

COSHOCTON TRIBUNE

Sunday

Oct. 20, 2002

Cloudy today, high 55.
Cloudy tonight, low 37.
Sunny Monday, high 54.
Sunny Tuesday, high 51.



Details on Page 4A

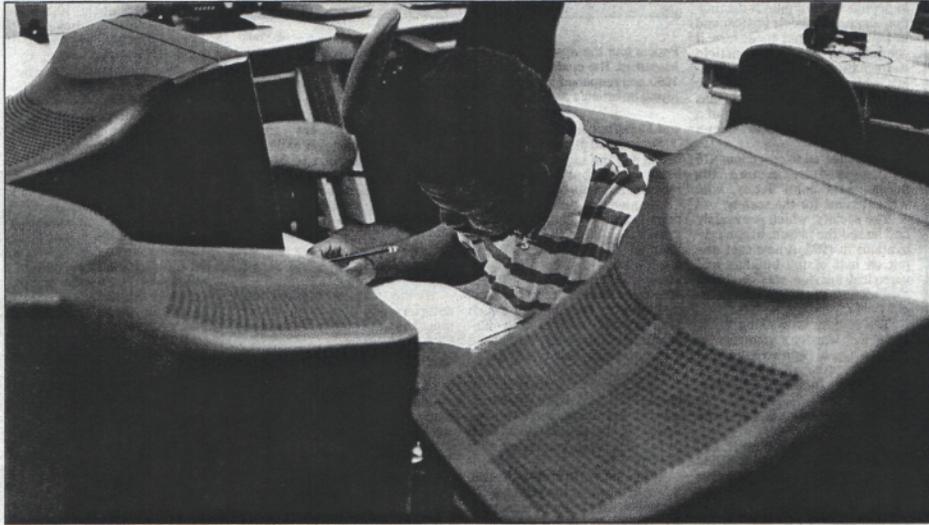
A REFLECTION OF HOME.

spaper

www.coshocotribune.com

\$1

Literacy in Appalachia



TREVOR JONES/Tribune

Tim Williams prepares for a practice test in the resource center of Coshocton County Adult Basic and Literacy Education. Williams has been in the ABE program for close to two years to earn his general equivalency degree.

Program aims to give all children an Even Start

By DAVE SCHAFER
Tribune Staff Writer

COSHOCTON — The Coshocton City Schools District, Job and Family Services and Head Start are trying to give all children an Even Start toward a productive future.

Even Start, a new program that is a collaboration between the three entities, is a family-literacy program. It's designed to help parents and their children become better readers together, while building the



Berg

parental-offspring bonds.

"Not only are they helping parenting, but they are giving them the tools to help their children," said Gina Ficociello, executive director of the Literacy Initiative of Columbus.

The program, part of the national Even Start, is funded by a grant from the Ohio Department of Education. The four-year grant provides \$154,000 this year for the program — which is 90 percent of the operating costs — and then decreases the amount received in each of the next three years by 10 percent each year. The Coshocton Even Start program has to re-apply each year, and therefore has to prove each year how effective it's been.

The goal of Even Start is to help parents become literate so they can teach their children to be literate, said Francie Berg, coordinator for early childhood/school improvement for Coshocton City Schools, who wrote the grant proposal.

Berg said this program deals with two issues teachers in a classroom can't address: Problems presented by an individual student's maternal education and social-economic status.

There are four components to Even Start, which will be housed in the computer lab at Central Elementary School.

The first part is teaching adults to read, and obtaining their general equivalency degree if they want. The second component is early childhood education for children up to the age 8.

See EVEN START, Page 8A

A GED: One man's plan for a better future for his family

By DAVE SCHAFER
Tribune Staff Writer

COSHOCTON — Two years ago, Tim Williams was reading at about the eighth-grade level. Now the 23-year-old is just weeks away from testing for his general equivalency degree.

"A lot of times we don't have someone at that low of a level stick around. But Tim's not your regular student," said Lynn Jacobs, director of the Coshocton County Adult Basic and Literacy Education.

"He's going to get it. Sooner or later," Jacobs said about Williams' GED, about Williams grasping the concepts before him on a computer screen, about Williams' goals in life.

"He sees his goal ... so he's really been pushing. He's going to be one of those who you really feel good about when he gets it."

For Williams, the degree is just the start of what he wants to do.

Distractions

He grew up in Sarasota, then Port Charlotte, Fla. His single mother raised four children — three boys, Tim is the oldest — and was, Williams said, overprotective.

Her children weren't allowed to leave the house often because she feared for what would happen to her babies and what they would get involved with, Williams said. When Williams went to school, it was a chance for him to socialize, not learn. As he got older, his mother let him go outside with his friends, but she set strict limitations on where he could go and how long he was allowed out.

Her fears proved correct. Eventually, "city life" got to Williams and he abandoned his school work altogether. He made it to

"I could be stupid about the situation, or I could really try. I decided to really try."

— Tim Williams, who is just two weeks away from testing for his GED

Related stories

Books open doors
Do your part: Volunteer
See Page 6A

the 10th grade before he dropped out.

He said he always planned to go back to school, eventually. After all, he said, his younger siblings looked up to him, and he wanted to show them that they can make something of themselves.

At the time he dropped out of high school though, he admits, he wasn't the best role model.

When his girlfriend at the time wanted to move to Coshocton in early 2000, Williams agreed. She had family here, and Williams said he saw this as an opportunity to start over, and to get away from the bad influences in Florida.

"We both came up here with a pretty good plan," he said.

His plan was to get a job in a factory, then get his GED and go to college. Soon after he arrived, he took a job working second shift at Pretty Products.

See WILLIAMS, Page 8A

Center offers educational, literacy services for adults

By DAVE SCHAFER
Tribune Staff Writer

COSHOCTON — Lynn Jacobs wants to work himself out of a job.

Jacobs, director of Coshocton County Adult Basic and Literacy Education (ABLE), wants everyone in Coshocton County to have at least a high school general equivalency degree (GED) and the basic educational skills to compete in the workforce. Unfortunately, Jacobs fears that won't happen.

Very few people are completely illiterate — less than 5 percent — according to Karen Scheid, executive director of the Ohio Literacy Network, and that number is decreasing. But a 1993 National Adult Literacy Survey conducted by the Department of Education found 16 percent — or about 4,266 — of Coshocton County adults were at the lowest defined literacy level. In the survey, adults were defined as people 16 or older not attending school. People at level one literacy can read just a little, but not well enough to fill out an application, read a food label or read a simple story to a child.

See ABLE, Page 5A

Coshocton County Adult Basic and Literacy Education

Through the use of textbooks and computer software, the Coshocton County Adult Basic and Literacy Education (ABLE) program helps people obtain their general equivalency degrees, re-train for a new career or just gain educational skills for living — such as reading to their children. The ABLE learning center features 15 separate workstations and two instructors. The program begins with orientation and an assessment test. Instructors then create a lesson plan for each student. The student works independently, but instructors are available to help.

The service is free to adults, and ABLE pays the cost of the GED test for those who complete the ABLE program. In 2001, ABLE served 179 students, 34 of whom earned a GED. The learning center is open 8 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. Monday and Thursday, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Tuesday and Wednesday.

For more information, call Lynn Jacobs at 622-1020, extension 1865.

Williams

From Page 1A

"It was lovely," he said. "We both had a car, we got a place, we were going to enroll in school. Everything was going good."

A little more than a month later, the girlfriend left Williams, returning to Florida.

Williams stayed here because he feared he'd fall right back into his old ways if he returned to Florida.

Then he was fired from the factory and lost his apartment, car, and even his dog.

"It was like a country music song," he said.

But as he sat there, on the rock at the bottom of how bad things could be, he thought about all the people who are doing what they wanted to with their lives, because they took advantage of the opportunities education gave them.

He thought of his mother, who raised four children, earned her GED and attended two years of college. He thought about his younger siblings, who look up to him.

"I really want to start over and do it right. Putting learning together with things you love doing, that's A plus."

Steps forward

One day in late 2000 or early 2001, Williams got back on his feet. He found a place to lay his

head at night, he took a job at a fast food restaurant, and he walked in to the Adult Basic and Literacy Education center on Seventh Street.

Williams' assessment test showed that besides the eighth-grade reading level, he lacked even basic math skills, Jacobs said.

Williams said he thought they wouldn't accept him because he tested so low.

He was wrong.

"The teachers really care about you," he said. While the teachers haven't pressured him, Williams said, they have supported him.

"I could be stupid about the situation, or I could really try. I decided to really try."

Williams' attendance hasn't been consistent over the last two years. He's missed whole weeks at a time — either because of his jobs at the time, "me being stupid and just not going" or, once, because of a stint in jail for driving with a suspended license.

Jacobs admits he's given up on Williams at times. But Williams always came back — he even attended an ABLE session while in jail.

Since he started attending ABLE classes again, Jacobs has found that Williams has more motivation. He started dating Cara Harsh, who had a son of

her own. That son has become like his own to Williams.

Then, in August, Harsh gave birth to another son, Darius, Williams' biological child. Now, Williams, said, he's working to build a good future for his family, including his siblings, who he regularly talks to on the phone.

"I want to be able to say to them, 'Look what I've done. You can do the same,'" he said.

Harsh has always encouraged Williams.

"I think it's good that he's working toward (a GED)," she said.

Broken stereotypes

When Williams' picture and an essay about the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, went up on ABLE's Web site, he took his family into the center to view it.

That was touching, and a little funny, to see Williams so excited about it, Jacobs said. Williams can be an intimidating figure with his stocking cap on and all, Jacobs said. He's the type of person you'd see, then cross the street to pass on the other side.

"You would think of him as a certain paradigm, and he breaks that down," Jacobs said. "He's not what you'd expect."

Williams took his practice GED in early October. Jacobs

wanted to wait because Williams is just on "the edge" of being ready. But Williams was so excited, Jacobs thought he couldn't wait anymore. So he administered the test.

Jacobs said he is certain that if Williams doesn't pass the test, it will just motivate him more.

After Williams gets his GED, he wants to attend the Coshoc-ton Education Center when it opens next year and get his practical nurse's license. He also wants to study music — he plans to release an album next year — and learn computers "inside and out."

After Williams gets his GED and gets into college, Harsh is going to work toward her GED — she finished high school one health and one gym credit short of graduation. Then she also wants to go to college and earn her practical nurse's license.

Then, Williams and Harsh say, the future will be limitless, for them and their children.

"There's a lot of opportunities out there," he said. Two years ago, Williams couldn't have seized many of those opportunities. Now, he's hoping to give even more chances to his own children.

dschafer@nmcogannett.com
295-3452

Description of literacy levels

Level one: Most of the tasks in this level require a person to read relatively short text to locate a single piece of information that is identical to or synonymous with the information given in the question; locate a piece of information based on a literal match or enter information from personal knowledge into a document; or perform single, relatively simple arithmetic operations, such as addition.

Level two: Tasks at this level are more varied and require readers to locate a single piece of information in the text; however, several distracters or

plausible but incorrect pieces of information may be present, or low-level inferences may be required.

Level three: Tasks in this level tend to require readers to make literal or synonymous matches between the text and information given in the task; or to make matches that require low-level inferences. They also ask readers to integrate information from dense or lengthy text that contains no organizational aids such as headings.

Level four: Many of these tasks require readers to perform multiple-feature matches

and to integrate or synthesize information from complex or lengthy passages; and to provide numerous responses, but do not designate how many responses are needed.

Level five: Tasks in this level require readers to search for information in dense text that contains a number of plausible distracters. They ask readers to make high-level inferences or use specialized background knowledge.

For a sample test to see which level you are, go to <http://nces.ed.gov/naal/defining/measprose.asp>

basis of OhioReads, Gov. Bob Taft's major education initiative. The program is designed to have elementary students reading at grade level before they go to middle school.

OhioReads relies on one-on-one tutoring and provides grants to classrooms and communities. The program has provided nearly \$23.5 million to Appalachian counties — schools, communities or stipends — since 1999. That includes \$536,214 to Coshocton.

"Our goal is that every child will leave elementary school in our state reading at grade level," said Fern Conte, public affairs manager of OhioReads. "And we need to do better.

"We are of the belief that providing one-on-one intervention to struggling students is the best (way to build literacy). Today, teachers can't do it alone." By involving the community, there are more teachers for the individual students.

Making progress

The Associated Press recently reported that scores on the reading portion of fourth-grade proficiency tests dropped at more than half the schools involved in OhioReads. But Conte and Padgett said Appalachia is home to two of the OhioReads'

model programs, one in Hocking County and one in Jefferson County. In one of those schools, South Bloomingville Elementary in the Logan-Hocking Local School District, 67 percent of the fourth graders passed the reading portion of the proficiency test, up from 53 percent in 1998. The state average for 2001 was 56 percent.

At the other school, Hills Elementary in the Indian Creek Local School District, 83 percent of fourth graders passed the reading part of the proficiency test in 2001, up from just 46 percent in 1998.

Family Literacy is another buzzword in erasing low literacy rates. The family element is one of the many reasons for low literacy: When reading isn't important to the parents, it isn't something the parents pass on to the children and the children often continue the low-literacy tradition. Jacobs said that's a cycle that needs to be broken.

Ficociello said using the Family Literacy approach is the best way to achieve progress and future goals. There are four parts to the approach: Literacy classes for the parent, literacy classes for the child, parenting

classes and parent-child together time.

"Not only are they helping parents, but they are giving them the tools to help their children," Ficociello said.

"In Coshocton County, honestly, we are pretty good at helping each other," Jacobs said. "We are getting to the point where we are providing what's needed, but we have to be careful who falls through the cracks."

The Coshocton ABLÉ program is joining the family literacy program. In November, ABLÉ will begin an Even Start program, in which children and parents will work together. The program will target low-level education families that don't have educational values in their family.

Jacobs points out that at age 25, people are already seven years behind if they don't have the necessary educational level for today's workforce. So if the community can get to the children early, it can keep them from falling behind.

On the Web

The National Assessment of Adult Literacy:
nces.ed.gov/naal

U.S. Department of Education:
www.ed.gov

The National Institute for Literacy:
www.nifl.gov

Ohio Literacy Resource Center:
literacy.kent.edu

Literacy Volunteer Connection:
literacyvolunteer.homestead.com

Coshocton County ABLÉ:
www.coshoctonable.com

"I think (family literacy) is one of the keys to breaking the cycle of drop outs," Jacobs said. "We need to find new and better ways to keep children in schools."

For those who do fall behind, there's ABLÉ, Coshocton's primary literacy initiative. Jacobs calls his program "real effective" at helping students get their GEDs or gain whatever skills they need. It's flexible enough that people who have a lot of things to do throughout the day can find time on their own to work on the program, he said.

"The good thing about adult

education is that the students already have motivation," Jacobs said. "They want to be here. They made mistakes sometime in their lives, and they want to fix that."

Jacobs' dream is to reverse the cycle.

Someday, he hopes, there will be no need for adults to go back to any type of school because they will have all the education they need. He knows that's just a pipedream, but that's the idea that gets him out of bed every morning.

dschafer@nncogannett.com
295-3452

ABLE

Coshocton scores well comparably in that level. Statewide, 18 percent of adults — more than 1.5 million — were at level one. Throughout the 29 Appalachian counties, the average percentage was 18.7. Nationwide, the percentage was even higher: 21 percent to 23 percent of adults — or 40 to 44 million — were at the level.

"There is a misconception that rural areas tend to have lower literacy rates. It's not true," said Gina Ficociello, executive director of the Literacy Initiative, a coalition that serves central Ohio.

In Franklin County, home to the city of Columbus, the percentage was 16. A quarter of the adults in Cuyahoga County — which includes Cleveland — were at level one. In New York City, the percentage was 36; in Seattle, it was 18.

But the news isn't all good for Coshocton. According to the survey, half of Coshocton adults ranked in the bottom two levels of the five-level rating. Level two was defined as someone who "can perform more complex tasks such as comparing, contrasting or integrating pieces of information but usually not higher-level reading and problem-solving." Statewide, 45 percent of adults were in the bottom two levels. Nationwide, the percentage was 46 to 51.

A follow-up survey is expected to be completed later this year or next year.

For Jacobs and Ficociello — and many like them — 16 percent at level one, or even 1 percent, is too high.

In the workforce today, it's hard enough to get a sustainable job with a high school diploma or a GED, Jacobs said. "But without credentials (a diploma), the chance to get a meaningful job is nearly nonexistent."

Good reading skills play a vital role in getting the most out of life according to Joy Padgett, director of the Governor's Office of Appalachia. "The written word has to be common to you.

"If you can prosper without being able to read, you've done far better than winning the lottery."

Padgett and Jacobs point out the prevalence of computers, and the need to be able to read to use them. The Coshocton ABLE program is computer-based, so the students learn computer skills as well, Jacobs said.

"Literacy is more than the ability to read," Ficociello said. "There's so much that we don't often think of, that we just take for granted." For instance, reading stop signs, bus schedules, a newspaper, detour signs and medicine labels.

Overcome challenges

But progress has been made in the last 20 years, Ficociello said. The best progress so far has been understanding and beginning to access and recognize learning disabilities.

Scheid said people in the field have realized about half the people who enter an adult-education program have some sort of learning disability.

And, she said, progress has been made in understanding the diversity of needs for people who have low literacy. For example, according to the National Institute for Literacy, 25 percent of adults in level 1 were immigrants just learning to speak English. More than 60 percent didn't complete high school; and more than 30 percent were over 65. More than 25 percent had physical or mental conditions that kept them from fully participating in work, school, housework, or other activities, and almost 20 percent had vision problems that affected their ability to read print.

People are understanding the importance of reading, and of having a degree, Scheid said. According to her, 75 percent of adult Ohioans — those 18 and over and out of school — had a high school diploma in 1990; in 2000, it was 86 percent, although the percentage of people graduating from high schools stayed about the same.

Appalachian counties have some unique challenges in overcoming low literacy rates. Padgett said these counties have better schools than many rural areas — particularly inner cities — but overcoming the Appalachian stereotype is a major factor in achieving success in this area.

"We must shake the myth that people can't achieve and succeed as much (in Appalachia) as people in other areas," she said.

She said whatever solution is developed, it has to be on a local level, and it has to be a step-by-step process. That's why the tutoring system is so important.

The tutor system is the one endorsed by Scheid of the Ohio Literacy Network. And it's the

Even Start

The third element is parenting education, teaching parents how to work with their children and how to communicate with the school.

"We really want the parents to become not only the child's best teachers, but also their best advocate," Berg said.

The fourth component is PACT, parent and child time. This "supported" together time is meant to build parent-child relations, Berg said. In Even Start's model, there is an instructor to show a parent how to interact with the child, and suggest more effective ways to use their time together to help the child learn.

"The more I learn, the more I think its one of the great ideas in literacy training," said Lynn Jacobs, director of

"We really want the parents to become not only the child's best teachers, but also their best advocate."

— Francie Berg, coordinator for early childhood/school improvement for Coshocton City Schools, who wrote the Even Start grant proposal

Coshocton County Adult Basic and Literacy Education. "If you don't know how to help your kids, we can give you the skills to help."

Jacobs called it an "Ap-

palachian thing." Mom and Dad can't read, so they can't help Junior read, so he grows up not being able to read. This program breaks that generational cycle, he said.

Even Start will tentatively provide service from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Mondays through Thursdays. The program will run all year, including five weeks during the summer.

The national organization says a family must attend the program for four months to see any change. Berg said it takes a year for any sustainable change to take place, and that's the length of time she would like to see people commit to the program.

Berg said her first-year goal is to have 22 families attend the program. She said she understands this is a time-consuming program, and requires commitment from the parents. And she doesn't expect parents to necessarily make it to all the programs all four days a week.

Even Start Open House

There will be an informative open house to preview the Even Start program at 9 a.m. Thursday, and other meetings for people interested in the program Oct. 29, Nov. 7 and Nov. 18. The plan is to open the program's doors in early December. For more information, call Francie Berg at Central Elementary, 622-5514, Lynn Jacobs at Coshocton County ABLE, 622-1020, extension 1885, or Head Start, 622-3667.

Whatever they can attend will be helpful, Berg said, and the program allows for flexibility — parents can take the adult literacy portion somewhere else, if they want.

The important thing, Berg said, is for parents to come as often as they can.

"We know that it is going to be a family issue if we are

going to make a difference," Berg said.

"There are all kind of barriers (to education), and if we can do things many different ways, we can get around them. This is one of those ways."

dschafer@nncogannett.com
295-3452