15, 2019	PULSE conference
January 30, 2020	MI GED non-passer feedback
April 22, 2020	North Star Digital Literacy
May 27, 2020	Online Strategies
July 30, 2020	Adaptive Leadership
September 24, 2020	Keeping Remote Learners Engaged
November 20, 2020	PULSE conference

¹ Six organizations were awarded mini-grants to expand existing programs and four were awarded grants to develop new programs.

Appendix E: Speakers and Topics During COVID-19 Pandemic

Guest	Title	Organization	Topic
Patrick Brown	President	MACAE	Online Resources
Brian Frazier	Department Analyst	State of Michigan, LEO	WIOA
Nicole Sherard-Freeman	Executive Director	Workforce Development & Detroit at Work, City of Detroit	Digital Literacy, Payroll Protection Program
Kevin-Johnson	Senior Analyst	SEMCOG	Employment Projections
Sharon Dulin	Manager, Government & Regulatory Affairs	Comcast	Comcast Essentials
Jane Eguez	Director of Program Development	CASAS	Progress towards remote proctoring
Michael Matos	Region 4 Representative	COABE	COABE offerings
Adora Beard	State Relationship Manager	GED	Online testing
Patrick Rouse	Workforce & Continuing Ed	MCC	Employment Challenges
Michele Cyrus	Director of Adult College Completion	Detroit Chamber of Commerce	Detroit Reconnect
Michelle Rafferty	CEO	DESC	Detroit @ Work Services
Nilda Thomas	CEO	Workforce eTraining Solutions	Online Tools
Kate Brady-Medley; Lori Spicer	COO; Talent Dev. Coord.	SEMCA	Service Strategies During Covid
Michael Evans	Executive Director	Kalamazoo Literacy Council	Outreach Strategies