

## **Rotary and Literacy**

Illiteracy lies at the root of poverty, ranking as one of the prime impediments to earning a living wage. An estimated one billion people -- three fifths of them women -- do not have the literacy and numeracy skills needed to hold a job or get a better one. Helping people learn these skills and become self-sufficient is one of the most critical tools for fighting poverty.

Because girls do not have access to education in many parts of the world, providing women with literacy skills can have far-reaching positive effects. A mother who can read will teach her children to read, helping to break the cycle of poverty for her family.

Although 98 percent of the world's illiterate live in developing countries, more than one-third of the adults in industrialized countries cannot read well enough to decipher prescriptions or fill out employment forms.

### **Rotary's Response**

In 1985, Rotary International declared basic literacy to be a fundamental pre-condition to the development of peace. Rotarians are urged to address a range of literacy issues including primary education, vocational education, teacher training and adult education.

The Rotary Lighthouse Literacy Program teaches students with the Concentrated Language Encounter method. It teaches students through immersion, learning in an activity-based setting.

### **Early Childhood and Primary Education**

In a project supported by The Rotary Foundation's Health, Hunger and Humanity (3-H) Program, Rotarians in Thailand and Australia developed a literacy program that dramatically reduced mass school failure in parts of Thailand. Thailand's government adopted the program for all the nation's schools.

The Rotary Club of Dhaka, Bangladesh, and the Rotary Club of Footscray, Australia, launched a project to bring the Concentrated Language Encounter method of teaching literacy to Dhaka's primary schools in 1994. Since then, more than 4,000 teachers have been trained and 30,000 starter books have been printed.

In Morocco, where illiteracy plagues about half the population, Rotary clubs from Morocco and France renovated an elementary school in a poor rural area near Marrakech. With help from a Rotary Foundation matching grant and other agencies, the Rotarians made repairs, installed solar-power systems, dug a well, furnished the classrooms, and stocked the library. They also provided a teacher for children who leave school to help their families on the farm.

In Cape Town, South Africa, Rotarians are expanding a successful program to train almost 5,000 teachers in Concentrated Language Encounter methodology. This approach is expected to reach about 240,000 students in 1,200 schools in the Province of Western Cape by 2005.

Rotary Clubs in South Korea, Bolivia, and Southern California set up 30 Literacy Libraries throughout California. They spread awareness of learning disabilities to parents, educators, and those who work with juvenile offenders. Libraries have also been established at a juvenile delinquency camp, and at a program for children in the juvenile court system.

Canadian and Indian Rotarians established the *Bombay Pavement College* to give street children both literacy training and entrepreneurial skills. Students receive loans for such small business ventures as shoe shining, car washing, and bicycle repair. Rotary clubs in Calcutta are developing literacy programs for street children in slums and for children in poor rural villages.

### **Adult Literacy Programs**

Nigerian Rotarians are addressing low literacy rates for women in their country. In Osogbo, a Rotary program provides two hours of daily literacy training to market women. In Ibadan, Rotarians coordinate the literacy training component of the vocational training conducted by the National Directorate of Employment.

The Rotary Club of Bridgeport, Connecticut, USA has joined the Literacy Volunteers of America to work with local businesses to teach workers English as a Second Language and basic skills. Eleven club members worked with the group to interview employees to evaluate the project's success.

In India, more than 340 million citizens are illiterate, Rotarians developed the Navjyot literacy campaign, in conjunction with other area literacy initiatives. Navjyot's seven-step program is a means to creating permanent literacy training system. It already includes 88 schools.

The Rotary Club of Marilia-Pioneiro, Sao Paulo, Brazil, along with the Center for Sao Paulo State Industries and the Association of Marilia Foods, launched a literacy project called "Education at Work." It encourages firms to establish workplace literacy programs.

### **Donations of Books**

The Fall River, Massachusetts, USA Rotary Club shipped approximately 15,000 school books, valued at \$225,000, to Uganda in East Africa. The Fall River club coordinated the gathering of books from the 67 Rotary clubs in Rhode Island and Southeastern Massachusetts, USA. Working with "Books for Africa", a nonprofit corporation with the goal of eliminating the book famine in Africa, Rotary has been responsible for one-third of the books delivered to Africa over the past 10 years.

The Rotary Club of Kigali-Virunga in Rwanda is creating the country's first public library. The club's goal is to provide all Rwandans with books, magazines, video and cultural events. They plan to use the library facility to support outreach into rural communities.