



Seeds of Success

ANNUAL REPORT 2017

Dear Friends,

I love to work in my garden. Preparing the soil in the spring, planting the seeds, watching the plants break through the dirt, and tending them as they grow is immensely gratifying to me. I also find satisfaction in analyzing the results of my efforts, adjusting if needed, and planning for next year's garden.

First Literacy was started with a seed of an idea and has grown into a thriving organization serving thousands of adult learners, thanks to your commitment. Your gifts enable us to support adult literacy programs and their learners through our First *Literacy Lab* grants, offer best practices workshops for adult educators, and support adult learners continuing to college by awarding scholarships and providing mentors.

In this report of our activities in fiscal year 2017, you'll learn about a First *Literacy Lab* project that has taken root in the community. ABCD Mattapan developed a curriculum for teaching English that involved a community garden. As with many successful First *Literacy Lab* projects, this one became a workshop and has been replicated at another program. This is just one example of First Literacy's work sowing seeds of success.

You'll read a reflection on our work nurturing the educators – the people who are on the front lines of adult education in an environment that is increasingly hostile to the people whom we serve. And you'll meet a highly educated asylee whose passion for unearthing the truth brought him to the United States under conditions that would make even the strongest among us pause.

With your support, we continue to give adult educators opportunities to grow as professionals through both our First *Literacy Lab* grants and our workshops. College scholarships reward adult learners who have persisted and are taking full control of their futures, for themselves, and their families.

We are flourishing because of you. Your gifts, and your belief in the power of our work to change lives, sustain us. I thank you for your continuing commitment and generosity.

Skye Morrison Kramer
Executive Director



When Riva Pearson and Brian Jordan, ESOL teachers at ABCD Mattapan, took their class for a field trip to a nearby community garden, they were pleased at how willing students were to practice English. The students—all Haitian women—spoke fondly of growing things in their home country. They expressed a desire to learn the vocabulary of gardening in the United States. As responsive and creative teachers, Riva and Brian hatched a plan to offer a summer-long ESOL class using the theme of gardening as a base for expanding speaking, listening, reading, and writing. ABCD

Mattapan, like many small programs, does not hold classes over the summer due to budget restrictions, and as a result, students lose some of their progress between June and September when they have minimal chances to practice English. So how would they fund it?

As program coordinator, Riva knew about First Literacy's *Literacy Lab* grants and, after securing City Growers as a collaborative partner for her project, submitted a proposal to First Literacy, where it was enthusiastically funded. Students practiced reading seed packets and maps, acquired the vocabulary of fruits, vegetables, and the environment, and discovered the potential of using community gardens. They learned English from their ESOL teachers and science from the City Growers educators.

Because of this successful project, Riva and Brian have developed a unit on food and nutrition that has been integrated into their ESOL curriculum. Through First Literacy, they have shared their teaching materials online and have presented at workshops, inspiring other teachers to explore learning English “in the weeds.” *Literacy Lab* projects, like ABCD Mattapan's, help teachers think beyond the workbook page when designing instruction for adults with a wide range of needs and interests.

Small grants, like small seeds, go a long way toward achieving big results.

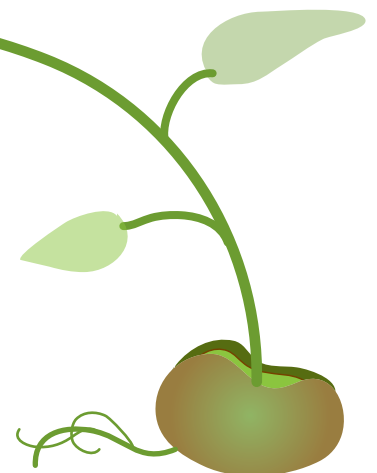


Strong teachers are at the heart of student success. Through a First Literacy Lab grant, our best instructors were given the opportunity to grow and deepen their practice—through piloting, evaluating, and scaling innovative classroom practices. In a field often short on resources, but long on teacher dedication, this opportunity was invaluable.

— Gina Frey, North Shore Community Action Programs

WITH YOUR SUPPORT...

- **373** adult learners participated in 14 *Literacy Lab* projects.
- **173** learners benefited from projects that strengthened their programs.
- **199** learners participated in projects that will improve the entire field.
- **93** learners improved their English through technology.
- **122** learners benefited from new curriculum developed in their programs.
- **36** students participated in projects that prepared them for employment.



One year ago, I introduced myself in First Literacy's annual report as the newly-hired Director of Programs. I focused on my conviction that professional development for Adult Basic Education practitioners is a cornerstone of quality education for adults seeking to acquire the skills they need to improve their lives.

A year later, I take pleasure in reflecting on the work we have accomplished. We implemented the robust series of pedagogical workshops planned by my predecessor; we also *added* sessions, including workshops that helped practitioners understand—and help their students respond to—increasingly confusing and frightening immigration policies affecting so many of our adult learners in Greater Boston and across the state.

One particular workshop, *Reading Whole Books with ESOL Students*, stands out for me. By drawing from reading research and by sharing their classroom experiences, the presenters stimulated other teachers to reach beyond worksheets and to build a library of high-interest, low-level books for their students to enjoy.

To ensure that we planned effective and responsive professional development for 2018, we conducted a survey asking practitioners what they wanted and when they wanted it. We used this data to plan another year of offerings.

My appreciation for the teachers and administrators who attend our workshops continues to grow. So, too, does my own growth as an educator and staff developer.

Lenore Balliro
Director of Programs

During the 2016-2017 academic year, First Literacy presented workshops on a wide range of topics including:

- Visual Storytelling: Using Photography to Teach English Language Learners
- Approaches to Writing for Students' High School Equivalency, College, and Careers
- Helping ESOL Students Become More Effective Self-Directed Learners
- All You Need to Know About the GED and What It Means for Massachusetts Programs
- Digital Resources to Create Independent Learning Opportunities
- Know Your Rights: A Workshop for ESOL Teachers
- Reading Whole Books with ESOL Students
- Math Instruction for High School Equivalency

WITH YOUR SUPPORT...

- **18** workshops were held throughout the academic year.
- **5** teachers' circles brought educators together to learn and share.
- **Over 6,000** students were impacted by their teachers' participation.
- **60** hours of professional development were presented.
- **214** educators attended workshops throughout the year.
- **64** attended more than one workshop or teachers' circle.



Attending and learning from the First Literacy workshops are the most important parts for my professional development. It's not only just for me, but also for the teachers in our program. We always share what we learned in your workshops and we adapt the ideas to our classes.

—Huiling Chen, BEST Corp



Scholarships Mentorships

Ciro Valiente fled his home in Venezuela when his life was threatened during the 2013 political uprising. As a journalist, he was targeted by the police for telling the truth about what was happening to protesters. “I never wanted to leave. I had an established life, a wife, family, friends, and a job. I am an asylee now and I can never go back with the current government in power.”

When **Ciro** arrived in the United States, he struggled. “I didn’t know the language. I didn’t know anything about living here. I had to start my life over. But I didn’t give up.”

Ciro found El Centro del Cardinal in Jamaica Plain, where he completed English language classes and graduated from their Bridge to College program. He received two First Literacy Scholarships to study business management at Bunker Hill Community College, while also working full time at El Mundo, New England’s premier Latino news outlet.

As a digital media editor and video producer at El Mundo, **Ciro** help tell the stories of Latinos in the region. “The immigrant community has a lot of problems because when they arrive here they are alone and without guidance to help them reach their goals.”

A leader in the Latino and ESOL community in Boston, **Ciro** personifies what we value in our scholarship recipients – perseverance in the face of hardship, giving back to your program, and a commitment to lifelong education. We are honored that **Ciro** is sharing his gifts and skills with First Literacy as a member of our Board of Directors.

First Literacy’s most recent scholarship recipients include adults from 13 countries, including the United States, whose goals are as diverse as the individuals themselves. We are confident that, like **Ciro**, all will succeed.



New Scholars

Dora Ajanel
Kamala Areesamarn
Sherita Dawson

Diandra Drivas
Janiah Garcia
Girlene Green

Eliene Lima da Silva
Braeja’Nee Marquez
Patrick Mbanga

Rasha Habis Obyat
Marie Regine Paul
Hilvalin Rodriguez

Morad Simoum
Sangbana Wagbe
Junying (Ethan) Zhu

Continuing Scholars

Luciana Castilho
Wilfrix Cherazard

Bianca Cornejo
Ana Maria Dos Santos

Hasna Hassoun
Sama Mahmood

The Mayor Thomas Menino Scholarship, created to honor Mayor Menino's commitment to adult literacy education and the potential of all students, was awarded to Marie Regine Paul.

The William Berman Scholarship, which recognizes Mr. Berman's years of dedicated service to First Literacy and his love of learning throughout his life, was awarded to Diandra Drivas.

The 11-10-02 Foundation awards scholarships to hard-working students throughout the country. The 11-10-02 Foundation Scholar is Ethan Zhu.

WITH YOUR SUPPORT...

- 15 first-time scholarships were awarded.
- 6 continuing scholarships were awarded.
- **First Literacy scholars** attend:

Bunker Hill Community College | MassBay Community College |
Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences | North
Shore Community College | Northern Essex Community College |
Quincy College | Roxbury Community College | Urban College



First Literacy thanks the individuals, corporations, and foundations who believe in and support our work. The following list recognizes those donors who made gifts between July 1, 2016 and June 30, 2017.

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Scholarships are made possible by gifts from Bank of New York Mellon, Eaton Vance Management, the Hamilton Company Charitable Foundation, and The 11-10-02 Foundation.

* Literacy Leaders supported the 28th Corporate Spelling Bee

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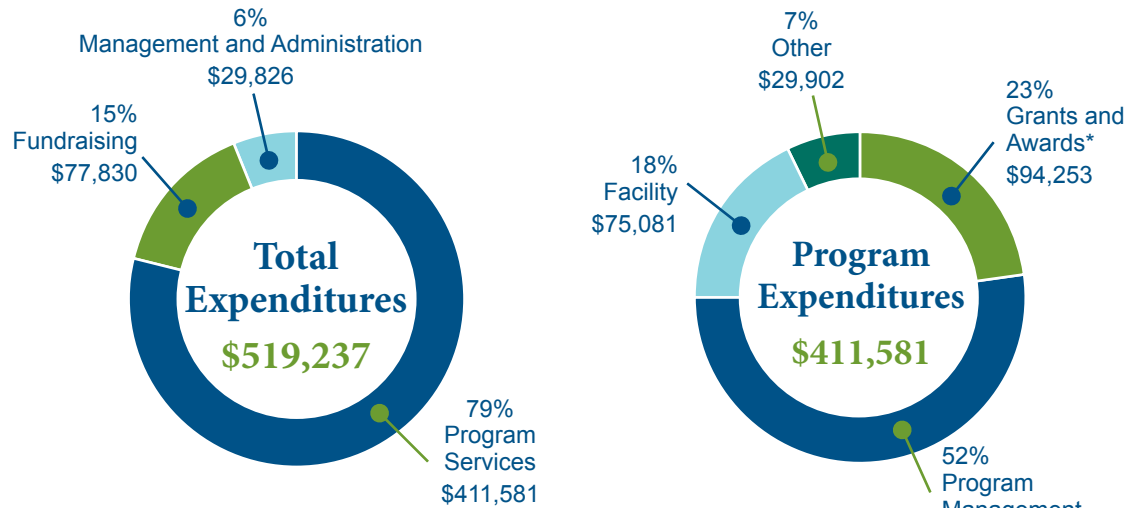
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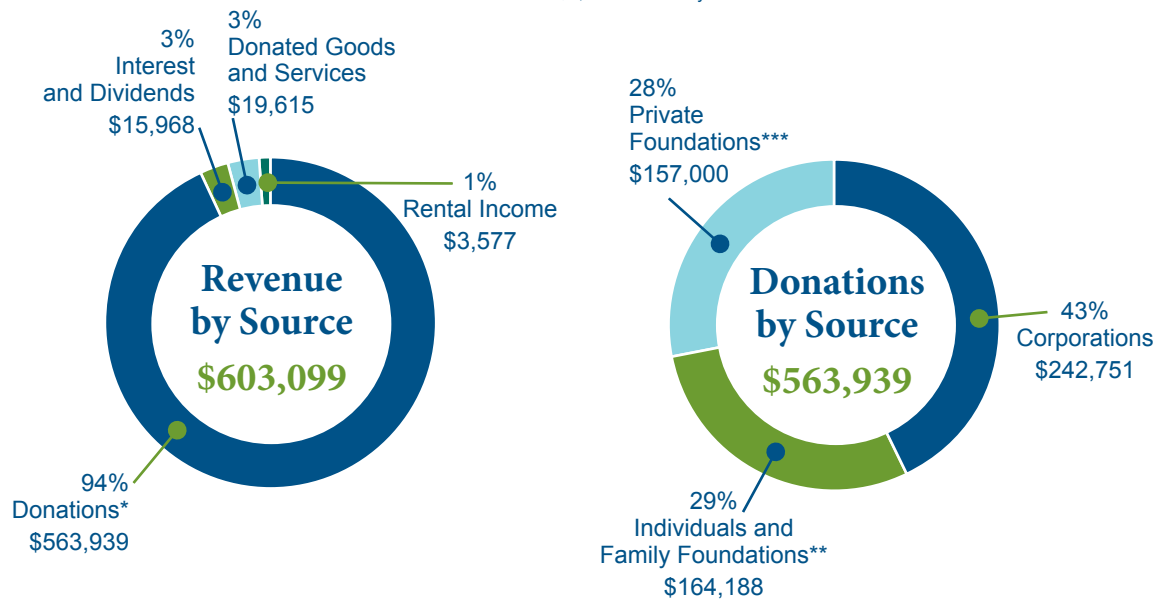
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CREDITS:

Editors: Lenore Balliro, Paula Dincer,
Skye Morrison Kramer, Madeline Meador
Design: Cindy Beck Goldstein



*Includes \$66,082 for First Literacy Lab grants, \$21,750 for scholarships and mentoring, and \$6,421 for literacy awareness activities.



*\$112,237 is temporarily restricted.

**\$16,237 is temporarily restricted.
***\$96,000 is temporarily restricted.

Demographics

reflecting the ethnicities, gender, and ages of our scholarship recipients and the students who benefit from *First Literacy Lab* support.

Ethnicity

Asian	192	Caucasian (US born)	11	Middle Eastern	13
African	16	Haitian	47	Other*	38
African American	6	Latino	66	Total	394

*Includes learners from Armenia, Belarus, Eastern Europe, Moldova, and Russia

Gender

Female 320 | Male 74

Ages

16-24	30	40-65	199
24-40	156	65+	9