

GRAND JURY

County of Yolo

P. O. Box 2142
Woodland, California 95776

2011-2012

FINAL REPORT

YOLO COUNTY ADULT LITERACY PROGRAM

Yolo County Adult Literacy Program
June 4, 2012

YOLO COUNTY ADULT LITERACY PROGRAM

SUMMARY

Yolo Reads (YR) provides free tutoring to English speaking adults who want to improve their reading, writing, spelling, and grammar skills. The program is well administered and effective in spite of recent budget cuts. Although budgets initially submitted to the Grand Jury contained conflicting information, the program is well managed and fiscally sound.

REASON FOR INVESTIGATION

The Grand Jury investigated YR to determine if it is fulfilling its purpose to promote literacy in Yolo County by providing free instruction to English speaking adult learners, and to determine if the program is meeting its fiscal responsibilities. The Grand Jury was particularly interested to determine if the substantially reduced budget for 2011-2012 has negatively impacted the literacy program.

California Penal Code Section 925 provides: "The grand jury shall investigate and report on the operations, accounts, and records of the officers, departments, or functions of the county including those operations, accounts, and records of any special legislative district or other district in the county created pursuant of state law for which the officers of the county are serving in their ex officio capacity as officers of the districts."

ACTIONS TAKEN

The Grand Jury interviewed Yolo County Library (YCL) personnel, reviewed documents, publications, and information relevant to YR, and downloaded pertinent information concerning YR from the library website. Items relevant to the investigation were:

- "Yolo Reads", Fall/Winter 2011. Periodical published by YCL
- "Yolo Reads," 1/6/12. An information paper published on the Yolo County web site, www.yolocounty.org
- "Yolo Reads, Adult Literacy Program." (no date) A one page tri-fold brochure placed in all branch libraries providing basic information about the program
- YCL Adult Volunteer Application form
- Yolo Reads Volunteer Information Sheet
- Yolo Reads Learner Intake Form
- "Roles and Goals" progress sheet used by tutors and learners
- Three budget scenarios for Yolo Reads, fiscal year 2011-2012

- Final Yolo Reads budget, fiscal year 2011-2012

WHAT THE GRAND JURY DETERMINED

Overview of the Yolo Reads Program

YR is the adult literacy program for Yolo County and is in its fourth year of operation. According to YCL personnel, “One in six Yolo County residents cannot read and write sufficiently to carry out daily activities at work and home.” YR provides free tutoring to adults who want to improve their reading, writing, spelling, and grammar skills. The YR program is designed for learners 16 years and older who are not in high school and who read below sixth grade level. Learners receive one-on-one support from volunteer tutors, free materials, free computer use, and access to YCL collections. YR operates in the seven branches of the YCL which are located in Davis, West Sacramento, Winters, Esparto, Clarksburg, Yolo, and Knights Landing. The Woodland City Library is not part of the Yolo County Library system and therefore is not part of this report.

The primary focus of the YR program is on individual tutoring in reading and writing, emphasizing skills that are needed for practical, everyday activities. In addition, YR has partnered with four branches of the YCL to offer English conversation groups to limited English speakers. The branches are the Mary L. Stephens Library in Davis, the Arthur F. Turner Branch Library in West Sacramento, The Esparto Regional Library, and the Winters Community Library.

Administration of the Yolo Reads Program

Yolo Reads benefits from a dedicated and highly educated library staff and versatile volunteers committed to the success of the program. The Yolo County Library administers the Yolo Reads program. Until late 2011 a full-time Literacy Coordinator, under the supervision of YCL administrators, managed the YR program. However, that position became vacant in December 2011, and due to budget cuts, has not been filled. YR is now administered by key YCL personnel who devote part of their time to YR duties and responsibilities. Although some YR activities have been curtailed as a result of reduced funding, the main operation of the program remains intact. A part time library assistant (16 hours per week) works exclusively on the YR program.

Volunteers

YR depends heavily on volunteers. All volunteers must complete an application, meet with library staff, and attend training sessions and/or access online training. Most volunteers serve as tutors and work one-on-one with learners. YCL staff determines if a volunteer is suited for tutoring. Library personnel provide training, materials, guidance and evaluation for the volunteers, but seldom engage in the actual tutoring themselves. YR has a number of bilingual

volunteers who serve a diverse county population for whom English is a second language. Volunteers are not given stipends, nor are they reimbursed for travel expenses.

Although most volunteers serve as tutors, a few serve in other capacities, usually assisting the YCL staff who administer the YR program. All volunteers are asked to make a six month commitment. Many serve longer, even for several years, becoming dedicated to their students' success. In addition to other responsibilities, some volunteers lead the English conversation groups.

Adult Learners

YR students are referred to as adult learners. YCL publicizes the YR program through its branch libraries, with brochures, and online, but most of the learners hear of the program by word of mouth. Potential learners meet with a YR staff member who performs an assessment. Learners, like their tutor counterparts, must commit for at least six months. If accepted, learners are paired with a tutor. YR staff works to assure that learners and tutors are compatible.

Tutors and learners first work out a "Roles and Goals" plan of study. Most pairs meet once or twice a week for one to two hours each time, and some pairs continue to work together for two years or more. The number of pairs at any given time is between 50 and 60. At the time of the investigation, there were 50 pairs. The average learner is a 42 year old male. YR conscientiously avoids a school-like setting, so no formal assessment is made of a learner's progress. Instead, the tutor and learner periodically review the learner's "Roles and Goals" sheet to determine which goals have been met and which need further work.

Yolo Reads Finances

Until 2011, the California State Library provided funding for literacy programs. The Federal Government matched the State's allocation. During 2011, the State Library cut off funding for literacy programs, therefore the Federal match ceased to exist. The YR budget for the fiscal year July 1, 2011 to June 30, 2012 is significantly lower than in previous years. According to YCL administrators, the actual cost of the 2010-2011 Yolo Reads program was \$87,527. The 2011-2012 budget has been reduced to \$30,645, which represents an approximate reduction of 65%. Currently all funding for YR comes out of YCL funds.

The Grand Jury determined that YCL has made a concerted effort to cope with the budget shortfall, but program adjustments have been necessary. Various YCL staff members are performing some of the duties of the previous Literacy Coordinator. Tutor training is still important, but one-on-one training has been replaced with group training. Tutors must now borrow some of the training materials instead of getting their own copies.

However, the Grand Jury determined that the core program of one-on-one tutoring of learners has not been adversely affected. English conversation groups also continue. YR staff has shown flexibility in dealing with less money and fewer personnel, and have maintained a viable, meaningful program.

The Grand Jury found that the YR budget for 2011-2012, as presented to the Grand Jury, was in disarray. At one point three different “budget scenarios” were presented to the Grand Jury and not one of them was clear or accurate. Some line item entries were not valid and needed to be removed, and others needed to be inserted or changed. After repeated questioning and requests for budget clarification, the Grand Jury determined that key YCL personnel had not been diligent in using proper budget practices. However, the Grand Jury also determined that, to the best of its knowledge, there was no fiscal impropriety by YCL staff. Ultimately, YCL prepared a clear, well organized budget for the Grand Jury’s review.

FINDINGS

- F1.** YR has a beneficial impact on a small number of people, helping them to improve in basic literacy skills needed for everyday activities.
- F2.** YCL administrators are adapting to changing financial and personnel conditions to maintain an effective literacy program in Yolo County.
- F3.** The versions of the budgets and actual costs submitted to the Grand Jury were conflicting and confusing.

RECOMMENDATION

- R1.** YCL administrators need to follow proper budgeting procedures and prepare a clear, accurate budget for Yolo Reads at the beginning of each fiscal year.

REQUEST FOR RESPONSE

Pursuant to Penal Code Sections 933(c) and 933.05, the Grand Jury requests responses as follows:

From the following individuals:

- Yolo County Librarian, Recommendation R1
- Yolo County Controller, Recommendation R1

DISCLAIMER

This report was issued by the Grand Jury with the exception of one member who may have had a perceived conflict of interest. That juror was excluded from all parts of the investigation, including interviews, deliberations and the preparation and acceptance of this report.