



# Message from the Co-Chairs

*Dr. Annie Norman, State Librarian, Delaware Division of Libraries and Cynthia Sermeyer, Executive Director, Literacy Delaware*

*The term “literacy” is one that evokes an array of images; from toddlers pointing to board book illustrations while sitting on an adult’s lap, to older children combing through library stacks, searching for the latest novel in their favorite series. It is considerably less often that we associate the term with adults, despite the ongoing adult literacy crisis evident across our state and our nation.*

Cindy Shermeyer, the Executive Director of Literacy Delaware, refers to this reality as the *“adult low literacy murmur”* (see Cynthia Shermeyer’s article). We seldom consider the obstacle low literacy poses within our workforce, and even less so do we extrapolate the concept to other areas of knowledge, such as health, technology, and finance.

Many community leaders are confronting this truth and intend to shift Delaware's learning trajectory. The ***Delaware Communities of Excellence Collaborative*** focuses on developing a comprehensive literacy ecosystem that promotes equity and impacts Delawareans to enhance their overall quality of life. While there are other organizations doing collective impact work, there are currently no holistic literacy-based collaboratives that operate across an age range continuum. Our work intends to fill this void.

As you will read in our inaugural newsletter, we have literacy initiatives occurring throughout the Diamond State, spanning all ages. Our current concentration is on traditional literacy, as it serves as a foundation for all others. Delaware Libraries sponsor Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, showcased in Dolly's recent visit to the Wilmington Library. The Delaware Communities of Excellence Collaborative work will expand to other areas, beginning with health literacy, spearheaded by Health Literacy Chair Greg O'Neil. These enterprises all coalesce to create a dynamic and inclusive network of information, contacts, and support, ensuring every Delawarean has the opportunity to *"navigate life as contributing citizens"* (from Tynetta Brown's article).

## Co-Chair

Submitted by: Dr. Annie Norman, Literacy Champion, DE Communities of Excellence and State Librarian, Delaware Division of Libraries

### Imagination Library Enrollment Soars

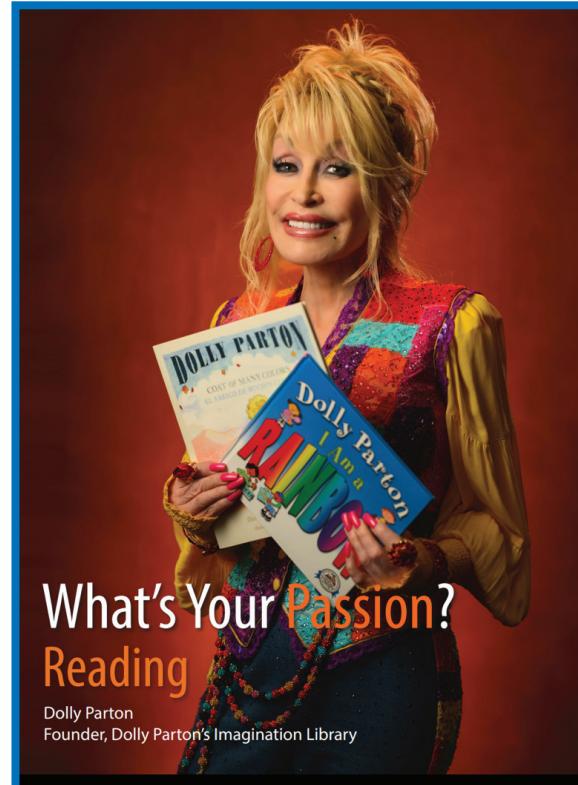
On May 5, 2022, Governor John Carney, First Lady Tracey Quillen Carney, and Dr. Annie Norman of the Delaware Libraries welcomed American icon Dolly Parton for a statewide celebration of [Dolly Parton's Imagination Library](#), to mark that every child in Delaware from birth to age five, is eligible to enroll in this free book-gifting program. Public librarians and library staff, early education advocates, members of the General Assembly and members of the Cabinet also joined in the event.



Inspired by her father's inability to read and write, Dolly Parton started her Imagination Library in 1995 to foster a love of reading for the children within her home county. Today, Dolly Parton's Imagination Library is the world's preeminent early childhood book-gifting program that is dedicated to inspiring a love of reading. In partnership with local affiliate partners, the program mails high quality, age-appropriate books to children from birth to age five —at no cost to families.

"With gratitude to all the partners, it is my privilege to serve as the honorary chair of Dolly Parton's Imagination Library in Delaware," said First Lady Tracey Quillen Carney. "The Imagination Library books are a wonderful collection and I'm grateful I've been able to read them with young Delawareans since the program's inception. I look forward to seeing more Delaware families sign up for this incredible program."

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*"Delaware Libraries are delighted to facilitate Imagination Library for our youngest Delawareans and their families," said Dr. Annie Norman, State Librarian. "Acquiring the reading and library habit early is a foundation for curiosity and success throughout life!"*

In Delaware, every child under the age of five is eligible to receive a gift of a monthly book at no charge to families. Almost 1,500 Delaware children were signed up for the Imagination Library since Dolly's visit was announced, to bring total active enrollment to almost 23,000 Delaware children, and almost 6,000 graduates since 2020.

Families can sign up for Dolly Parton's Imagination Library on Delaware Libraries' website: [delawarelibraries.org/imagination](http://delawarelibraries.org/imagination).

## Co-Chair

*Submitted by: Cynthia Shermeyer, Literacy Champion and Executive Director,  
Literacy Delaware*



Amidst the literacy buzz around Delaware of late, an underlying murmur refuses to remain silent. On May 3, 2022 the adult low literacy murmur was center stage at the virtual Adult Literacy Action Forum hosted by Literacy Delaware, and sponsored by Delaware Libraries, Highmark Health Options, the United Way of Delaware, and PMG Consulting.

Four national leaders in adult literacy: Rebecca Dyer from the Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy; Michele Diecuch from ProLiteracy; Eric Nesheim from Literacy Minnesota; and Dr. David Rosen from the Open Door Collective, were guest speakers at the forum. The topic—the adult literacy crisis we face and the opportunity to make a lasting impact on that crisis in our state.

***“Low literacy exists everywhere, it matters, and it can be addressed at a systemic level, but the solutions have been under-valued, under-funded, and under-researched,” observed Rebecca Dyer.***

The National Action Plan for Adult Literacy 2021 (released earlier this year) was conceived of and convened by the Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy. In her keynote address, Ms. Dyer opened participants' eyes to the challenge of low adult literacy. She explained that the NAP offers a response to the challenge of low adult literacy with ten specific actions under five initiatives with one vision, "a country where every adult can access high quality, effective support to improve their reading, writing, digital and numeracy skills—regardless of who or where they are."

If all adults would be able to read on or above the 6<sup>th</sup> grade, our country would see dynamic changes. The economy would generate 2.2 trillion dollars per year. Poverty would decrease, positive health outcomes would prevail, and children would succeed in school. That's the power literacy holds.

Following the keynote, the other speakers gave valuable insights concerning Delaware's response. Michele Diecuch spoke of ProLiteracy's support and commitment to continued access to high-quality resources and materials. Adult literacy programs are "scrappy" according to Eric Nesheim. But he also encouraged us to look at resources through the lens of abundance rather than scarcity. In conclusion, Dr. Rosen introduced a new name for the field, Adult Foundational Education and shared his thoughts on the NAP.

Several observations stand out upon reflection. First, the event was well attended and well received, with over 70 participants from many different organizations in the landscape joining the virtual conference. Second, adults with low literacy in Delaware deserve greater salience and the opportunity to gain the relevant skills to reap the benefits of higher wages, education, and community engagement.

Finally, Delaware has many advantages it can leverage to do this work. Being small has its advantages in shorter travel times and unique access to our local, state, and national leaders not found in larger states as well. Building statewide collaboratives such as the COE is easier. Our geographic location allows us to connect with programs in other states. In sum, this is our moment to make a lasting impact on our state's literacy challenges like never before.

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# Spotlight: Council Member

Submitted by: Tynetta Brown, Communities of Excellence Advisory Committee Member and President and CEO, Philanthropy DE



Literacy, as an adult (ages 16–65) or as a child is critical to all aspects of daily living.

**Programming designed to ensure that everyone has the ability to proficiently read, write, comprehend and apply what**

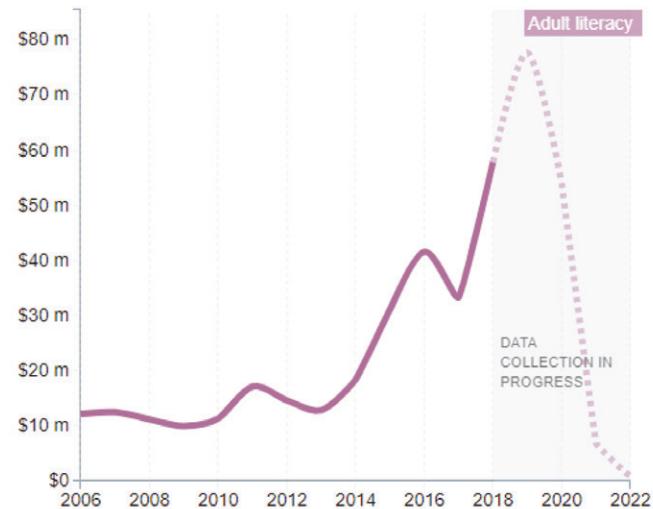
**they learn in order to navigate life as contributing citizens, is a key component in shifting the adult literacy crisis.**

The impact of poor adult literacy on the ability to participate in the workforce, strengthen individual and family economic mobility, manage one's health, among other aspects, has a broad reach. Support from federal, state, and local governments alongside public and private philanthropy all are necessary and contribute to strengthening adult literacy programming and its outcomes.

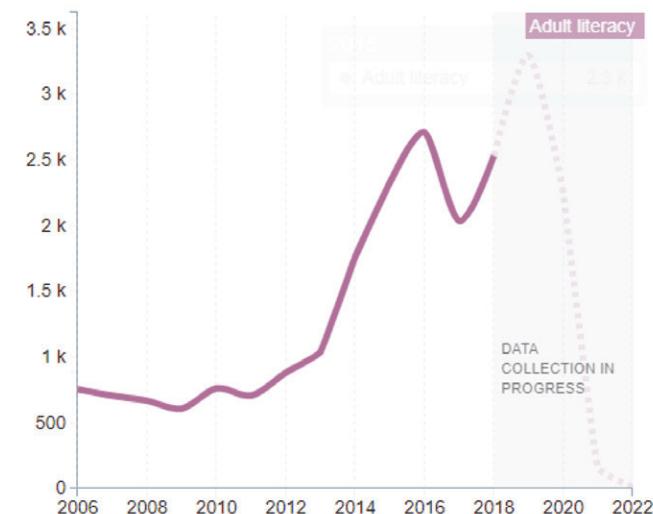
Nationally, according to Candid/Foundation Maps (using tax data and self-reports indicators) the numbers show that from 2006 to the present an estimated \$423.4 million has been contributed to efforts to address adult literacy. At least 4,288 foundations contributed to this number and have awarded over 23,200 grants to over 4,996 recipients. In comparison, it is reported that 26 members of the Delaware philanthropic community have awarded about 84 grants to support adult literacy representing a total of \$1.1 million to at least 26 grant recipients. Obviously more funding support is needed at both national and State levels.

There are a number of funders nationally and statewide who recognize the need. These funders would entertain the opportunity to support adult literacy initiatives in order to halt the ripple affect poor literacy has on our state, local communities, and future generations.

Total Dollar Value of Grants



Total Number of Grants



Source: Candid, Foundation Maps, 2006-Present. Candid relies on tax form data and self-reporting by companies, so it is not an exhaustive source.

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# Health Literacy Chair

Submitted by: Greg O'Neil, MSN, APRN, AGCNS-BS, NPD-BC, Health Literacy Chair and Director, Patient & Family Health Education, Institute for Learning, Leadership & Development (iLEAD), Christiana Care

## At the Intersection of Health and Literacy: Choices



### *What does it mean to understand your health?*

Perhaps it is an intimate knowledge of the ingredients in your food and how they interact with your body. Maybe it is how you take medications or better

yet why you are taking them and how they impact your body, your lifestyle, and your budget. There might be the need to consider a new treatment or heed a warning promoted by the public health department. It could be that your tax dollars are being spent on environmental or regulatory policies that relate to your health and you need to know which candidate to vote for in the next election.

There are countless ways that health can be impacted, especially over the lifespan. Most consumer goods (and the barrage of marketing dollars that follow them) likely do not have individual health or community health as the main driver when communicating to the public. How is it that a society with all the world's knowledge at our fingertips for the first time in human history struggle to achieve basic health?

### *The answer: It's complicated.*

If the pandemic showed us nothing else, it demonstrated that communicating risk, benefits, treatments, illness, and population health is complicated by a highly variable *understanding* of and trust in institutions, local relationships, long-term thinking, basic science, social responsibility, and individual freedoms. We know

that social determinants of health have a large impact on this complex web of information, the availability of resources, and the general culture. We must ask:

- Have we adequately prepared our communities and the individuals in them to navigate this complexity?
- Do our developmental programs and adult-learning systems foster the critical thinking necessary to achieve a fundamental understanding of health from the ocean of competing priorities that our communities are swimming in as they live from day to day?

As clinicians, health systems, and insurers move towards helping populations achieve health, it will be essential that work is done to address and improve the health literacy of our communities. The Delaware Division of Public Health, the University of Delaware and ChristianaCare have recently launched a new effort to better understand the current state of health literacy in Delaware and through a collective impact model are working to bring partners together to develop priority action items.

It is only by truly understanding the nature of the problem that we can begin the hard work of building interventions for health literacy. Innovation, creativity, consistency, and advocacy will be required throughout our institutions to achieve the Healthy People 2030 focus to "eliminate health disparities, achieve health equity, and attain health literacy to improve the health and well-being of all."

**If you are interested in the health literacy work in our Delaware, please contact [goneill@ChristianaCare.org](mailto:goneill@ChristianaCare.org).**

# Early Literacy Chair

Submitted by: Diane Frentzel, Early Literacy Chair and Program Manager, DE Readiness Teams

## Early Literacy—Summer Reading Outreach Program



### About the Program

The Delaware Readiness Teams and our partners are distributing books this summer, beginning in June, as part of the Delaware

Department of Education's (DDOE) Literacy Plan's Summer Reading Program. The theme, goes along with the Delaware Division of Libraries summer reading theme "Oceans of Possibilities."

Along with our books, we are including a bookmark for older children and a recipe card for younger children that lists components of early literacy, including **play, sing, read, write, and talk**. The materials include a QR code that will take you to the [Early Literacy Page](#) on the Delaware Readiness Teams website that has additional resources listed under each of the literacy component areas and is sorted by age.



Diane Frentzel:  
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### Our Impact

Partners from around the state signed up to receive books and other materials, and soon will distribute in their community and programs. They selected the age, language, and how many books they needed for each. We received requests for thousands of books from birth to 5<sup>th</sup> grade and in 14 languages!

We created a [calendar of family friendly community events](#) this summer that will be shared on the website. Please share your family friendly community events so that we can add them to the calendar, and encourage families to use the calendar and engage in family friendly activities this summer. Remember to check out what is happening at your local library as they have many exciting activities planned all summer long.

### Our Partners

The Delaware Readiness Teams thanks the Delaware Division of Libraries, Delaware Department of Education, Delaware Office of Early Learning, Read Aloud Delaware, Literacy Delaware, United Way of Delaware, Kids Count Delaware, Community of Practice, Help Me Grow, First Lady Tracey Quillen Carney, Medical Society of Delaware, the Parent Information Center of Delaware, and the Delaware Chapter of the Academy of Pediatrics.

### Our Partnership Goals

We have convened this group to better understand programs and resources that are available in the early literacy space and to determine the most important messaging for families. The materials created that will be distributed with the books provide a unified message to families about early literacy. Reading is an impactful activity for young children in the summer and we look forward to exploring all the wonderful possibilities that come from a good book.

## Spotlight: Council Member

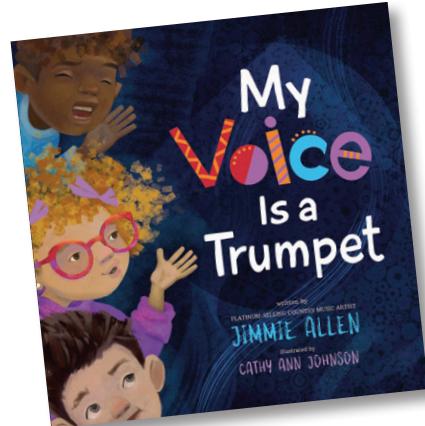
*Submitted by: James Spadola, Communities of Excellence Advisory Committee Member and Executive Director, Read Aloud Delaware*



Delmarva Christian School, who asked, "What do you like best about Delaware?"

Jimmie stated that he loves to fish, and that he just loves where he's from. It's the "one place I can take a break from the entertainment business and be me, and people still treat me the same."

From perusing Jimmie's social media profiles prior to my conversation with him, I saw he posts a lot of inspirational quotes. One tweet that caught my eye said "When chasing a dream, your effort and patience set the boundaries of what you deserve." Unsurprisingly, Jimmie Allen met Jennifer Lopez in 2010 and decided one day he would do a song with her. Showing his effort and patience, 12 years later Jimmie released a song with Jennifer Lopez, titled, "On My Way."



I asked Jimmie to elaborate on that tweet and his work ethic and he said,

***"Hard work sets the expectation for appreciation. When you work for something, you appreciate it more. And then you work hard to keep it. When you set your mind to something, do it, keep fighting for it until it happens. And after it happens, keep fighting for it everyday the same way you fought for it in the beginning. You control your life. You control your destiny. Stay focused on the goal, and don't get distracted."***

Many thanks to Jimmie for joining us and for representing Delaware (and Sussex County) on the world stage!

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### *Ecosystem Facilitated by*

