**Mission and History**

Tri-County Literacy is a non-profit organization based in Bath, Maine that provides free literacy programs to people of all ages in Lincoln, Sagadahoc and northern Cumberland Counties through our Family Literacy and Adult Literacy services. “Improving lives through literacy” is our mission, brief as a statement but broad in scope and purpose. Through a wide range of programs and projects, we strive to help children and adults develop their literacy skills so they may become competent, healthy, caring individuals who are capable of succeeding through all stages of life.

Tri-County Literacy was formed by the merger of three separate entities: Literacy Volunteers of Bath (1970), Literacy Volunteers of Casco Bay (1982), and *Read With Me* Family Literacy Project (1995). In May 2010, we legally changed our name to Tri-County Literacy. Over our 48 years, Tri-County Literacy has served thousands of children and adults. We have collaborated with numerous organizations and continue to collaborate with Midcoast Maine Community Action Head Start and Early Head Start, Mid Coast Hunger Prevention Program, Adult Education Centers, Career Center, Elmhurst, Spindleworks, and Eldercare Network of Lincoln County. These collaborations encompass programming for the entire age range we serve, from babies to seniors, and include immigrants, the developmentally delayed, and the unemployed.

Our goals for the future are to sustain the programming we have consistently offered families and adults in our region for decades and to devote concentrated efforts to strengthen and expand our newest program, *Read Together*. Our aim is to annually increase this free tutoring program for children beyond our initial pilot target area of the greater Bath/Brunswick region so we may eventually reach children in all towns in our service area and are able to accommodate all families in need that seek literacy help for their struggling school-age children.

**Scope and Impact of Work**

Tri-County Literacy provides assistance in two broad categories: Family Literacy services and Adult Literacy services. We strive to help people of all ages develop their literacy skills so they may become competent, healthy, caring individuals who are capable of succeeding through all stages of life.

Our Family Literacy programs are:

* *Read With Me*: early childhood literacy programming for families with children ages 0-5, in collaboration with Head Start and Early Head Start programs
* *Read Together*: year-round, one-on-one, free tutoring for children in grades K–8 who are reading below grade level
* *Summer Books*: free books and enrichment activities for low-income children participating in local Summer Food Services Programs

Our Adult Literacy programs are:

* *General Literacy Instruction*: free, one-on-one tutoring for native English speakers in need of reading, writing, and other educational support
* *English Language Instruction*: free one-on-one tutoring and support to non-native English learners
* *Elder Literacy*: one-on-one companionship and literacy guidance for the elderly participating in our personal history writing project entitled “My Life Story”

The need for literacy services for people of all ages in our region and in Maine is significant. According to the Barbara Bush Foundation:

* 63% of Maine 4th grade students read at a Below Proficient level
* 10% of Maine adults have less than a high school diploma
* 64% of children under age 6 in Maine with parents who have less than a high school diploma are economically poor

Additionally:

* The number of age-appropriate books in the home is an important factor in determining a child’s eventual educational level (Science Daily, 2010)
* Across the U.S., a persistent and widening gap in academic achievement exists between low-income students and their more advantaged peers. By age four, an 18-month gap is apparent (NCCP, 2007).
* 6% of the adult population in the counties we serve have a Below Basic literacy level (NCES, 2003).
* Approximately 2,000 residents of Lincoln and Sagadahoc Counties are immigrants (Census Bureau, 2010)

The specific free services we provide (early literacy educational programming for families; one-on-one tutoring for low-literate adults and children; literacy activities for the elderly; and free books for low-income children) are not readily offered, if at all, by other local agencies, organizations, and schools. With the invaluable support of our dedicated volunteers and generous funders, we fill a crucial niche in the educational sector, assisting those whose needs are not easily met through other traditional means.

**Target Population:**

Family Literacy Services: 355 children and their families (270 *Read With Me*; 25 *Read Together*; 60 *Summer Books*)

Adult Literacy Services: 110 adults (60 *General Literacy and English Language Instruction*; 50 *Elder Literacy*)

During our 2017 fiscal year, our Adult Literacy programs served 64 adult basic education learners and 51 English language learners on a one-to- basis; and 50 learners participating in groups. Our Family Literacy programs served 283 children and 183 adults, and distributed 1,659 free books to participants.

**Specific Request for Irving Foundation Funds**

We are requesting $4,000 to help fund *Read Together*, our program that provides free, year-round, one-on-one tutoring for elementary school children who are reading below grade level. The central objective of this unique effort is to help struggling young readers, whose families are primarily low-income and cannot afford private tutors, to receive sustained, individualized assistance so they can become engaged, successful readers and writers.

According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), in 2011, 82 percent of fourth-graders from low-income families failed to reach the “proficient” level in reading. Maine was one of the six states for which the poverty/achievement gap actually widened. The 2014 Educate Maine report found only 37% of all Maine fourth graders were at or above the proficiency level in reading and, by eighth grade, the proficiency rate only increased one percentage point, to 38%. Children who begin school academically behind their peers tend to not only stay behind, but to lag further and further behind as they progress through the grades. Thus, a child who is one grade behind in reading in second grade may be two grades behind by fourth grade. Our goal in *Read Together* is to stop this ever-expanding gap in reading proficiency for our students and then to begin to reduce the gap between each student’s actual reading level and his or her grade-appropriate reading level.

*Read Together* provides one-on-one, free tutoring to school-age children, matching them with trained tutors, ensuring they have good books to read, and providing support to their parents through periodic conferences and/or workshops. *Read Together* is intended to be supplemental to home and school learning, and to function independently from existing school programs. Parents are responsible for engaging our services for their children. Participating tutors and students are asked to commit to meet for twice weekly, hour-long sessions, for a year. After one year, the participants can choose to commit to another year of tutoring. The tutoring sessions are individually tailored to the needs, abilities, learning style, and personal interests of each student, and are structured yet flexible. Tutors use a variety of self-selected materials and techniques to incorporate phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, fluency, and the joy of reading into their sessions. Read Together also gives free, high quality books to participating students to guarantee they have easy access to appropriate and interesting reading material at home.

**Timeline FY19**

Monthly Ongoing Activities. . . . Tutor In-Service Workshops

Publicity

Parent Conferences

In-Take and Assessment of New Students

Lending Library Maintenance

July/August/September. . . . . . . . Tutor Training (13.5 hours)

New Tutor/Student/ Parent Match Meetings

October . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . All Tutor/Student/Family Gathering (1)

New Tutor/Student/ Parent Match Meetings

February . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . All Tutor/Student/Family Gathering (2)

March . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Tutor Training (13.5 hours)

New Tutor/Student/ Parent Match Meetings

April . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . New Tutor/Student/ Parent Match Meetings

May . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .Tutor/Student/Family Gathering (3)

June. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Annual data analysis

Read Together Objectives:

1. Program will serve 25 children through one-on-one tutoring
2. 100% of students will improve their attitudes about reading over a one year period
3. 50% of students will lessen the gap between their reading achievement levels and those of their same age peers
4. 25% of students enrolled for a minimum of one year before grade 3 will read at grade level by the end of 3rd grade

Read Together Measurement Tools:

* Database to track session attendance
* Beginning, middle, and end-of-year informal reading assessments of the students
* Annual participant questionnaire for students and families

Nowhere else in our region can elementary-age children, whose parents cannot afford to hire a private tutor, get consistent, year-long, one-on-one, individualized help to improve their literacy development. By providing this service, Tri-County Literacy is taking the unique initiative to make real change in the academic trajectory and personal well-being of students, one person at a time.

d) Once completed, how will your effort have addressed the *Foundation’s Mission* to promote sustainable, long-term benefits in the improved welfare of our youth at risk? Our effort will help the Foundation meet its Mission serving youth in Maine because we too aim to help at-risk children (those at risk of being forever low-literate) lead happier, healthier, and more successful lives by helping them to become competent, engaged readers for life. Our efforts will help youth rise above becoming part of the U.S. corrections system where 75% of state prison inmates did not complete high school or can be classified as low literate, or being destined to live in poverty as 43% of adults with the lowest literacy levels currently do. (ProLiteracy, 2018)

e) In what ways will you be able to *observe and measure the impact* of your proposed effort? We maintain a database to track session attendance. We also conduct beginning, middle, and end-of-year informal reading assessments of the students, as well as have participating students and their families fill out a questionnaire annually. Anecdotal information is also gathered at the individual conferences held between the program coordinator and the parents.

f) Briefly describe the *history of the effort* you propose. Is it a new project? An on-going one? How can the Foundation be assured that a grant would have some lasting impact? Read Together was a pilot program in FY18.We aimed to start small, limiting our service area to the greater Bath/Brunswick region and providing tutoring to 10-15 children. We are currently tutoring 12 children, engaging 100% of our trained tutors. We have one last Tutor Training scheduled for the end of our Fiscal Year 2018 in June, so we can continue to match and serve students who may enroll during the summer months. While we have yet to complete a full year of Read Together and to collect data on students who have been enrolled for a full 12 months, the feedback we have gotten from parents and students alike has been extremely positive. In the words of one parent:

“Our two sons, Nathan 9 and Jack 7, thoroughly look forward to their visits each week! I mainly called for my oldest because he had recently been diagnosed with a learning disability and it seemed that the extra half hour provided by the school each day wasn't enough anymore . . . Both my boys would tend to get annoyed with me nagging about reading before and now they are far more inclined to do their homework for tutoring before regular school homework. Along with the actual reading help I think they have both built confidence in their reading. Nathan doesn't get angry when he doesn't know a word anymore, he works through it. It is a great change in him. Jack is interested in reading independently now, which is a staggering change. [The program is] something that my husband and I are both very grateful for having access to. We certainly wouldn't be able to afford to pay for tutoring otherwise. I think that the program is a huge asset to the community and hope that it grows and flourishes for years to come.” Rebecca Doyle, Phippsburg