



Local Library Literacy Services Celebrates 40th Anniversary

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[Sacramento, Calif.] – It’s celebration time for a California program that has enabled more than 300,000 adults to learn to read and write.

The ground-breaking California Library Literacy Services program is celebrating its 40th anniversary this year and commemorating four decades of success with a reception at the California Library Association convention at the Pasadena Convention Center on October 17.

Launched in 1984 by the California State Library, the program has helped transform the lives of more than a half million Californians, helping them attain literacy skills and pursue more ambitious career goals.

“It takes tremendous courage to admit to not being able to read or write. But it’s never too late – or too early -- to learn and, for 40 years, local library literacy services has been there to provide that opportunity,” said California State Librarian Greg Lucas.

The State Library recently awarded more than \$11 million to California public libraries to provide free reading, writing, and English language tutoring for adults and families. During the 2022-2023 fiscal year, public libraries throughout California worked with 345 community agencies to serve almost 26,400 adults and family members at more than 630 sites. With the help of trained staff and over 4,700 volunteers, adults received over 386,500 hours of instruction and families benefited from 1,984 special programs supporting family learning.

Family literacy programs also provided 90,420 books to families to help them build home libraries and 47,758 learning kits to help them continue learning at home.

[California Library Literacy Services](#) is a learner-driven program in which students tell their tutors what they want to learn. The volunteer tutors unlock the learners’ potential, helping them gain essential skills. One skill adults learn is how to support their children’s emerging literacy, helping break the cycle of illiteracy.

“It fulfills the mission of the public library as an institution of lifelong learning, of inclusion, equity and diversity,” said the narrator of [Learning Together: The Values that Shape California Library Literacy Services](#), a video on the program’s history and impact on people’s lives.

The [National Coalition for Literacy](#) says that adult education is an investment that returns far more than it costs. Literacy skills improve job opportunities, increase earnings potential, and raise participation in civic activities.

The impact for adults and families participating in the California Library Literacy Services program is substantial. Says one adult learner:

“This program has helped me learn to read. I feel energized that I could read my first book. Words make sense to me now! This skill is moving me forward in life. This program has given me hope.”

The featured speaker at the 40th Anniversary reception in Pasadena will be Chef Curtis Aikens, a founding host and chef of The Food Network. Aikens is also a literacy advocate with a compelling story about how he learned to read at the age of 26 at the Marin County Library, the site of one of the first established local library literacy programs.

Tired of hiding his inability to read, Aikens saw a commercial for literacy services and enrolled. Now he is the author of seven books and motivates others to begin their literacy journey.

It’s a story familiar to Diane Shimota, who’s been the adult literacy coordinator at A.K. Smiley Public Library in Redlands since 2016. Recently interviewed by [KVCR about the adult literacy program's history in Redlands](#), she knows some adults hide their lack of reading skills until it becomes too much of an obstacle to their careers.

Shimota encourages English learners to be “brave” and ask their local library for help. Libraries will provide it – for free and without judging.

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About the State Library: Established in 1850, the California State Library is the central reference and research library for state government and the Legislature. The Library collection includes more than 4 million titles, 6,000 maps and 250,000 photographs, and includes an extensive collection of documents from and about the state’s rich history. Around the state, the State Library serves California’s local libraries, providing more than \$500 million state and federal funds to support public libraries and deliver statewide library programs and services such as the free Parks Pass program in public libraries, Lunch at the Library during school breaks and holidays, and a statewide eBook library with diverse titles in 20+ languages. The State Library is also partnering with the Dolly Parton Imagination Library to provide books to every child under the age of 5. [State Library Website](#)

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