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Madison, WI 53713
608-244-3911

Literacy Network™

Improving Lives Through Literacy

Mission: Literacy Network helps adults in Dane County build skills, reach goals, and connect communities.

January 28, 2022

Dear Members of Madison Common Council,

I am writing in support of the Imagination Center at Reindahl Park (ICRP).

For more than 15 years, Literacy Network has been a proud partner of the Madison Library System, whose staff have demonstrated a high level of commitment to improving the skills of families in our county's most impoverished community. Because of this strong relationship, your investment will be put to work efficiently and immediately.

The mission of Madison Public Library ties closely with Literacy Network's mission. Madison Public Library provides space and technology for many Literacy Network classes. MPL staff help promote Literacy Network services to patrons. We look forward to strengthening our partnership with the library through this project.

The ICRP will be a wonderful opportunity for our community to come together to pursue a wide variety of goals. With its innovative combination of intentionally created spaces, it will be ideal for community collaborations among neighbors, social service providers, and civic programs. It will be a strong asset in an area of our community that most needs a public gathering hub.

Literacy Network is proud to be one of the partners in the planning process. We look forward to partnering with ICRP to improve civic innovation by expanding our citizenship classes. Benefits of citizenship include the right to vote, access to public-sector jobs, the ability to travel with a US passport, and the opportunity to sponsor a family member to immigrate to the United States. Naturalized immigrants see an 8-11% increase in family income after becoming citizens, according to a 2012 study by the USC Center for the Study of Immigrant Integration. This is often enough to bring them out of poverty. Citizenship also confers other long-term gains for the whole family: when one member naturalizes, the others have access to more social contacts, capital investments, and improved employment. Citizenship status is truly a multi-generational asset.

Demographic estimates show that in one in seven adults in Dane County, about 55,000 people, struggles with reading, writing, and/or English language skills. Literacy skills are the strongest predictor of an individual's health status – more than age, income, education level, employment status or racial or ethnic group. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, a lack of health literacy skills makes it extremely challenging to find trustworthy information about safe practices, access to healthcare, and other crucial resources. Adults with lower literacy skills are more vulnerable to COVID-19- and vaccine-related misinformation, which has spread widely via social media. In 2021, Literacy Network provided current, accessible COVID-19 vaccination education and information to more than 400 low-income adults with low literacy in Dane County. As a

result, by June 2021, 78% of our students reported they were vaccinated. At the time, Dane County had a vaccination rate of about 50%. Our partnership with the ICRP will help improve expand health literacy for adults with low literacy.

The partnership with ICRP will also expand economic opportunities by opening more post-secondary education options to adult learners through our successful partnership with Madison College.

“The Literacy Network Transitions Program helps many English language learning students in our community gain access to valuable career advising, and to learn about Madison College careers of study. Further, the college has assigned advisors to this project to help connect with students with careers of interest at the college. Students who are co-enrolled in Literacy Network have proven to have higher levels of success at Madison College. Based upon data collected between 2016-2020, students have shown that they are more likely to show gain on the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) reading exam, more likely to attend more hours of classes, and more likely to enroll in a subsequent semester.” – Kevin Foley, Administrative Manager, School of Academic Advancement at Madison College

We look forward to our continued collaboration. Please contact me at jeff@litnetwork.org or 608-268-6539 with any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jeff Burkhart". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Jeff" being more prominent than the last name "Burkhart".

Jeff Burkhart

Executive Director

Literacy Network