

# Overview of LIFT

**History and Ongoing Need:** Literacy Instruction for Texas (LIFT) was **founded in 1961** by the National Council of Jewish Women, Greater Dallas Section, in response to the critical need for educating thousands of functionally illiterate adults in the Dallas area. The most recent National Adult Literacy Survey indicated that 55% of Dallas residents, age 16 and over, read at or below a 4th grade level. And in 2004, United Way of Metropolitan Dallas issued a report noting that the adult illiteracy rate in Dallas is most likely *understated* due to the large influx of immigrants since the last Adult Literacy Survey. In fact, United Way has identified adult illiteracy as a *critical and worsening problem* in the Dallas area.

**Mission and Purpose:** LIFT's mission is *to enhance lives and strengthen communities by raising the adult literacy rate in the Dallas Metroplex*. LIFT's primary purpose is to build self-reliance and hope among low literate adults, both English and non-English speaking, and to provide them with the tools to function in the workplace, the community, and in their role as parents or caregivers.

LIFT is unique among adult literacy providers in that it provides services to the lowest literate adults in the community. Did you know that a person must be able to read and write on an 8th grade level *just to enroll* in most GED programs or to participate in many English-as-a-Second Language programs? What about those who read on a 4<sup>th</sup> grade level? **LIFT** prevents them from slipping through the cracks. LIFT helps these adults learn to read/write English when they cannot read/write in their native language, to achieve the literacy level required to enter a GED program, to apply for a better job, and to provide a better future for their children.

**Programs:** LIFT currently offers three types of programs:

## (1) Adult Literacy

- Reading Readiness - Prepares students, who *read below the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade level*, for entry into Basic Literacy. 24% of LIFT's students begin at the Reading Readiness level.
- Basic Literacy - Two-year program that brings students to a solid functional literacy level and teaches them life skills that utilize their new knowledge. LIFT has offered this very successful program for **over forty-three years**. LIFT also offers an accelerated version of this course that can be completed in one year, instead of two.
- GED Preparation - Prepares students, who test below an 8<sup>th</sup> grade level, for enrollment in DISD's GED class. Once a student reaches 8<sup>th</sup> grade level proficiency, he/she is referred to the DISD program for final GED preparation.

## (2) ESL Literacy

- English as a Second Language (ESL) - Teaches the essentials for functioning in the community and the workplace. Most Dallas area ESL programs are designed for students who are proficient at an 8<sup>th</sup> grade level in their native language. LIFT is the only local organization that specializes in ESL instruction for students who have a low level of reading proficiency in their native language.

## (3) Family Literacy

- Family Literacy - Teaches parents that children learn prior to kindergarten, teaches parents how to engage their children with books, and encourages families to increase reading together time at home. This program was implemented in partnership with Head Start of Greater Dallas.

The demographic profile of LIFT students is as follows:

- **95% are low/moderate income**
- **37% are one-step-away from homelessness** (they are staying with friends or family and not

contributing to the rent)

- **93% are minority** (30% Blacks, 62% Hispanics, 1% Asian-American)
- **The average age is 36 years old**
- **Most are parents or grandparents caring for children**

To effectively deliver these services, LIFT utilizes a corps of volunteer teachers and has deployed an innovative partner-site strategy that significantly leverages LIFT's resources. Consequently, LIFT is recognized as one of the largest and most effective providers of adult literacy services in the entire state of Texas. LIFT consistently makes a profound difference in the lives of thousands of adults who had no where else to turn for help.

### **Other unique facts about LIFT:**

- Last year LIFT averaged 104 free literacy classes a week, offered at the central location and 14 community partner sites.
- LIFT's class completion rate is a phenomenal 46%, compared to the national average completion rate of just 10% for adult literacy classes. According to the Education Resource Clearinghouse (ERIC), one of the top reasons students drop out of adult literacy programs is that they feel they do not belong. LIFT's class structure is a key retention strategy. Adults are in class with similar adults, which increases their sense of belonging and mutual support.
- LIFT'S ESL (English-as-a-Second Language) program is uniquely suited to those who have a low level of literacy in their native language. Illiteracy in one's native language is often a barrier to success in typical ESL programs.
- LIFT's volunteer teachers are a vital part of LIFT's programs. In 2004, in-kind contributions from volunteer teachers totaled over 12,000 hours, valued at over \$200,000. LIFT typically retains 90% of its volunteer teachers from year to year. The steadfast commitment of these teachers inspires LIFT students to persevere in working toward their goals.
- During this time of tightened economy, LIFT has managed to do more with less. In the last three years, LIFT has dramatically increased its number of students (from 500 to almost 2,500 per year) while reducing its cost of service delivery from \$690 to \$190 per student.
- In November 2004, LIFT was honored by the Center for Nonprofit Management for Excellence in Board Governance.

**Staff:** LIFT maintains an extraordinarily lean staff of only five full-time and eight part-time personnel. Using Full-time Equivalents, that is a ratio of one paid staff person per 300 students. LIFT is staffed as follows:

#### 5 Full-time staff members:

**Executive Director** (Jerome Mosman) - Administers the agency, supervises staff, assists Board in raising resources, oversees fundraising events, publishes the newsletter, and promotes the agency in the community. **Director of Programs** (Cheryl Parker) - Oversees the curriculum, tracks and reports the program outcomes, as well as supervises the Volunteer Coordinator and Outreach Coordinator

**Volunteer Coordinator** (Bill McGrath) - Responsible for volunteer teacher recruitment, training, scheduling and monitoring as well as assists with volunteer training.

**Outreach Coordinator** (Melinda Franklin) - Recruits students and supports volunteer instructors teaching at remote locations, develops new outreach locations, and oversees site coordinators.

**Director of Administration** (Barbara Johnson) - Responsible for tracking the finances, paying bills, keeping records, thanking donors, and maintaining office equipment and office lease.

8 Part-time staff members (equivalent to 3 full-time positions):

**Learning Center Managers** (Melissa Gray, Rudy Murillo) - assist with student recruitment, placement and evaluations and help students overcome barriers.

**Learning Center Coordinators** (Julia Rendon, Florina Jayme) - Work as receptionists and welcome students to LIFT's Main Street classroom facility, schedule intake assessments, and assist with office duties. **Site Coordinators** (Elaine Takacs, Estella Hood, Joe Mickens, Sam Thelin) - Support volunteer teachers, keep attendance records, register and support students.

**Website:** [www.lift-texas.org](http://www.lift-texas.org)

## Proposed Program

### Catalyst for Change

According to the Census Bureau, the number of immigrants in North Texas has more than doubled in the last decade. In fact, *35% of the Metroplex population now consists of immigrants and their children.* A study conducted by Dallas International concluded that a great portion of this immigrant population lives in poverty and does not speak English. *The Dallas Morning News* stated it well: "In the Greater Dallas area, *over 50% of the immigrants hail from Mexico. An estimated 16% of this group is functionally illiterate in his native language, Spanish. This combined with the relatively low percentage of Mexican immigrants who speak English well, creates a myriad of societal challenges.*" LIFT continues to play a unique role in addressing these challenges - the proposed program removes barriers by providing *free ESL classes that are geographically accessible for the lowest literate immigrants.* These maps illustrate the geographic dispersion of Dallas' largest immigrant population, Hispanics. This dispersion highlights the importance of LIFT's partner site approach for which we seek King Foundation support - by bringing ESL to the immigrant neighborhoods, LIFT effectively removes accessibility barriers.

Graph

**Social Capacity:** As of the 2000 Census, there were over 750,000 foreign-born immigrants in the North Texas area and this number is growing rapidly. These immigrants are a vital part of our economy. During the economic boom of 1996-2000, immigrants accounted for 51% of the labor force growth and Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan attributed labor force growth as a key element in the U.S. economy's remarkable growth during this period. Per the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas, "immigrants also have a beneficial effect on the fiscal health of pay-as-you-go government programs, such as Social Security and Medicare. Because immigrants are younger than natives on average and have higher fertility rates, immigration decelerates the aging of the population. This slows the ongoing decline in the ratio of workers to retirees and helps maintain the solvency of these programs." ***However, the degree to which immigrants will bolster the economy depends on how well they assimilate in to America, society and the first step in assimilation is to understand the language.***

**Individual Capacity:** In almost 25% of Metroplex homes, English is not the primary language. Surveys also reveal that immigrants realize that English is not only essential to their success, but that the lack of English skills negatively impacts their quality of life. Lack of English fluency hinders: (1) access to medical care (2) ability to help children with schoolwork and to communicate with the children's teachers (3) understanding of civic rules and responsibilities, and (4) access to potential job opportunities.

The Center for Immigrations Studies has found that immigrants often live in dire economic conditions such that the poverty rate of immigrants and their children is two-thirds higher than the rate of poverty of

natives and their children. *The key to immigrants' successful integration and economic survival is language.* According to *The Economist*, being fluent in English will boost an immigrant's earnings by around 17%.

**Goals/Objectives of the Proposed Program:** LIFT seeks the King Foundation's support *to implement two additional ESL HUB sites* per LIFT's Strategic Plan Goals. LIFT's ongoing strategy is to work with community partners to establish ESL classes at partner sites in areas of the community that are currently underserved. A HUB Site is a partner site that can support 3 or more classes at the same time, serving 80 to 100 students at a single time. Current LIFT ESL partner sites are:

All Nations United Methodist Church	Forest Meadow Jr. High*
AVANCE at David G. Burnet Elementary School	Head Start - Walnut Plaza
Cathedral of Hope Church*	Mi Escuelita Cockrell Hill
Catholic Charities Marillac Center	Mi Escuelita Maple
Christ United Methodist Church*	Trinity Presbyterian Church
Dallas Salvation Army	University of Texas at Dallas*
First Presbyterian Church*	Zaragosa Elementary School

\* Indicates a HUB site

LIFT currently has a waiting list of 12 potential partner sites. LIFT's strategic plan calls for 22 partner sites in operation in FY 2005-2006.

### **Program Implementation**

Start-up activities at two new partner sites represent **one-time costs**. Once agreements are reached, volunteer teachers are recruited and trained, classrooms are set up, and the first set of classes are completed, then the maintenance of a site requires only basic services from LIFT staff. These basic services include student placement, evaluations, intake assessments, and helping individual students overcome potential barriers. The partner site manages the aspects of the program that pertain to the physical site and LIFT's trained volunteer teachers provide instruction at the site and are allowed, after the initial class, to move up to the next level with the same students. The primary ongoing cost for these programs is the cost of materials (student workbooks) which are consistently provided by LIFT donors.

This partner-site model has worked very successfully. In fact, it was the implementation of this partner-site model that allowed LIFT to increase the number of students served (from 500 to almost 2,500) without major increases in staff or funding. LIFT now serves almost 60% of its students at partner locations. Leveraging LIFT's resources, the donated use of these partner facilities is **valued** at almost **\$300,000 per year**.

HUB sites are particularly effective partnerships in that start-up costs are even better leveraged when a site has enough classrooms to offer the full range of ESL courses or multiple sections of the same course, depending on student need.

## **Program Overview**

Most Dallas-area ESL programs are designed for students who are proficient at an 8<sup>th</sup> grade level in their native language. Over 55% of Dallas adults, English and non-English speaking, read at or below the 4<sup>th</sup> grade level and over 16% of Mexican immigrants are illiterate in Spanish. LIFT is the only local organization that specializes in ESL instruction for students who have a low level of reading proficiency in their native language.

LIFT's ESL program is a series of five classes:

- ESL 0 - Literacy
- ESL 1 - Low Beginner
- ESL 2 - Beginner
- ESL 3 - High Beginner
- ESL 4 - Low Intermediate

Pre-testing determines the beginning class or level and post-testing determines if students advance to the next level or repeat the class. Class sizes are 15 to 20 students. Each level of class meets four hours a week (two-hour classes, twice a week or a four-hour class once a week) for 13 weeks. Upon completion of each level (every three months), LIFT holds a graduation ceremony that includes family and friends followed by a reception with refreshments provided by LIFT staff, volunteers, and students.

The curriculum used is *English ASAP* (which has a workplace focus) or *Real Life English* (which focuses on daily living activities), both published by Steck Vaughn. Each class works on reading, writing, listening and speaking in topic areas such as "personal communication," "our community," "our country," "daily living," "food and shopping," "home," "health care," "employment," "finances" and "transportation and travel."

## **Outcome Measurements**

ESL students are given the Steck-Vauglm standardized test prior to beginning the course, at fixed intervals during the course, and upon exit. The results are tracked and analyzed, in order to allow adjustments in the program to occur in a timely manner. It is a program objective for each student to improve at least one competency level.

ESL students also set personal goals for themselves. The ESL program objective is for 75% of the students to improve on 50% of their personal goals. Sample ESL goals include helping children with homework, communicating with children's teachers, using the telephone book, reading street and bus signs, reading bills, filling out applications, opening a bank account, communicating with employers and co-workers, and reading prescription labels and other directions.

In 2004, ESL outcomes were as follows:

- 76% of ESL students improved on at least half of their personal goals.
- 91% of ESL students improved at least one competency level.
- 99% of ESL students advanced to the next level or repeated the class (99% retention rate).

## **Target Population**

The partner sites selected will be located in areas that are easily accessible to low-income, low-literate immigrants. It is anticipated that the students added through these additional ESL HUBs will be demographically similar to the current LIFT student population. The current demographic profile of LIFT's ESL students is as follows:

- 95% are low/moderate income
- 99% are minority (1% Blacks, 92% Hispanics, 1% Asian, 5% Other)

It is anticipated that this expansion will serve a minimum of 80 students per HUB site (at an expansion cost of just \$125 per student). Because these are HUB sites that can, by definition, provide multiple classrooms, there will be room for growth as more neighborhood immigrants learn about the free program. Over time, the total number served at the HUB location will average over 240 per year (a minimum of three classes offered three times a year).

## **Request**

LIFT respectfully requests of King Foundation, \$20,000 to fund the start-up of two HUB sites for delivery of ESL services to low-literate immigrants. This innovative and collaborative approach allows LIFT to stretch its grant money to deliver ESL education to far more immigrants than would be possible using the traditional model of program delivery. The community partners allow LIFT to use their classrooms and facilities free of charge. In 2004, this in-kind donation from partners was valued at almost \$300,000. LIFT recruits and trains the volunteer teachers for the sites, though often the partner provides many of the volunteer teachers. In 2004, LIFT's teachers donated in-kind hours valued at over \$200,000.

LIFT has a proven record of developing these partnerships with schools, faith-based organizations and non-profit agencies with like missions of assisting people with limited English proficiency or who are functionally illiterate. LIFT's fourteen community partners are listed in the "Proposed Program" section of this grant request. LIFT's strategic plan calls for the operation of 22 partner sites in FY 2005-2006. LIFT currently has a waiting list of 12 potential partners, with the majority of these possessing enough classrooms to become a future HUB. A HUB is a partner site that can provide a minimum of 3 concurrent classrooms that will serve 80-100 students at a single time.

A "start-up" is considered complete when the first 3-month long class session has been completed. At that point, the site becomes much more self-sufficient and requires much less hands-on work by LIFT staff. With start-up funding provided by King Foundation, LIFT would move ahead negotiating with these pending partners in order to implement the ESL Literacy program at two HUB locations. Once the start-up activities are complete, the site will be supported under LIFT's general operating budget.

### **Other Sources of Funding:**

The following organizations are some that provide general operating support for LIFT's ESL program:

[names omitted]

In addition, [name omitted] has provided funding to expand capacity at existing partner sites so they can become HUB sites. [Name omitted] has provided funds for start-up HUB sites to be located in Tarrant County. Many individuals and numerous corporations also support LIFT. At this time, LIFT does not receive any state or federal funding.