

# A History of Adult Learner Leadership in California Library Literacy Services

## 1985

Curtis Aikens sees a commercial for the Marin County Free Library Literacy Program and at age 26 decides to learn to read. Today, he is a popular television and radio personality, a celebrated chef and culinary consultant, and the published author of four books including *Curtis Cooks with Heart and Soul*. Royalties from his books continue to support literacy services across the country.

## 1988

The first New Reader Conference is held in Oakland. This is a huge step toward the empowerment of the adults who have received literacy services. A “Bay Area New Reader Council” is formed to serve as an advisory arm to the California Literacy Campaign.

## 1990

The New Readers Council stages a rally on the steps of the State Capitol in Sacramento to thank legislators for supporting literacy programs.

*The Drum*, a collection of writings by literacy students is published by the Bay Area Literacy Network (BALit). These essays, from 48 new adult readers, have been chosen by their peers.

## 1993

Darlene Garcia, the state’s first “Adult Learner on Staff” is hired by Alameda County Library. The importance of having someone who has benefited from literacy services on staff is recognized as invaluable and in time over 20 libraries follow suit.

A series of *Oakland Readers* are published by Oakland Public Library from the stories of adult learners. The *Readers* are a hit throughout California, are picked up for distribution by New Readers Press and Peppercorn Press, and twice make the Public Library Association’s annual list of best materials for adult new readers.

## 1994

The first ever *Easy Reader Voter Guide*, a non-partisan guide for “new voters and busy voters” is produced by the New Readers Council, with support from a federal LSCA grant through the California State Library, Santa Clara County Library and Oakland Public Library. The original circulation of the guide is 10,000 copies. Today over 4 million will be circulated statewide (including newspaper reprints) and partners include the Secretary of State’s office and the League of Women Voters.

*The Teacher Who Couldn’t Read* is published. The autobiographical work of John Corcoran, a high school teacher who bluffed his way through life, tells how he ultimately confronts his poor literacy skills by approaching the Carlsbad City Library and successfully learning to read as an adult.

## 1996

The first and only statewide Adult Learner Conference for learners from all types of adult literacy programs is sponsored by the State Literacy Resource Center and the State Collaborative Literacy Council. Over 30 library literacy learners attend with 80+ adult learners from other programs.

## **1999**

Using federal LSTA funds, the State Library creates a new initiative designed to train adult learners working as staff at library literacy programs and to encourage more libraries to employ their adult learners. Staff development meetings for ALOS, managed by the adult learners themselves, begin and continue to occur annually.

Millie Anderson earns her GED at the tender age of 91 with help from her volunteer tutor and the staff of the Lompoc Public Library Adult Reading Program. She is also legally blind.

## **2000**

The first Henry Huffman Leadership Institute is created as a training ground designed by and for learners. Hosted by Santa Clara City Library, the number of graduates from the Leadership Institute continues to grow each year that it is held, and in 2005 with support from the California State Library, adult learners from around the state are able to participate. In 2006 the Institute is held in both Northern and Southern California (hosted by the Inland Library System Literacy Committee) and nearly 60 adult learners graduate.

## **2001**

Writer to Writer, a writing challenge for adult learners presented by the State Library and the California Center for the Book, kicks off. Learners are asked to write to the author of a book that has inspired them. The annual "Books Change Lives" ceremony recognizing the winners will attract First Lady Sharon Davis, authors and State legislators.

## **2004**

Through a federal LSTA grant through the California State Library, San Francisco Public Library, in cooperation with Common Knowledge and the Bay Area Library and Information System, launches Project Money, a curriculum and website to help tutor/learner teams who are working on basic money skills including, savings accounts, banking, credit cards, and income tax.

## **2006**

Adult learner leaders from around the State gather in Sacramento to plan for the future.

Ruben Dozal, Jr., from Vision Literacy (Santa Clara County Literacy Program) publishes his book, *My Dad's Thoughts, Bits and Pieces of Life*

*(Compiled by Valerie Reinke, California Library Literacy Services)*