

How can Adult Literacy Teachers and Students Help Health care providers?

by Julie McKinney, World Education, Inc.

- Adult literacy teachers AND students have a lot to offer the health field
- They can help health care agencies improve their health literacy
- *If you can make health care delivery easier for adult learners, it's easier for everyone*

Adult Literacy Students

- An organized pool of hard-to-reach patients
 - Health Programs are looking for them
 - Adult Literacy Programs have them
- Diverse in language and culture
- Low literacy
- Scheduled gatherings
- Come with their own liaison (teacher)

They are the End Users

- They are the ones whose opinions count
- They know what they want
- They know what they need
- They know what the barriers are
- They know how they can best understand the information
- They know what supports they need to access services
- *If it's easier for adult learners, it's easier for everyone*

Why Adult Education Programs?

- Culture of education supports learning
- Teacher as liaison
- Safe and trusting environment allows people to be honest
- More face time

What Exactly Can Students Do to Help?

- Pilot test written materials and other things
- Do a walk-through of the building to assess ease of access
- Provide information through focus groups
- Promote health services to those in their community

Pilot Test Materials

- Written information: brochures, etc.
- Hospital forms
- Oral communication systems
- Interpreter services
- *If it's easier for adult learners, it's easier for everyone*

Case Study: LAC Pilot Testing

Literacy Assistance Center (LAC), NYC

– www.lacnyc.org

Contracts with health organizations to develop plain language print materials

Example: Revised a brochure for The Community Service Society of New York's Managed Care Consumer Assistance Program

Walk-Through to Assess Ease of Access

- Have you ever gotten lost in a hospital?
- Adult learners can do a walk-through to identify the barriers to finding their way around (also called a walking interview or wayfinding activity)
- They can assess signs, set-up, staff helpfulness, etc.
- This activity can inform the administration
- *If it's easier for adult learners, it's easier for everyone*

Case Study:

HALL Team Building Walk-Through

- National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) created a research team with students and teachers:
- The HALL Team: Health and Adult Literacy and Learning
- Navigated through the hospital and recorded their experience
- Also tested written materials for readability

Case Study:

HALL Team Building Walk-Through

- Found many barriers to navigating the hospital
- Discussed the barriers with hospital administration
- Wrote a Guide:
 - *The Health Literacy Environment of Hospitals and Health Centers*
 - <http://www.ncsall.net/?id=1163>

Article: Navigating Healthcare

<http://www.ncsall.net/?id=1156>

Provide Information Through Focus Groups

- Adult education classes lend themselves to focus groups
 - Used to communicating this way
 - On home turf: safe environment
 - Already gathered and scheduled
- Can give better information than forms or surveys
- More face time >> more honesty and depth
- Flexible: can give feedback on all kinds of things
- *The advice they give will benefit everyone*

Case Study:

Wisconsin Literacy and Paul Smith

- Dr. Paul Smith, Wisconsin Literacy, Wisconsin Research & Education (WREN) Network, American Academy of Family Physicians Foundation
- Wisconsin Literacy worked with Dr. Smith on interacting with adult learners through focus groups
- Dr. Smith led 6 focus groups with adult learners
- Goal: to explore how low literacy impacts their health and health care
- Findings ultimately helped to improve communication and health care delivery
- <http://wisconsinliteracy.org/>

Promote health services to those in their community

- Adult learners can reach out to friends, family, and community groups and recruit patients who need services but need support to access them
- Adult learners can be the best advocates in their own communities
 - Diverse group in language and culture
 - Can make personal connections with others
- Adult learners want to share what they learn
- Win-win-win situation! (And it snowballs!)

Case Study: Literacy Students as Health Advisors

- Community Learning Center and Cambridge Health Alliance's Volunteer Health Advisory Program
- Adult Learners were trained as community health advisors
- They conducted health promotion activities in their communities and at the Learning Center
- They provided a more diverse group of advisors than the Health Alliance were able to recruit on their own
- http://www.ncsall.net/fileadmin/resources/fob/2008/fob_9b.pdf

Challenges

- Time
- Money
- How to find programs to partner with
- Culture of Health and Literacy fields
- Each field really valuing the potential contribution of the other

Questions...?

- It all sounds great, ***but*** _____
- What makes it harder/easier to connect with an adult literacy program?
- What would you like to know about the adult literacy field that would help bridge the gap?
- How can both parties be sure to get what they need?

Thanks for Listening!

Here's my information:

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