

## Summary

Advocacy Outreach, a 501 (c) 3 nonprofit corporation, providing anti-poverty services in Elgin and surrounding Bastrop County, a rural portion of Central Texas, proposes to expand its Family Literacy Program.

Recent funding cuts (loss of a federal discretionary grant distributed through Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs) have strained the organization's resources and resulted in a 25% reduction of services. A Family Literacy Program that had been offered four days each week is now offered three days per week. Advocacy Outreach proposes to expand the program to four days weekly, adding an additional 140 hours of educational services to the Elgin community between February and August 2008. Fifteen thousand dollars is requested to return the program to its former level of service delivery.

A lesser funding option is also available. Another casualty of the funding loss was the educational site visits, or *field trips*, that helped motivate family learning. An annual trip to Half Price Books in which parents and children selected books has had to be eliminated from plans. Funding of \$2,000 would sponsor an outing in which participants, parents and children, purchase books of their own selection.

The Family Literacy Program is designed to meet the needs of the whole family—parents, infants/toddlers, and school-aged children. The program has five major components: adult education, parent training, early childhood education, interactive literacy activities between parents and children, and home-based case management services. Adult education consists of classroom instruction, supplemented through a multi-media approach (computer, video, print text), in English as a Second Language and Adult Basic Education (for adults who have not achieved a high school diploma or equivalent). Parent training examines childhood development with an emphasis on how children learn and offers parents strategies for teaching their children. While parents attend classes, infants and toddlers attend an Early Childhood Development Center where English language acquisition is emphasized. Parents and children together participate in interactive learning activities. Support services, such as transportation and child care, enable those who are most in need to access services. Case management helps families overcome the daily living crises that tend to derail academic persistence and provides assistance to parents transitioning from the program into employment or higher education.

The Family Literacy Program helps interrupt the intergenerational cycle of poverty by enabling parents and their children to develop literacy skills that lead to success. Parents increase their earning potential and children develop the academic abilities needed to continue to higher education.

## **I. Contact Information**

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## **II. Mission**

Advocacy Outreach, a 501 (c) 3 nonprofit corporation, has a mission to reduce poverty by providing support services for the poor and disenfranchised residents of rural Central Texas. Advocacy Outreach provides an array of services that address the needs of low-income families in Elgin (population 8,007) and surrounding rural areas, from financial assistance for short term crises to education services that have a long range impact on whole families.

## **III. Educational Program**

The Advocacy Outreach Family Literacy Program located in Elgin is designed around five major components: early childhood education, adult instruction in English as a Second Language (ESL), Adult Basic Education, parent training, interactive literacy activities with parents and children, and home-based case management services. Classes are conducted at a variety of sites. Sacred Heart Catholic Church provides ample space for daytime classes in its educational annex and a small house on its site has been developed into an Early Childhood Development Center that can accommodate approximately 30 children ages 0—3. Advocacy Outreach maintains a 13-station computer lab at its day resource center where students gain technology literacy. The Public Library holds weekly interactive literacy sessions for parents and their preschool-age children. The school district also makes a school bus available during the day (between its regular ISD routes) to pick up families who lack transportation and to shuttle students between sites. This innovative solution was developed to overcome a barrier familiar to many small towns—lack of adequate facilities to house all services beneath one roof.

A weekly schedule currently provides for: 15 hours of adult education, 15 hours of early childhood development and 5 hours of parent-child interactive literacy activities. The case manager visits each family in their homes at least once monthly and is available on a daily basis to overcome crises as they arise. Case management connects families to other support services and helps parents overcome obstacles that would otherwise result in their leaving the program, such as finding medical or emergency financial resources or counseling for domestic problems. Twenty hours of adult education have been offered in all previous years of this program, but a funding cut in September necessitated a recent reduction in services offered.

Adult education instruction is provided by two teachers with specialized training and experience. The “English as a Second Language” teacher, a native Spanish speaker, has 7 years experience working with adults in an educational setting and specialized training in the field of bilingual adult education. The “Adult Basic Education” instructor is currently participating in an intensive training program aimed at helping adults with learning disabilities (one of only 37 teachers in the state selected by Texas Education Agency for this training.) Her current students have the benefit of her access to the most current research-based adult learning practices.

Instructors use a variety of curricula, including texts, workbooks, and software from educational publishing companies such as McGraw-Hill/Contemporary and New Readers Press. Instructors also gather materials from a variety of sources, including newspapers, internet sites, maps, tax forms, and health or social services forms. They utilize speakers and representatives from community institutions, advocacy and civics groups, including monthly presentations by the County Extension Agent and the Career Specialist at Texas Workforce Center.

When families join the program, adults receive a baseline assessment recommended by Texas Education Agency (BEST Plus for ESL learners, TABE 9/10 for adult basic education students) that determines their functioning level (Beginning ESL through Advanced Adult Secondary) and after they have received 60 hours of instruction they are given a progress test which indicates whether they have made gains or advanced to a higher functioning level. Classes are structured to accommodate multi-level instruction.

Young children, 0—3 years, attend the Early Childhood Development Center during the hours that their parents are in classes. There, they participate in a newly developed early childhood curriculum, Partners for Literacy, that Advocacy Outreach was selected to field test in a three year pilot study that was completed in August 2006. The curriculum was developed by a renowned research team, Drs. Wasik and Sparling, who developed the Abecedarian Project 30 years ago for young children who had been identified as being high risk learners. A longitudinal study spanning 30 years has shown that the early academic gains were maintained by participants and that they continued to achieve success in adulthood. The new curriculum differs from the former (Abecedarian Project) in that it includes a component for parent-child interactive literacy activities. Parents learn activities that promote the literacy development of their children (learning games) and parents are taught the educational theories behind the use of the learning games, so that they develop an understanding of developmental processes. Research has shown that, once established, this parent-child learning bond will continue throughout the years that children attend school and will increase the academic success of the children who participate.

School-age children of participating parents are brought by school bus to one of the educational sites after school where they meet their parents for a supervised homework session. Parents assist their children to complete assignments under the supervision of the program's teachers. In this way, parents also learn what their children are learning; they have ready help available from instructors to explain concepts that they may not be familiar with. At the end of the day (5:00 pm) families go home with homework completed to enjoy the remainder of the evening without struggling to balance homework assignments with preparing the family meal or other family activities.

### **Proposed Program Participants**

The area of Central Texas east of the capital is experiencing a population surge. Bastrop County had a 50.9% population increase between the 1990 and 2000 Census reports and the population has continued to mushroom. The Texas State Data Center estimates the population has grown another 26% since 2000. Recent immigrants comprise a significant portion of the increase. Sixteen percent of Elgin ISD is considered Limited English Proficient, a term applied to English (second language) learners who have only a minimal ability to communicate in the

language. Fifty-seven percent of Elgin students are economically disadvantaged. Parents who lack English language fluency find that job opportunities are limited or nonexistent. Envision Elgin, a regional planning study, reports that 50% of adults in Elgin lack a high school diploma or equivalent. The study ranks adult education as one of the city's highest priority needs.

The Family Literacy program proposes to serve 40 families, consisting of approximately 40 parents, 50 children ages 0—3, and 15 school-age children.

### **Proposed Program Budget**

Funding for the program is provided by Texas Education Agency through a federal program, Even Start Family Literacy. The budget is \$200,000 annually and is awarded for cycles of four years. Advocacy Outreach will end its fourth year of the current cycle in August 2008. Availability of future funding depends on U.S. legislative appropriations. Advocacy Outreach has relied upon other funding to supplement Texas Education Agency funds to fully implement the family literacy program. Unfortunately, a grant that had helped support the program in the previous three years was not awarded to Advocacy Outreach for FY 2007-2008, a loss to the family literacy program of \$20,000. Cuts had to be made and staffing was reduced by 20%. The program had been offered four days per week and was cut back to three days. This has slowed the gains of learners and it has also negatively impacted the number of families served (because learners are not transitioning out as quickly, making room for more families). Of 40 projected families, only 18 have been served since September. An additional day of services would allow 8 families on the waiting list to join the program now and would allow staff to begin recruiting again.

#### Current Family Literacy Program Budget

(all staff are currently 32 hrs/wk)

Program Coordinator	\$ 28,661	Education Annex Rent	\$ 12,000
Case Manager	\$ 26,869	Supplies/materials	\$ 2,508
Teacher	\$ 26,869		
Teacher	\$ 26,869		
Instructional Aide	\$ 12,539		
ECDC* Director	\$ 22,391		
Child Care Aide	\$ 16,122		
Child Care Aide	\$ 12,586		
Child Care Aide	\$ 12,586		

\*ECDC (Early Childhood Development Center)

Total: \$200,000

Revenues from Texas Education Agency Even Start: \$200,000

#### Proposed Program Expansion (Funding Option #1)

(staff expanded to 40 hrs/wk, and addition of 8 hrs per week, for remainder of 28 weeks, February--August)

Teacher	\$3,617 (\$15 per hour x 8 hrs/wk x 28 wks + FICA)
Teacher	\$3,617 (\$15 per hour x 8 hrs/wk x 28 wks + FICA)
ECDC Director	\$3,014 (\$12.50/hr x 8 hrs/wk x 28 wks + FICA)

Child Care Aide	\$ 2,170 (\$9/hr x 8 hrs/wk x 28 wks + FICA)
Child Care Aide	\$ 1,688 (\$7/hr x 8 hrs/wk x 28 wks + FICA)
Child Care Aide	\$ 1,688 (\$7/hr x 8 hrs/wk x 28 wks + FICA)

Total: \$15,794

(Total amount of request from Texas Rural Communities is \$15,000)

**Supplemental Service (Funding Option #2)**

Educational site visit (field trip) to Half Price Books in Austin.

Books for approx 70 (parents = children) (avg \$20/person) = \$1,400

Lunch (all day trip because of distance) (avg \$8.50/person) = \$600

Total: \$2,000

**Proposed Deliverables**

The Advocacy Outreach Family Literacy Program was commended by Texas Education Agency for its accomplishments in FY 2006-2007. Adults and children demonstrated gains in literacy and language acquisition. Children also met state-defined Indicators of Program Quality: that K-3<sup>rd</sup> grade students' school attendance would be 95% or more of school days; that 90% would advance to the next grade; that 75% would meet or exceed the school district's reading standard; that 70% of students 3-5 yrs would show progress between pre and post testing on the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test. Children in the Advocacy Outreach Family Literacy Program actually performed at 100% on these Indicators.

Deliverables or outcomes proposed for the current program include that:

- 50% of Adult Basic Education (ABE) students will demonstrate gains on the standardized assessment measure Test of Basic Education (TABE 9/10);
- 40% of ABE students will increase a functioning level according to TABE 9/10;
- 65% of English as a Second Language (ESL) students will demonstrate gains on the standardized assessment measure Basic English Skills Test (BEST Plus Oral and BEST Literacy)
- 50% of ESL students will increase a functioning level according to BEST Plus or BEST Literacy;
- 70% of adult students with a goal of entering employment will enter employment by the end of the first quarter after exiting the program.
- 75% of K-3<sup>rd</sup> grade students will meet the district's reading standard;
- 70% of children 3—5 yrs will demonstrate improved English language acquisition on the standardized measure Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test.

## Proposed Schedule

Monday	Tuesday
9:00 - 12:00 Staff Meeting	9:00 - 10:10 Adult Ed Class (also Preschool)
Planning, Integration, Case Management	10:30 - 11:20 Library visit
1:00 - 5pm	11:30 - 12:00 Parents/preschoolers interactive literacy activities
Lesson Planning, Make up Classes	12:00 – 12:45 Lunch
	1:00-3:15 Adult Ed Class (Preschool)
	3:15 – 4:45 Parents/School-age interactive literacy activities

Wednesday	Thursday
9:00 – 10:50 Computer Class (Preschool)	9:00 – 11:00 Adult Ed Class (Preschool)
11:00 –11:30 Parenting	11:00 – 11:30 Parenting
11:30 – 12:00 Parents/preschoolers interactive literacy activities	11:30 – 12:00 Parents/preschoolers interactive literacy activities
12:00-12:45 Lunch	12:00-12:45 45 Lunch
1:00-3:00 Computer Lab (Preschool)	1:00 – 3:15 Adult Ed Class (Preschool)
3:15 –4:45 Parents/School-age interactive literacy activities	3:15 – 4:45 Parents/School-age interactive literacy activities

Friday
9:00 – 11:00 Adult Ed Class (Preschool)
11:00 – 11:30 Parenting
11:30 – 12:00 Lunch
12:00-12:45 Parents/preschoolers interactive literacy activities
1:00 – 3:00 Adult Ed Class (Preschool)
3:00 – 5:00 Clean up and preparation

The schedule is in place from September through July. In the summer, another program, funded by Region 13 Education Service Center, serves school-age children in a day camp setting. One day each week during the summer session, is set aside for educational field trips that include parents, preschool and school-age children. During August, testing, data collection and program evaluation is completed.