



Mayor's Office of
Immigrant Affairs
Bitta Mostofi
Commissioner

October 14, 2020

Testimony of Deputy Commissioner Colette Samman
NYC Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs

Before a hearing of the New York City Council Committees on Immigration and Youth Services

Oversight – Adult Literacy and Digital Literacy in Immigrant Communities

Thank you to Chair Menchaca, Chair Rose, and the members of the Committees on Immigration and Youth Services. My name is Colette Samman and I am the Deputy Commissioner of Strategic Programs and IDNYC at the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs (MOIA).

MOIA, and the City as a whole, have long recognized that literacy is crucial for the realization of individuals' full potential as well as their increased social, economic, and political empowerment. Studies have also shown a positive inter-generational spillover from adult literacy, which can improve parents' access to information and resources they need to invest in their children's development and education.

New York City is one of the most linguistically diverse cities in the world. More than 200 languages are spoken by residents across the five boroughs. This diversity comes with challenges: we know that many New Yorkers have limited English proficiency (LEP), especially immigrant New Yorkers. Almost half of all immigrant New Yorkers, and about 60 percent of undocumented New Yorkers have LEP. Moreover, almost a quarter of all immigrant New Yorkers and 32 percent of undocumented immigrant New Yorkers do not have a high school diploma, compared to 10 percent of U.S.-born New Yorkers.

For this reason, MOIA and our agency partners are deeply invested in providing access to adult literacy programs for New Yorkers. Today's testimony focuses on MOIA's We Speak NYC program and the shifts MOIA has made to adjust to the COVID-19 pandemic.

We Speak NYC and MOIA's role in adult literacy

MOIA plays an important role in the adult literacy field through our We Speak NYC program. We Speak NYC is different from other ESOL programming because it serves both learners and educators, with materials that speak directly to City services and how to access them.

Through We Speak, MOIA coordinates a set of volunteer-led English conversation classes that use episodes of the Emmy award-winning We Speak NYC television show and other materials over the course of 7 to 10 weeks. The classes address common issues and challenges encountered by immigrants and help students learn about available City services and resources that are relevant to their lives. Students can also engage with independent study tools for each episode.

These materials also support the educators. MOIA has a strong collaborative relationship with adult literacy service providers in New York City and provides We Speak's multimedia curriculum for free. This curriculum includes videos, lesson plans, student activities, study guides, and more for providers of ESOL and other adult literacy classes across the city. These materials are highly adaptable for learners with different goals and proficiency levels and have been widely utilized in a variety of education settings.

We Speak NYC is an important—and effective—program that makes a significant contribution to the City's adult literacy landscape. Moreover, at a time when students are struggling with job

and income loss, among other challenges, access to help learning English is more necessary than ever. Eighty-eight percent of We Speak NYC providers we surveyed said pandemic-related challenges have been exacerbated for students who have limited reading, writing, English language, and/or digital literacy skills.

Response to COVID-19

For that reason, when the world changed because of COVID-19, We Speak NYC has quickly changed its gear to ensure education could continue without a significant interruption. This was not without challenges. More than two-thirds of We Speak NYC providers we surveyed have said that the shift to remote teaching required them to provide new training to educators and staff on digital education, and about half of our providers noted that they had to adapt to using new technology to meet the needs of their students.

Despite these hurdles, we managed to transition our program into a remote model in just two weeks, delivering all programmatic activities and services online. This includes continuing our volunteer-led classes in a new format, with weekly online conversation classes that cover COVID-19 themes and resources available to immigrant New Yorkers. We have also conducted know-your-rights presentations, emailed resources to our students, and provided weekly student packets for We Speak NYC conversation classes to students with information on NYC services and other educational material activities.

MOIA continues to promote We Speak NYC through outreach to different community-based organizations, as well as collaboration with other organizations. This includes a recently launched online promotional campaign in partnership with CUNY, schools, libraries, and CBOs.

As we have transitioned into this new, all-digital world, we have noticed some trends. Adult learners who already have reliable technology and internet access have gained new benefits from remote learning, including the ability to limit travel and childcare needs, participate in classes at a wider range of time, and attend classes even if they are ill or less mobile. Students and teachers have also been gaining digital literacy skills while engaging with content online.

While we recognize that students have uneven access to information and communication technologies, We Speak NYC is continuously working to address these issues and plans to continue operating classes and workshops for educators remotely. In the weeks ahead, we will be surveying our partner sites to better understand their reopening plans and how that may affect service delivery.

Conclusion

Adult literacy programs have risen to the challenges of these pandemic, quickly adapting their instruction to remote platforms like Zoom, Google Classroom, and WhatsApp and providing additional one-on-one support to their students.



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However, these providers—including our We Speak NYC partners—still face enormous challenges. Many students are facing job loss, housing insecurity, childcare burden, and health issues and such hardship makes it difficult for them to prioritize education. MOIA has developed a comprehensive immigrant resource guide for immigrant New Yorkers seeking assistance and this information is shared with our We Speak NYC program participants.

MOIA and our partners have successfully brainstormed and collaborated on addressing many of these challenges and remain committed to finding ways to help our learners, providers, and community partners in this difficult time.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. I am happy to take any questions.



TESTIMONY

BEFORE THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEES ON YOUTH SERVICES AND IMMIGRATION

HEARING ON

**ADULT LITERACY AND DIGITAL LITERACY IN IMMIGRANT
COMMUNITIES**

PRESENTED BY

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER RONG ZHANG

OCTOBER 14, 2020

Good morning, Chair Rose, Chair Menchaca, and members of the Youth Services and Immigration Committees. I am Rong Zhang, Assistant Commissioner for Literacy and Immigrant Initiatives at the Department of Youth & Community Development (DYCD). Joining me today is my colleague, Colette Samman, Deputy Commissioner of Strategic Programs and IDNYC at the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs (MOIA). On behalf of DYCD Commissioner Bill Chong, thank you for the opportunity to comment on DYCD's Adult Literacy Services.

The ability to read and write is fundamental to a person's capacity to succeed in life. English proficiency is associated with the ability to find and keep employment that pays a living wage and provides opportunities for upward advancement, helps parents fully support and participate in their child's education and to actively engage in civic life. The most recent census data for NYC show that there are 1.76 million or 22.4 percent of the individuals aged 5 years and over who "speak English less than very well" and 544,714 or 9.1% of persons aged 25 years and over who have less than a 9th grade education. These data point toward a high need for ESOL instruction and adult basic education classes. In neighborhoods with large, low-income immigrant populations the need is particularly high. For example, Queens Community Districts 3 and 7 (Jackson Heights and Flushing) and Brooklyn Community District 11 (Bensonhurst) have the highest populations of persons who "speak English less than very well" and Manhattan Community District 12 (Washington Heights/Inwood), Queens 3 (Jackson Heights), and Brooklyn 7 (Sunset Park) have the highest populations of persons who have less than a 9th grade education.

These findings are supported by DYCD's comprehensive Community Needs Assessment Survey, a survey that collected information from residents who were asked, among other questions, to identify the service gaps in their community. In NYC overall, survey respondents ranked "English classes" as the number two service gap from a listing of 28 items. In ten communities, residents ranked "English classes" as their number one service gap. Six communities ranked "Adult Education/Literacy" instruction as among their top five service gaps.

We thank the Council for its strong, long-standing partnership on Adult Literacy programs. It has been critical to funding programs across the City. DYCD commits \$15 million to support Adult Literacy Programs from a mix of Federal Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) and Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding and City tax levy funding. This work is complimented by other literacy programs supported by the Department of Education, the City University of New York and the public library systems.

DYCD's adult literacy programs include a variety of courses to meet the various needs of participants. For example, these adult literacy programs offer Adult Basic Education (ABE) that teaches both native and non-native English speakers reading, writing and math. We offer High School Equivalency (HSE) prep classes to prepare students for the Test Assessing Secondary Completion (TASC), ESOL/Civics classes, and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) that teach listening, speaking, reading and writing to individuals whose primary language is not English.

In Fiscal Year 2020, our adult literacy programs enrolled 15,631 participants. Students not only benefit academically by participating in our literacy programs, they also receive other

much needed assistance such as referral to employment training, college assistance and individual support.

To assist in career and college exploration with participants, DYCD has partnered with CUNY to train our instructors, counselors/case managers on their CareerKits curriculum. The participants learn how to meet literacy goals while simultaneously learning about careers, incorporating career content into reading, writing, math and research activities, and learning about CUNY admission procedures, college prep programs, and financial aid.

To further promote the use of technology in the classrooms, our technical assistance provider, the Literacy Assistance Center offered training on Google's Applied Digital Skills curriculum. This online site with ready-to-use video lessons teach digital skills that have immediate, real-life application. CBO staff learned the basics of Google Drive, focusing on why it is so useful for adult education and explored the Google's Applied Digital Skills lessons.

We have partnered with MOIA to discuss ways to promote *We Speak NYC*, a video series produced by MOIA and CUNY to help English language learners improve their language skills while learning about City services and their rights. MOIA staff presented *We Speak NYC* to literacy providers. A joint professional training session on best practices around integration of the video into English language classes has been offered to providers.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, adult literacy programs quickly transitioned into the realm of distance learning. We are grateful to the literacy providers for their tremendous effort during this challenging time period, and we thank them for their commitment and flexibility. Both teachers and students were required to adjust to new online learning and teaching platforms such as Zoom and Google Classroom. In order to facilitate the transition, DYCD staff, in concert with our technical assistance provider, provided timely training to CBO staff on effective use of various online platforms to engage students. DYCD also organized several meetings where providers discussed successes and challenges of remote learning, which offered them the opportunity to exchange ideas, and to share best practices and resources. Programs have quickly adapted their instruction to remote platforms and provided additional one-on-one support to their students through phone calls, text messages, online platforms, email, and expanded support services. Programs are supporting students to continue their learning, stay connected to a caring community, and access essential information and services.

Although the pandemic has brought new challenges to our students and programs, requiring them to adapt to a new way of learning, DYCD maintains our commitment to adult learners. We have received positive feedback about the use of remote learning tools in adult literacy programs. Some providers have reported that some students who were previously uncomfortable participating in the classroom increased their participation when classes moved online. We have also seen that some families found it easier to fit the classes into their schedules when they were able to join from their own homes. We will continue to work with our providers to best accommodate the learning needs of our students.

Once again, thank you for holding this hearing today. We look forward to continuing to work with the City Council on promoting adult literacy.

**Adhikaar Testimony Submitted to the
Committee on Immigration and Youth Services Joint Hearing**
Adult Literacy and Digital Literacy in Immigrant Communities

October 14, 2020

Thank you Chairman Menchaca, Chairwoman Rose and members of the Immigration and Youth Services Committees for holding this important hearing and the opportunity to provide testimony.

Adhikaar is the only worker and community center serving and organizing the Nepali-speaking community on workers rights, immigrants rights, access to healthcare and language justice issues. We are women-led and our community is one of the newer and most rapidly-growing immigrant communities in New York City. According to [South Asian American's Leading Together's 2019 Demographic Snapshot](#) there was a 207% rise of Nepali immigrants in the U.S. over the last 10 years, the highest of any other population included in the report. By our estimate, New York City has the highest population and Queens the concentration of Nepali-speaking community members in the country. Census 2020, which Adhikaar worked diligently on, will provide better data for future hearings.

Today I would like to speak to the importance of resources for immigrant adult and digital literacy, and ask the members of the Committees present to prioritize this need in the city's budget, especially for organizations like Adhikaar. Adhikaar reaches more than 10,000 Nepali-speaking immigrants a year. Our members are domestic workers, nail salon workers, restaurant workers, Uber/Lyft drivers, and workers in other informal industries. Most of our members live in Jackson Heights, Woodside, Elmhurst, Sunnyside, East Elmhurst, Corona, Maspeth, Ridgewood, Jamaica, and Flatbush .

Our English for Empowerment (EFE) program, run out of our center in Woodside, Queens, has to date served nearly 1000 members. EFE is the backbone for many workers in our community. We have integrated the city's "We Speak New York" curriculum and also woven in over the years our members' experiences of being immigrant workers. Together we improve literacy and language capacity in our community while expanding community consciousness towards civic participation, city navigation, support for children and improving working conditions for all. Our program has become so popular that we expanded to host EFE classes for nail salon technicians in Flatbush, Brooklyn, where there were experienced technicians who had worked for decades in the nail salon industry, but were working under dangerous conditions and unlicensed due to limited literacy in English and Nepali. This year, we plan on creating a more robust industry-specific EFE program by adding EFE for domestic workers.





71-07 Woodside Ave.
Woodside, NY 11377
(718) 937 - 1117

In the last five years, on average 200-250 people attend our EFE classes every year. Over 90% are women with a majority working in informal industries. 70% earn a certificate for participation from We Speak New York which means they attend at least 10 weeks of classes a year and often move from beginner to intermediate to advanced levels. We host 3 sessions a year and our facilitators together volunteer over 500 hours a year. For almost 14 years, our staff have created curriculum, trained facilitators and developed a robust project that has received minimal funding. We run EFE because our community needs it and our classes impact people's everyday lives. People like Mohini Karmacharya, a domestic worker member at Adhikaar, who shared with us her experience.

"About 4 years ago, I heard about Adhikaar from my friend. I wanted to learn English, because without English, you're a "blind man" in America, you know. So, she told me Adhikaar had free English classes so I started coming. And I am very thankful because I learned so much- not only English but, you know, survival skills. Getting from place to place, taking the train, understanding my rights at work. In my work, it made me more confident. I was more assertive about my rights- like getting breaks and asking for more pay. And that also changed my relationship with my boss. In my own life, I am proud of myself."

Mohini has been involved with Adhikaar as a member since 2016, and became more engaged and developed into an EFE facilitator and worker leader more recently through her involvement with the Domestic worker campaign. On any typical (pre-pandemic) Sunday, Mohini arrives at 10:00 am to facilitate EFE. Mohini then eats lunch at the center, and she stays for a computer literacy class afterwards, and learns how to create a Google Doc document, something useful for her resume. At 3:30 pm, during days of general quarterly meetings she helps prepare for and attend the Domestic Worker general meeting, where we discuss issues at their workplace and strategize for our campaigns. Mohini is now a part of our campaign to demand human rights in New York City through Int. 339. I share with you a day in the life of Mohini to show how intertwined our work is, and more importantly, how important Adhikaar's adult literacy and digital literacy are to the development of our immigrant members who create change for the city.

Access to life-saving information has always been a struggle for our community and we've played an important part in bridging this knowledge gap for the last 15 years. Less than six months ago, Adhikaar was in the epicenter of the COVID-19 crisis. This has had severe and ongoing impacts on our community and is changing our community for the long-term. In five months we checked in one-on-one with 3,100 members including EFE participants and served 2,500 of our immigrant worker members addressing things like language access to government resources, \$500,000 in emergency funds to over 650 people, more than \$50,000 of medical and food supplies, and unemployment benefit support in Nepali for over 200 people.

Through the pandemic, there has been an immense need for information on government services in language. We received more than 1,340 calls through our hotline alone in April and May, and our phones have not stopped ringing. Once again to bridge the gap, we produced a 15-part video series in English, Nepali and Nepali sign language to support our community on dozens of issues. Our videos alone brought in over 205,000 viewers online through our Facebook page and eased the capacity burden on our organization while teaching members how to access lifesaving city and state resources.

Due to the COVID-19 crisis, we abruptly had to shift to running 100% virtually, and then faced an uphill challenge as many members are limited in digital literacy. But we quickly rose to the opportunity and saw it as a moment to build the capacity of our membership. It has taken months to train members to use video conferencing, but we are currently piloting a virtual EFE class online with a smaller number of participants, and hope to continue and expand this into the new year.

Beyond our EFE, computer and citizenship classes, which all are arms of building adult literacy, we provide dozens of hours of one on one and small group supplemental support to limited literacy nail technicians in our 26 hour nail technician license course (in partnership with the NYCOSH Beauty School) and domestic workers in the Nanny Training Certification through Cornell University. We are shifting these classes online as we train our members to use various online platforms and provide direct literacy support on platforms like Viber, that many of our members are more familiar with.

To date we have received \$10,000 of adult literacy-specific funding, yet we continue to do the work knowing that it's a lifeline for our members. We continue to be flooded with needs and requests for more adult and digital literacy support. As needs increase, our staff capacity thins. We need the city's support if we are to remain sustainable and collectively work for new immigrant communities.

We submit this testimony today representing nearly 5,000 members of Adhikaar. We urge you all, as the members of the Committees on Immigration and Youth Services to step in at this exact moment that the city must invest more in adult literacy funding. We may not know how much longer this pandemic will continue, but we do know that the need to equip our members with the skills they need to survive grows. We continue asking the city to invest in adult literacy specifically \$100,000 to Adhikaar to not just continue our work but pay facilitators and meet the needs of the community. We need your support to serve the immigrant workers that keep this city alive through this difficult time and are the spine of New York City's vibrant economy.



NORTHERN MANHATTAN IMPROVEMENT CORPORATION (NMIC)

TESTIMONY
In support of
Oversight – Adult Literacy and Digital Literacy in Immigrant
Communities

PRESENTED BEFORE:
THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL
COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION
October 14, 2020

PRESENTED BY:
Jennifer Argueta
Adult Education Program Manager
NORTHERN MANHATTAN IMPROVEMENT CORPORATION (NMIC)

Good afternoon Chair and council members. My name is Jennifer Argueta and I am the Adult Education Program Manager at Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation (hereafter, “NMIC”). On behalf of NMIC, we thank you for allowing us to present at the Oversight hearing for Adult Education and Digital Literacy in Immigrant Communities.

NMIC is a community-based settlement house founded in 1979. We have grown into a leading multi-service agency with a staff of over 150 employees, serving all of New York City. Our mission is to serve as a catalyst for positive change in the lives of the people in our community on their paths to secure and prosperous futures. Our legal, organizing, and advocacy services include immigration legal services, housing court representation/eviction prevention, counseling for immigrant communities and mental health support services. Our education and career services provide the community with the additional tools necessary to build secure and prosperous futures. We also offer weatherization services to improve the housing stock in Upper Manhattan. Community members receiving our services are also able to connect with our Connections to Care mental health services if the need arises. NMIC does not charge any fees for services and serves low income and immigrant persons and families.

For more than 20 years, NMIC’s adult education program has been meeting the needs of one of the city’s most vulnerable communities. Our state and local governments rely on community-based organizations like NMIC to do the work they can’t or won’t do themselves. Not only do we do it for 80 cents on the dollar, but we do also it better because we are embedded within the community. Our workforce is reflective of our clients, and we deliver culturally sensitive services to residents because we are credible messengers. We rely on feedback and participation of the local community to inform our priorities and approach to delivering services.

As we all know, the public health crisis has disproportionately impacted immigrant/Hispanic communities like Washington Heights/Inwood and the Southwest Bronx. Recent news articles highlight the economic disparity of America’s “K-shaped” recovery. As the nation’s wealthy continue to profit and enrich themselves while failing to contribute their fair share to ensure an educated and prepared workforce that they rely on, America’s poorest, and especially people of color, have yet to see the gains of their whiter, wealthier counterparts. New York’s “tale of two cities” continues to persist and wrest equality from hard working, tax paying residents.

Studies consistently show that there is a positive correlation between increased levels of education and higher earnings over time. This applies to men and women, as well as people of color. Providing access to education is a critical component of ensuring equity in the economy and throughout the recovery. Furthermore, people with higher levels of education show greater civic engagement, healthier lifestyles, improved mental health indicators and more open mindedness. In short, education is not an *expense* that the City incurs. It is an *investment* in our population that levels the playing field, strengthens social bonds, and attracts businesses looking for talent. Everybody wins when our residents have more access to education.

In the fiscal year before the pandemic brought everything to a halt, NMIC served more than 700 students in our adult education program and more than 180 opportunity youth in our young adult programs. This included students trying to learn or improve their English, legal permanent residents working on their citizenship and students working to achieve their high school equivalency diplomas. Across all our programs, NMIC helped 46 community residents achieve their diplomas. That represents 46 more residents with access to higher wage jobs or post-secondary education. It represents parents who are more able to participate in their children's educations. For many of our students, it represents the first time they start and finished something. More than 200 of our ESOL students made an academic gain. That represents more than 200 residents who better understand what's happening in their community and how it impacts their lives. It represents parents who can better advocate for their children's needs; workers with increased skills who are in line for a promotion; legal permanent residents who are one step closer to taking their citizenship exams; residents who are more connected to their communities and likelier to participate in elections.

In our youth programs, 147 opportunity youth received vocational training certificates that make them more competitive in the job market. One-hundred and five interns completed almost 59,000 hours of paid internship experience at businesses, nonprofits, and public institutions throughout the City. Our participants learned valuable on-the-job skills like the importance of good attendance, communication skills and problem solving while providing increased support to institutions where they worked and, frequently, became employed. Seventy-nine of our students entered jobs while 14 more entered college or an advanced training program.

Since the public health crisis, NMIC transitioned its programs to exist in a fully remote world. Not only did this involve our staff learning how to launch virtual instruction and training, it also meant providing training and resources to students who lacked the capacity to participate in virtual programming. Staff quickly found and shared resources to help people get the equipment and internet access that they needed not only to continue in programming but to adapt to the realities of the pandemic.

Even more importantly, staff made referrals to internal and external resources to help students who suddenly lost all of their household income and couldn't meet their most basic needs like putting food on the table or keeping their lights on. We stopped offering workshops on employment readiness when we saw that our participants needed social-emotional support, and we offered workshops on how to avoid feeling isolated or staying healthy while staying at home. While our primary focus is on improving the education and employment prospects of our clients, our strength as a community-based organization is recognizing the humanity of the people who we serve and treating them as complete humans. Students who are worried about being evicted or where their next meal is coming from are necessarily not engaged in the classroom. The pandemic has made even more important the need for holistic wrap-around services.

We would like to highlight a couple of our students who demonstrate why programs like NMIC's are crucial. Isabel (name changed) became a young parent during high school and did not finish her education. At 28, Isabel came to NMIC to get her diploma with the goal of attending college and studying business someday. Isabel took the test in January and passed all but two subjects. She continued to engage in classes and was scheduled to re-take the test in March. She thought her dreams would be deferred indefinitely, but she remained resilient and kept studying. NMIC staff worked with Isabel to navigate the pathway created by the NYS Education Department and obtained her diploma this June. Isabel did the work to get her diploma, but she wouldn't have been able to achieve it without NMIC's assistance. Isabel is now assisting her daughter to do online learning, and she is anxiously waiting to start college.

Wanda (name changed) came to NMIC at 17 after recently arriving from the Dominican Republic. She started in our ESOL classes, and after working hard for two semesters, she transitioned to our adult basic education (ABE) program. She continued to work hard for two more cycles and was ready to take the TASC test. She passed the test on her first try, and now

she is enrolled at Bronx Community College. She credits NMIC with helping support her in a new country as she pursued her education.

Sometimes, simply enrolling in a program can be life changing for residents. As one of our staff members was doing intake with an elderly ESOL applicant, the applicant became overcome with emotion and started crying. The staff member asked her why she was crying, and she said that she had raised children who grew up to become professionals, and she always wanted to improve her own education but didn't have time. Finally, she was able to do something for her own benefit.

Every year, we hear from hundreds of residents with similar stories. At NMIC, we embrace a strengths-based approach to running our programs because we recognize how hard working and resilient our community is. To honor that work ethic and resiliency, and to provide for an equitable recovery and a more equitable society moving forward, we ask that the City not balance its budget on the backs of the people who have already suffered the most. This includes not only the people we serve, but also our staff. Women and people of color are over-represented in direct service jobs that are the first to be lost when budgets get cut, which adds further pain to an already suffering community. We have seen repeatedly in history that the best path out of crisis is to invest *more* in people, not less. We call for no further cuts to adult education and youth services and a restoration of funds that have already been slashed. We have the responsibility and the opportunity to demonstrate our values as a City by collecting tax revenue from those who can afford it and using it to uplift our communities by supporting community-based programming.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to testify.



**New York City Council Committee on Immigration
Honorable Carlos Menchaca, Chair**

**New York City Council Committee on Youth Services
Honorable Deborah Rose, Chair**

**Oversight Hearing on Adult Literacy and Digital Literacy in Immigrant Communities
October 14th, 2020**

**Testimony of the New York Immigration Coalition
Presented by Liza Schwartzwald, Manager of Education Policy**

Good afternoon and thank you Chairs Menchaca and Rose, and members of the New York City Council Committees on Immigration and Youth Services for the opportunity to testify. My name is Liza Schwartzwald and I am a Manager of Education Policy at the New York Immigration Coalition, an umbrella policy and advocacy organization for more than 200 groups serving immigrants and refugees across New York State. The New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC) has a distinguished track record of improving Multilingual Language Learners' and immigrant students' access to resources, working with the New York City Department of Education (DOE) to address barriers immigrants face, as well as supporting adult literacy programs across the city. Our member organizations specifically serve the needs

New York Immigration Coalition

131 W 33rd St. Fl 6
New York, NY 10001
212 627 2227
nyic.org



of marginalized immigrant communities - including newly-arrived immigrants, low-income families, and youth and adults with limited English proficiency.

The NYIC wishes to thank you, and we wish to express our deep appreciation to the City Council and the Mayor for the \$12 million investment in adult literacy funding and services over these past several years, and the restoration of the majority of that funding in this last difficult year.

As part of the NYIC's expansive approach to education, many of our members run adult literacy programs essential to ensuring the success of immigrant families. Currently, there are approximately 2.2 million adults in New York City who lack English language proficiency, a high school diploma or both, of which over 75% are immigrants. Yet public funding for adult literacy education is so limited that only 3% of these 2.2 million adults are able to access basic education, high school equivalency, or English language classes in any given year. Many of these adults are also parents of young children; statewide, there are over 411,000 parents of young children who are limited English proficient, many of those here in NYC.

The need for New York City's adult literacy system has never been more desperate. A generation of our most vulnerable youth are being completely excluded from learning because their families can't access information online, don't use devices, and can't read emails coming from school only in English. Children's parents and grandparents are dying because they are sick and don't know how to access care or are afraid to do so. Our adult literacy system can build a web of support bolstering these families, to help them address all



of these challenges together with one trusted partner. It is an incredibly powerful approach during a crisis like this and we must invest in it like never before.

This is a moment when the need for digital literacy and health literacy; the ability for parents to independently support their children's education; and the ability to access, understand, and interpret complex information; has never been more apparent. There is a crisis in the K-12 education system, as the young children of immigrant parents are being left behind because their parents are unable to digitally connect to their child's school. Our immigrant workers, many of whom are English learners, have been on the frontlines of the current pandemic, performing essential work that is sustaining our communities. Our grocery store workers, delivery workers, and home care workers have risked their lives to maintain their livelihoods and to care for us all. Our restaurant workers, salon workers, and domestic workers have lost their jobs and incomes and face a harsh reality with no safety net. Adult literacy education – and the additional support services that adult literacy programs provide – play a vital role for these workers in providing opportunities to further their careers, support their families, and stabilize the lives of these most essential, yet vulnerable, fellow New Yorkers. This system will be crucial to these families as we work to recover from this unprecedented crisis.

Programs have quickly and effectively pivoted to remote support for adult learners by altering group activities, providing information on the rapidly changing health situation, and transforming programming to ensure that adult learners do not get lost. Programs have quickly moved to online platforms like Google Classroom and Zoom, where students continue to learn grammar, vocabulary, reading, and



writing while also continuing to learn how to complete employment applications, write resumes, and practice conversational skills. Non-English speaking parents are being supported through these classes, leaving them better prepared to take on a greater role in the education of their school-aged children, a role that has become increasingly necessary in our current remote learning environment.

Unfortunately, though many programs have shown great adaptability in pivoting to remote learning, a lack of access to digital devices and reliable internet connection has forced many students out of their classes. Students may lose more than a semester's worth of learning without the constant practice and preparation that adult literacy organizations provide them. Without the ability to provide devices to students and teach them how to use them, as we have seen in the K-12 system, many immigrant learners have lost the opportunity to continue learning.

In support of these adult learners, we call on the City Council and the Mayor to support these critical steps:

1. **Keep adult literacy programs whole by restoring \$12 million for DYCD-funded adult literacy services** and combine these funds with the existing \$3.5 million in previously baselined funding.
2. **Ensure that FY21 DYCD contracts are paid in a timely manner and in full so that community-based providers can continue serving New Yorkers in tremendous need of English language services and digital literacy support.**

3. **Provide remote-based learning guidance to DYCD-funded adult literacy education programs that are operating classes online to accommodate CDC guidelines.**
4. **Invest an additional \$2 million a year over the next two years to fund a pilot program that would allow the field to demonstrate that funding programs at or closer to the level called for in the Investing in Quality report written by the Literacy Assistance Center will lead to greater student gains and a wider range of benefits for families and communities than current levels of funding enable programs and students to achieve. A \$2 million investment each year for the next two years would enable the city to quadruple funding for at least six targeted community-based adult literacy programs so that these programs would be able to include a fuller breadth of services, including digital literacy, and more fully represent the potential of adult literacy programs to meet the current, dire need for supportive services.**
5. **Invest \$1 million dollars in the LIFT Pilot, a workshop based integration series created in partnership with the Migration Policy Institute that addresses the need for foundational New York City-specific systems navigation for immigrant families who either cannot get a seat in a currently existing adult literacy program or cannot attend these programs with the consistency they require due to external circumstances.**

Workshops include information on financial literacy, the educational system, basic digital

literacy, and other important topics taught by English teachers who are best suited to convey critical information to adults with lower English proficiency.

- 6. Allow for the use of Department of Education-distributed devices to be expanded to the adult literacy sector to begin to address the lack of internet access and digital devices that keep adult students out of adult literacy classes.**

Finally, I would like to include two student stories collected by NYIC intern Ashly Huerta, which illustrate just how important adult literacy classes are to immigrant New Yorkers:

“Speaking English opens doors. I have had opportunities that I would never expect because of this skill. I owe it to my teachers.”

Since her arrival from Peru to the United States, Maria has worked tirelessly to accomplish her dream of becoming a medical assistant. Although very motivated, Maria felt like she didn’t know where to start. On a venture to find some assistance, she found the Queens Public Library where she found more than just guidance, she found community, support, and opportunity.

Maria joined the Queens Public Library adult English literacy classes over 3 years ago in Jackson Heights. Since then, Maria feels that her confidence within herself has grown with the support of the QPL. “I was too shy to speak to anyone, especially in English. Now, not really.” Since the improvement of her English and literacy skills, Maria has had the opportunity to learn math, earn certification in Microsoft, and

be promoted to a manager position at a major makeup factory. Maria has also found some life long friendships, she checks in with her classmates multiple days a week to catch up. Although Maria has not accomplished her dream yet, she says that the English adult literacy classes have pushed her to where she needs to be, and beyond.

“I came here for my family. I want better for my family.”

Carol came to the United States in hopes of a better life for her family. While Carol has survived in New York City using her children as translators, she knows her children will eventually move out and she will be on her own. Since this realization, Carol has made it her mission to be more confident and reach out to more people using her English. Carol found the Chinatown Manpower Project through her work union three years ago. Since joining the adult English literacy classes, Carol has improved so much that she has found a job as a home health aid, she feels so confident and says, “I can even call my patient’s doctor and make appointments for them. They understand me!”

Carol does not have many relatives in New York City, but she has found her own community in New York City while participating in CMP. She found a new support system and community, which means a lot to her especially during the quarantine. She meets her classmates on zoom multiple times a week to practice English and catch up. When asked about what information she really wanted to share with me, Carol



enthusiastically said, “I want everyone to know the Chinatown Manpower Project. I want to share how great the teachers are, and how great the people are.”

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Submitted by:
Liza Schwartzwald
Manager of Education Policy
New York Immigration Coalition
Lschwartzwald@NYIC.org
212-627-2227, Ext. 255

TESTIMONY OF BROOKLYN PUBLIC LIBRARY

Oversight Hearing: Adult Literacy and Digital Literacy in Immigrant Communities

Committee on Immigration *and* Committee on Youth Services

October 14, 2020 | 10AM

Thank you, Chairpersons Menchaca and Rose, and members of both committees, for the opportunity to testify today. I am Haniff Toussaint, Brooklyn Public Library's ESOL & Business English Program Coordinator. Thank you all, and Speaker Johnson, Majority Leader Cumbo and Finance Chair Dromm, for your support of library services. With your help, BPL was able to pivot its programs almost as soon as this pandemic began. We launched virtual and remote-by-phone versions of our Adult Basic Education (ABE), High School Equivalency (HSE) and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes, conversation groups and Citizenship workshops, as well as multilingual storytimes for our youngest patrons.

Though the pandemic has changed how we deliver services to New Yorkers, I assure you that service to those most impacted by this pandemic — our elderly, our marginalized, our immigrants — are still intact. BPL has provided ESOL instruction for over 35 years and our goal has not changed even in this current climate: we serve non-native professionals, blue collar workers, stay-at-home providers, college students and newly arrived immigrants enabling them to achieve competency in the English language and digital skills that are vitally needed to function effectively as workers, parents, and citizens while navigating the complexities of NYC.

From the onset of COVID-19, BPL's ESOL program has assessed and enrolled hundreds of ESOL participants providing virtual instruction in 16 ongoing classes for civics education and digital fluency. We facilitated 13 We Speak NYC sessions virtually and currently have 4 online citizenship classes and 12 virtual conversation groups. This new mode of programs poses new challenges and compounds existing ones for participants and the library. Access to technology is a major challenge for immigrant patrons. Without our branches' wifi, technology and e-resources, ESOL participants are unlikely to have similar access to computers or the internet at home.

To address these challenges, we've launched "low tech" options in our programs, creating photocopied packets for patrons who cannot participate in online classes that can be picked up from our open branches. We've held writing workshops by phone for ABE students and our tutors have been engaging ABE students by phone to help those who aren't connected online to improve their literacy skills. BPL's grant writers have reached out to funders to explore the feasibility of providing technology and wifi to our learners. There is a major need here that we hope our government and foundation partners will seek to address.

While we're doing our best to ensure a continuous learning experience for our existing students and a welcoming environment for our new students, I and my colleagues miss seeing our students and volunteers in person. Our students inspire us to continue to do the work we do. I look forward to welcoming them back into our safe libraries and classrooms in the future.



**Statement by Fatma Ghailan, Assistant Director of the Adult Learner Program,
Queens Public Library**

**New York City Council
Committee on Immigration jointly with the Committee on Youth Services**

Oversight - Adult Literacy and Digital Literacy in Immigrant Communities

October 14, 2020

Good morning. I am Fatma Ghailan, Assistant Director of the Adult Learner Program at Queens Public Library (QPL). It is a pleasure to be here today. On behalf of our President & CEO Dennis Walcott and everyone at QPL, thank you Chairs Menchaca and Rose, as well as the members of the committees, for holding this hearing and providing me the opportunity to testify on this important topic.

Low literacy levels are a major barrier facing immigrant New Yorkers. Without comprehensive knowledge of how to read, write and understand the English language, as well as the digital technologies that are becoming more vital than ever, immigrants are unable to fulfill routine tasks such as completing medical forms, communicating with their child's teachers or effectively conveying answers in an interview. Queens Public Library provides the resources many immigrants need to overcome these daily challenges.

Libraries are the "great equalizers" in our democratic society. As such, public libraries play a crucial role in supporting new immigrants. Serving the most ethnically diverse county in America, Queens Public Library has long been a primary destination for immigrant New Yorkers. QPL's New Americans Program (NAP) provides an array of programs and special services to help the borough's immigrants integrate into American society and share their diverse cultures with the community at large. In 1977, QPL became the first public library in the nation with a department dedicated to providing comprehensive programs and services for immigrants. Almost half of the residents of Queens County are foreign born, making this program a vital resource.

NAP works closely with QPL's Adult Learner Program (ALP) in developing a wide range of programming to support our immigrant communities and their unique needs. ALP offers Adult Basic Education for immigrants, covering topics such as math, reading and writing skills. It offers High School Equivalency instruction for new immigrants who did not complete high school in their home country, or whose high school diploma is not recognized in the United States. Our immigrant-focused programs and services are continuously in high demand. In Fiscal Year 2019, QPL welcomed over 18,200 participants to our more than 8,600 immigrant-focused program sessions. We hosted over 4,600 ESOL sessions, which had over 4,100 participants. Our ESOL students are seeing results. They experienced an average educational gain of 59 percent. Our Job & Business Academy (JBA) Integrated English Literacy & Civics Education class, which teaches

contextualized English and training for technology or home health aide jobs, had over 500 sessions with 230 students. Exit surveys indicate that the post-test rate was 79 percent, while the education gain of the students was 72 percent.

In addition to providing vital programs and services, we must also ensure our frontline staff are communicating effectively with our newest New Yorkers. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, every library and Adult Learning Center in our system had handheld translation devices for our staff to connect with our customers, regardless of the languages they speak. These translation devices have been important tools for our staff to assist customers in an efficient and timely fashion.

QPL's international language collections are some of the largest available in the United States. The Library actively purchases adult and children's books, magazines, newspapers, CDs, movies and more in 30 languages.

In March, Queens Public Library closed our physical buildings in an effort to slow the spread of COVID-19. While our buildings were closed, we quickly moved to provide our customers with virtual programs and services, including classes for our immigrant population. QPL is serving the needs of our communities through hosting ESOL, HSE, citizenship, and computer classes, as well as case management through synchronous and asynchronous lessons. Since March 2020, QPL's ALP has served over 1,800 students and hosted over 100 virtual courses, as well as one-on-one tutoring. NAP's ESOL program continued to offer 34 classes virtually, the same amount offered in-person, pre-pandemic. After careful review, NAP adjusted the class schedule by increasing the number of classes offered on the weekend to better serve the busy parents and essential workers who are our students. In August, registration for our virtual Fall semester opened, resulting in 700 individuals signing up for the series. Our aforementioned JBA Integrated English Literacy & Civics Education class transitioned from in-person to a virtual platform as well, where we conducted two home health aide classes with 31 participants, and four technology classes with 77 participants.

Additionally, we encouraged our participants to continue their studies outside of our scheduled classes by taking advantage of other free educational tools we have available, such as Cell-Ed. Cell-Ed, supported through a partnership with the Elmezzi Foundation, is a mobile-based application allowing adults to study, anytime, in 3-5 minute lesson intervals to acquire literacy, language and workforce-ready skills. The platforms allow students to join via the Internet or by phone. While we are encouraging our students to continue learning outside of the classroom, we are having our staff do the same. Our twenty Adult Learning teachers and managers have become certified in online teaching through TESOL International Association, an organization advancing the quality of English language, which involved staff participating in weekly trainings on how to effectively teach and support students virtually.

While we are making the best of an all-virtual platform, this shift to the digital realm has brought to light a truth that QPL has voiced publicly for many years now: a severe digital divide exists in the borough.

For far too many Queens' residents, the digital divide presents barriers to education, job opportunities and the tasks of daily living. Approximately 30% of New York City residents do not

have broadband access at home. In certain areas, such as Southeast Queens, approximately 43% of households are without broadband access. Queens Public Library serves as a vital lifeline for individuals who do not have these services and technology at home. In Fiscal Year 2019, we hosted over 2.7 million computer sessions and nearly 460,000 Wi-Fi sessions throughout the borough. All of our 66 locations have Wi-Fi within the buildings, and in December of 2018, we eliminated the sign-in requirement to fulfill our mission of ensuring access to information for all and to improve the user experience. Digital literacy classes are continuing while our buildings are closed. Virtually, we have offered multi-lingual computer classes in Spanish and Bengali, as well as Ready, Set, Bank!, a workshop series in both Spanish and English, designed to teach financial and digital literacy, with support from Capital One.

QPL is witnessing the effects of the digital divide and gaps in digital literacy levels with our immigrant customers. Students with low digital literacy levels find it difficult to access content since all our programs are virtual. There are students, especially those on the beginner's level, who are not able to continue with online learning due to the lack of access to technology. In other situations, many families are sharing one technology device. When faced with either the adult or children using the device, adult learners prioritize their children's education over their own. Despite these obstacles, we are dedicated to serving our customers and students and have found ways to support them through other means. For example, we have mailed coursework to students and hosted lessons over the phone.

The programs and services we offer to our customers allow them to make real, positive changes in their lives. For immigrant New Yorker Ana Dias, finding a free and high quality English language class where she could express herself in a safe and trusted environment was extremely difficult. She then discovered and registered for an intermediate ESOL course at the Briarwood library. With every class, she started becoming increasingly independent and self-reliant. She became so confident in her English language skills and was so grateful to the library for empowering her, she felt compelled to share her story – and show off her new skills – last year by providing public testimony at the Libraries Committee's Fiscal Year 2019 Preliminary Budget hearing.

Libraries are trusted entities that people turn to when in need. Ana's story is unique to her, but it highlights the role QPL, and all public libraries, play in the lives of our immigrant customers. As we strive towards building a vibrant, informed, cohesive, and empowered society, it starts with making sure that our most vulnerable populations receive the care and services they need.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today on this important topic. We cannot do this important work without your continued support, so we are very appreciative of you all. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

City Council Committee on Immigration
City Council Committee on Youth Services

CUNY Adult Literacy Program Testimony
October 14, 2020

Good morning, Council Member Menchaca, Council Member Rose and members of the Committees on Immigration and Youth Services. I am Stacie Evans, University Director for Language and Literacy Programs at CUNY. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and thank you to the City Council for its ongoing focus on adult literacy and services for immigrant New Yorkers.

For nearly 40 years, the City University of New York (CUNY) has helped adults develop the foundational skills critical to achieving their goals. CUNY operates Adult Literacy programs across all five boroughs – at seven senior colleges and seven community colleges – offering 15 programs in English for Speakers of Other Languages, and seven occupational training programs specifically for English language learners. CUNY is also a part of a strong, high-quality adult literacy network in New York City.

New Yorkers who lack English language proficiency cannot access higher education, training, and employment opportunities. In addition, digital literacy skills are essential for tasks such as accessing government programs, finding community-based services, connecting with children’s teachers, and finding and enrolling in education and workforce training programs. A September article from the Migration Policy Institute notes that, “the proportion of US adults with no computer experience is much higher for immigrants who speak a language other than English at home.” The digital divide is often greater for “people of color, those with lower incomes, and those with lesser levels of education”¹ – these are the same New Yorkers who are in our programs.

When COVID-19 was declared a pandemic, adult literacy programs, like all other educational programs, needed to shift online. The idea of doing so presented seemingly insurmountable obstacles, not the least of which was the concern that too many students lacked the skills and tools to be able to participate in any kind of meaningful way. If issues around digital inclusion were serious before the pandemic, then these issues would be more pronounced and acute with quarantine.

¹ Cherewka, Alexis. Migration Policy Institute. (2020, September 3). *The Digital Divide Hits U.S. Immigrant Households Disproportionately during the COVID-19 Pandemic*. [www.Migrationpolicy.Org](https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/digital-divide-hits-us-immigrant-households-during-covid-19).
<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/digital-divide-hits-us-immigrant-households-during-covid-19>

The transition to online learning presented serious challenges for students. Aside from having to learn new technology such as Zoom, Slack, Schoology, and Google Classroom, students had to sort out how best to access online content. Many students lacked adequate internet service at home, if they had service at all. Many lacked computers or tablets that would enable them to access virtual classrooms. Many students also had to juggle school and work with homeschooling their children and sharing limited home devices with children and other family members.

“Impossible” was made *possible* by the determination and dedication of staff and students. CUNY’s Adult Literacy Program staff helped students access free and low-cost internet service offers, and the University was able to provide loaner devices to some students to facilitate the move to remote instruction. Webinars and screencasts were created for students to demonstrate the use of various tools. CUNY’s professional development team facilitated teacher trainings and resource shares, joined Zoom classes to support instruction, and created and shared instructional materials. Program case managers helped students access food resources, financial help, health information, and legal support. To quote one director, all staff took a “no student left behind approach” to remote learning. These supports made the difference between ‘full’ participation and ‘no’ participation.

A number of positives have come from our rapid-fire shift to online learning. Students have used asynchronous learning platforms to communicate outside of class, building support networks and friendships. Students’ confidence and skill with technology and web navigation have increased. Most importantly, students have persisted; they have continued to attend classes and have stepped up to the challenge of learning the digital skills necessary to support their continued program participation.

We are grateful for the Council’s support of adult literacy over the years and the commitment to helping immigrant New Yorkers achieve English proficiency and adapt to their lives in this City. CUNY is proud to be an essential partner in the network of adult literacy providers, and we look forward to continuing this partnership.



Literacy Assistance Center

**New York City Council Committee on Immigration
Honorable Carlos Menchaca, Chair**

**New York City Council Committee on Youth Services
Honorable Deborah Rose, Chair**

**Oversight Hearing on Adult Literacy and Digital Literacy in Immigrant
Communities
October 14, 2020**

Testimony of Ira Yankwitt, Literacy Assistance Center

Thank you Chair Menchaca and Chair Rose for the opportunity to testify. My name is Ira Yankwitt, and I am the Executive Director of the Literacy Assistance Center (LAC), a 37-year-old not-for-profit organization dedicated to strengthening and expanding the adult education system and to advancing adult literacy as a core value in our society and a foundation for equal opportunity and social justice. The LAC is also a proud member of the New York City Coalition for Adult Literacy (NYCCAL), a coalition comprised of adult literacy teachers, program managers, students, and allies from over 40 community-based organizations, CUNY campuses, and library programs across the five boroughs.

This past May the LAC conducted [a survey](#) of over 50 adult literacy providers in the city to learn about the impact of COVID-19 on students and programs. The findings were sobering but not surprising. We learned that adult literacy students were struggling with job and income loss, supporting their children's homeschooling, food and housing insecurity, caring for family members, risks as essential workers, immigration issues, mental health issues, and access to healthcare – and that all of these issues were exacerbated by limited reading, writing, English language, and/or digital literacy skills. Moreover, lack of access to hardware and reliable internet

service were a major barrier to students participating in classes, and respondents estimated that an average of 65% of their students were facing technology obstacles.

At the same time, we saw that adult literacy programs rose to the moment, quickly moving and adapting their instruction to remote platforms like Zoom, Google Classroom, and WhatsApp and providing additional one-on-one support to their students through phone calls, text messages, online platforms, email, and expanded support services, including providing vital information on the rapidly changing public health situation. We learned that, for students with reliable technology and internet access, remote learning offered some benefits, including the ability to limit travel and child care expenses, participate in classes at a wider range of times, attend classes even if they are ill or less mobile, and gain digital literacy skills while engaging with other content. Strikingly, nearly half the programs reported that they envisioned continuing to offer some form of remote teaching even after they are able to reopen in person – and they see this as an opportunity to serve a greater number of students at a time of increased need and demand. Moving forward, adult literacy programs have the potential through remote learning to reach thousands of additional adults who may not have been able to previously dedicate the time to continue their education. The educational gains made during this time could prepare adult students to help restart the economy and ensure greater security for themselves and their families.

Still, there is concern that an over-reliance on remote adult literacy programming could leave behind those adults who do not have hardware, dependable internet access, or digital literacy skills; and almost all of the providers expressed a need for greater professional development on remote teaching and learning, more resources for their students, and increased paid planning time for their staff. Indeed, as the DYCD-funded technical assistance provider to community-based adult literacy programs, the Literacy Assistance Center has seen an

unprecedented demand for our services over the last six months. We have responded by providing regular webinars that introduce teachers to Zoom and other online tools, and by holding individual coaching sessions with teachers and providing customized professional development to programs to assist with the integration of digital platforms and the design of remote curriculum and instruction. We have developed an online resource center for city-funded programs that we update weekly, created online “office hours” for teachers to meet as needed with our staff, and produced several YouTube videos on digital apps that can be used in the virtual adult literacy classroom.

We know that greater literacy skills are linked to positive social and economic indicators, including higher income. A new national study from Gallup shows that the average annual income of adults who reach the minimum level of proficiency in literacy (level 3 on the international PIAAC assessment) is nearly \$63,000, substantially higher than the average of \$48,000 earned by adults who score just below proficiency (level 2), and much higher than those at low levels of literacy (levels 0-1), who earn just over \$34,000 on average. Yet in parts of New York City, well over 50% of adults fall below level 3: In the Bronx, 81% of adults are below level 3 and 50% are below level 1 in reading. Similarly, census data show that median wages for adults with a high school diploma or its equivalent are 24% greater than for those without a diploma; and immigrants who speak English “very well” are half as likely to live in poverty as those who do not.

Higher levels of literacy are associated with greater health knowledge, use of healthcare services, and the ability to manage chronic health conditions and communicate with healthcare providers. Moreover, according to the National Institutes for Health, “a mother's reading skill is the greatest determinant of her children’s future academic success, outweighing other factors, such as neighborhood and family income.”

Increased literacy not only benefits individuals but also drives collective economic gains. The Gallup study finds that “getting all U.S. adults to at least a Level 3 literacy proficiency would generate an additional \$2.2 trillion in annual income for the country,” and that large cities like New York would see a 10% increase in gross domestic product.

Clearly, adult literacy education should be regarded as vital to the health and economic recovery of our city, to the ability of parents to support their children’s education, and to preventing low income and immigrant children from falling behind in school during this chaotic academic year. Yet, despite these direct benefits, funding for adult literacy education is so limited that fewer than 4% of the 2.2 million adult New Yorkers in need will be able to attend classes this year. **It is time that we stop treating adult literacy education as a supplement to the education system and as a privilege for a lucky few and start recognizing it as a necessary and essential component of our educational system and a right of all that need it.**

Furthermore, as progressives, we need to recognize and capitalize on the role that adult literacy programs can play in furthering racial, social, and economic justice by linking adult literacy students to movements and campaigns relevant to their lives and emanating from their communities. **Adult literacy education is about cultivating individual leadership and building community power.** Adult literacy education can provide the space for community members to read, write, and speak the truth of their lived experience; to build understanding and solidarity across differences; to examine historical and current systems of oppression and envision alternatives; and to claim the power to transform the cultural, social, political, and economic structures that circumscribe their lives. In this moment, adult literacy programs can serve as catalysts to introduce students to campaigns such as Cancel Rent, Fund Excluded Workers, and New York Budget Justice; to the Black Lives Matter movement; and to the campaign to create a true universal healthcare system in New York State.

So what do we need to do? I would propose two near term and one long term solution:

- 1) **First, we must ensure that every adult literacy student who needs it is provided with the necessary hardware and free internet to be able to access classes.** No adult – no parent – who would otherwise be able to participate in a basic education, ESOL, or high school equivalency class should be denied the opportunity simply due to lack of basic infrastructure.
- 2) Second, as we move toward envisioning the FY22 budget, **we must find the resources to invest in the adult literacy pilot project** that NYCCAL had been discussing with you and your colleague, council member Treyger, prior to the pandemic. As a reminder, as recently as March, NYCCAL was calling for an additional \$10.5M to quadruple city funding for approximately 25 community-based adult literacy programs. These funds would be used to enable these programs to fully invest in the 14 “Building Blocks” of a comprehensive adult literacy programs identified in the LAC’s [*Investing in Quality*](#) report, and to ultimately demonstrate that greater investment in supports and resources for adult literacy students will lead to significantly greater social and economic benefits for students, their families, and their communities.
- 3) Third, over the long term, **we need to quintuple the cumulative funding for adult literacy education in New York City.** Currently, the total state and city funding for adult literacy education in NYC amounts to approximately \$85 million a year – less than \$40 a year for each of the 2.2 million adults in need and just over \$1,000 for every student who is able to access classes. We need to work together to dramatically increase this funding both to serve far more than the 3%-4% of the 2.2 million adults in need that we’re currently serving and to provide those students, their teachers, and their programs with the full range of resources, supports, and benefits they need and deserve.

Literacy is not simply the ability to read and write. Literacy skills give individuals the power to understand and command information, to communicate in the language of access, to make informed choices, to access critical resources and opportunities, to stand up for themselves in the workplace, to fully participate in civic life and institutions and, ultimately, to transform their lives and the world around them.

Adult literacy education is a matter of racial, social, and economic justice. A substantial investment in adult literacy education will mean that more people will have the skills to access better jobs and higher wages; more parents will be able to support their children's education; more families will be healthier; more people of all backgrounds will know and speak up for their rights; and more New Yorkers will participate in the democratic process. If we are truly a city committed to equality and justice, we should aspire to no less.

Thank you again for your time.

Submitted by:

Ira Yankwitt, Executive Director

Literacy Assistance Center

iray@lacnyc.org



TESTIMONY: UJA-FEDERATION OF NEW YORK

**New York City Council Committee on Immigration
New York City Council Committee on Youth Services
Oversight: Adult Literacy and Digital Literacy in Immigrant Communities**

**Submitted by:
Ariel Savransky
UJA-Federation of New York**

October 14, 2020

Good morning Chairperson Menchaca and Chairperson Rose and members of the Committees on Immigration and Youth Services. My name is Ariel Savransky and I am a Policy and Advocacy Advisor at UJA Federation of New York. On behalf of UJA, our network of nonprofit partners and those UJA serves, thank you for the opportunity to testify on the importance of adult literacy and digital literacy in immigrant communities.

Established more than 100 years ago, UJA-Federation of New York is one of the nation's largest local philanthropies. Central to our mission is to care for those in need. UJA identifies and meet the needs of New Yorkers of all backgrounds and Jews everywhere. UJA connects people to their communities and responds to crises in New York, Israel and around the world. UJA supports nearly 100 nonprofit organizations serving those that are most vulnerable and in need of programs and services.

Funding for adult literacy programs is critical as the city continues to navigate the ongoing pandemic. The \$12 million in adult literacy funding supports over 7,500 adult basic education (ABE), high school equivalency (HSE), and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) students in community-based adult literacy programs, CUNY campuses, and libraries across NYC. These programs are designed to help New Yorkers gain the literacy skills and credentials they need to successfully integrate into their communities and increase their employment and earning potential. From immigrant New Yorkers looking to improve their English skills so they can support their children's education and improve their employment prospects, to native-born New Yorkers with interrupted formal education due to family care needs, health issues, or other circumstances who now are seeking to earn their high school equivalency diplomas, these programs reach thousands of New Yorkers each year. Adult literacy programs and providers are part of the larger human services sector, providing critical services to millions of New Yorkers. This sector must be kept whole as human services providers continue their work on the frontlines as New York City responds to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The need for digital literacy and health literacy; the ability for parents to independently support their children's education; and the ability to access, understand, and interpret complex information has never been more apparent. Yet, today in New York City, there are more than 2.2 million adults who lack basic literacy, numeracy, English language proficiency, and/or a high school diploma – and the current funding for adult literacy programs only allows for about three percent of the population in need to access these services. Many of these 2.2 million adults are on the frontlines of the current pandemic, performing essential work that is sustaining our communities. Some are the grocery store workers, delivery workers, and home care workers who are risking their lives to maintain their livelihoods and to care for us all. Others are the restaurant workers, salon workers, and domestic workers who have lost their jobs and incomes and face a harsh reality with no safety net. Adult literacy education – and the additional support services that adult literacy programs provide – will play a vital role in the coming year to help stabilize the lives of many of our most essential, yet vulnerable, fellow New Yorkers. Adult literacy programs have the potential to now reach thousands of adults who may not have been able to dedicate the time to continue their education in the past, individuals who may now be able to pursue their HSE, or ESOL students who could be working on learning English using web-based curricula. The educational gains made during this time can prepare our adult learners to help restart the economy instead of leaving them even further behind.

Adult literacy programs are frequently the main connection that immigrant adult learners have to the wider network of New York City's programs and services. This has become even more evident in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Programs quickly and effectively pivoted to remote support for adult learners by altering group activities, providing information on the rapidly changing health situation, and transforming programming to ensure that adult learners do not get lost. Using online platforms like Google Classroom and Zoom, students continue to learn grammar, vocabulary, reading, and writing, while also continuing to learn how to complete employment applications, write resumes, and practice conversational skills. Non-English speaking parents are being supported through these classes, leaving them better prepared to take on a greater role in the education of their school-aged children, a role that has become necessary in our current environment. There are thousands of adult literacy students and prospective learners that are home, scared, and in need of the support that a trusted teacher provides them.

The benefit of keeping program staff employed is critical for New York State as the city faces economic uncertainty and extreme public health concerns as a result of COVID-19. Thank you for your efforts to ensure that adult literacy programs can continue to provide vital education and support to vulnerable New Yorkers during this pandemic. **UJA urges the Council and the Administration to work together to keep programs whole as the city faces difficult budget decisions in the short and long-term.**

Additionally, according to a report released by the Literacy Assistance Center based on an online survey of adult literacy programs in New York City looking at the impact of COVID-19 on students and programs, the digital divide remains a serious barrier. Adult literacy program staff who responded to this survey estimated that an average of 65% of their students are facing technology barriers to remote learning. These include obstacles related to technology access, internet connection, hardware, and/or having a safe, quiet space to study. Many students are engaging in remote learning with a smartphone as their only access point. To engage in remote learning, adult students need internet access and the appropriate hardware, digital skills development, and support with digital participation. If programs are given the necessary resources and support, the adult education field can use this time of hardship to help students learn, adapt, and emerge in a stronger position to achieve their goals and ultimately help the city through its recovery. These students will be able to hold more advanced positions in the workplace while at the same time help their children succeed in school. **UJA urges the Council and the Administration to explore ways to ensure that adult literacy students have access to necessary technology and supports so that they can continue to engage with and benefit from adult literacy programming in a virtual environment. For example, the city could allow for the use of Department of Education distributed devices to be expanded to the adult literacy sector to begin to address the lack of internet access and digital devices that keep adult students out of adult literacy classes.**

Lastly, as FY22 budget discussions begin, UJA urges the Council and the Administration to invest in the adult literacy pilot project that the New York City Coalition for Adult Literacy (NYCCAL) had worked with the Council to launch prior to the pandemic. An additional \$10.5M investment would quadruple city funding for approximately 25 community-based adult literacy programs. These funds would be used to enable these programs to fully invest in the 14 "Building Blocks" of a comprehensive adult literacy programs identified in the LAC's [*Investing in Quality*](#) report, and to ultimately demonstrate that greater investment in

supports and resources for adult literacy students will lead to significantly greater social and economic benefits for students, their families, and their communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. UJA looks forward to working closely with the Council and the Administration to ensure that adult learners have access to the critical programs upon which they rely. Please contact Ariel Savransky at savranskya@ujafedny.org or 212-836-1360 with any questions.



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®
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FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

**New York City Council
Committee on Immigration, Honorable Carlos Menchaca, Chair
Committee on Youth Services, Honorable Deborah Rose, Chair**

**Testimony of YMCA of Greater New York
Presented by Rachael Rinaldo, Senior Director of New Americans Initiative**

**Oversight Hearing - Adult Literacy and Digital Literacy in Immigrant Communities
October 14, 2020**

Good morning, it is my pleasure to be here today. My name is Rachael Rinaldo, I'm the Senior Director of the New Americans Initiative for the YMCA of Greater New York, and I will be testifying on behalf of the YMCA. Thank you, Chair Menchaca and Chair Rose for the opportunity to testify on the state of adult literacy and digital literacy in immigrant communities in this moment of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As an educator, program director, friend, ally and ardent supporter of immigrant communities here in New York City, nationally and on a global scale, I have had the privilege of witnessing families and communities transform and thrive as a result of human and capital investment.

As the Senior Director of the YMCA of Greater New York's New Americans Initiative, I provide content area expertise and oversight to seven New Americans Welcome Centers and nine off-site locations throughout New York City. The YMCA of Greater New York has been serving newcomers in NYC since 1908 when we had a YMCA on Ellis Island. Based on the success of our English Language and Employment Services for Adult Immigrant and Refugees program, which was established in 1978, we launched the New Americans Initiative in 2008.

Prior to the pandemic our New Americans Initiative offered holistic, wrap-around services to thousands of newcomers to New York City. Our multilingual resource and referral centers provided immigrant families with a wide array of instructional, vocational, recreational, family support, and social services, as well as a comprehensive case management program that supported individuals and families in removing barriers to their success. On March 16th when we were mandated to close our facilities, we quickly began offering our services remotely.

YMCA OF GREATER NEW YORK ASSOCIATION OFFICE 5 West 63rd Street, 7th Floor New York, New York 10023
D 212-630-9646 C 646-599-7607 E rrinaldo@ymcanyc.org W ymcanyc.org

Although we faced significant challenges, we formed a Crisis Response Team whose goals are to reduce the feelings of helplessness, confusion and heightened anxiety our communities are faced with, as well as to address the needs and provide critical resources throughout the pandemic and beyond. Participants and community members have the opportunity to access supportive services, ensuring they have access to the food, medical, education, immigration and other support services they may need. We had to triangulate our approach and balance the capacity and ability of our team, the capacity and ability of our constituents to access our services, and the capacity and ability of our finances to support the work. We focused on:

- Connecting individuals and families to services and resources
- Removing all barriers to receiving immediate services during and after the current pandemic
- Increasing stabilization for individuals and families in need
- Reducing the lasting impact of the current pandemic
- Continuing English language learning and development of work readiness and civic engagement skills in a virtual environment

While we knew inequities pre-existed the pandemic, we had not realized to what extent. The pandemic shed light on the growing digital divide and the negative impact of that on our adult language learners. Prior to March 16th, we saw an average of 800 individuals walk through our doors daily. By April 13, 2020, although we contacted nearly 2,000 individuals, only 265 individuals were able to access technology that allowed them to enroll in virtual English Language classes. A mere 13% of those contacted. While our classes traditionally focus on English language attainment, workforce readiness, and citizenship preparation, our instructors spent the first six weeks teaching our participants basic digital literacy skills; just enough to make sure everyone had the opportunity to participate and stay connected to their peers and community.

As the pandemic drew on, we heard from many students of their challenges with: isolation, financial insecurity, food insecurity, housing insecurity, language access to important COVID-19 information, the digital divide, digital literacy, and balancing being essential workers while supporting their children with remote learning. To support in these areas, we counted on our partnerships and shifted our communications from a virtual Zoom room to messaging, emails and phone calls for many. We had to bridge the gaps in accessibility for those who have limited access to technology or minimal knowledge of digital literacy. In order to bridge the digital literacy gap we provided individuals with one-to-one digital coaching, multilingual instructions on accessing Zoom, "walked" individuals through the process of downloading an app or accessing a website, and supported those who do not have the technology in accessing classes by calling in. In essence, we had to get creative and diversify our approaches. By doing so, we, a team reduced from over 60 staff to six due to loss of revenue and funding, were able to support hundreds of additional families in accessing critical resources such as free or reduced internet services, information to obtain devices to support their child(ren)'s learning, free online tutorials to help support their digital learning, as well as online directories (e.g., food pantries/distribution sites, mental health resources, etc.)

Faced with significant revenue loss, impending state budget cuts and fiscal uncertainties, we were forced to reduce our services and the stability of our Initiative is unknown. On March 15th we offered over 35 classes citywide, daily. From April through June, our capacity was such that we could only offer 8 classes, weekly. However, from July 1 through today, realizing the need and demand, despite the threat of state budget cuts we increased our staff from 6 to 12 and our virtual programming from 8 to 15 classes a week, all of which are offered from 6 to 12 hours per week.

A citywide [survey](#) of programs conducted by the Literacy Assistance Center this past Spring found that job and income loss, support for children's schooling, food and housing insecurity, and mental health concerns are all significant, pressing issues for students in adult literacy programs - and that these issues have all been exacerbated by limited reading, writing, English language, and/or digital literacy skills. The survey results offer a startling, yet accurate, finding of what our students told us they were facing. In addition, I want to name that many of our students are considered essential workers. We cannot forget what they have done for us in this pandemic. It is critical to invest and work towards eliminating the digital divide - as the Department of Education is striving to do for our school-aged youth - to support and stabilize our English language learning households throughout the pandemic. The timeline of the pandemic is uncertain; however, what is certain is that we have to take steps now so that all New York City families are able to join us on the path to recovery.

We need to meet our students where they are, which means they need access to the new digital realities, digital literacy, and a commitment to a proven pedagogy of engaging instructional classes - remote or in person - ***as well as access to supportive services to mitigate the challenges they are now faced with.*** This work is not easy. Our services are free, with the support of public and private funds. However, current public funding levels are not nearly enough to serve those in need with ***quality*** services. It was always a struggle prior to the pandemic to balance quality services and meeting the needs of our communities with limited funding. It has become that much more challenging now due to the uncertainty of funding and the necessary digital access our students need to succeed in class.

2.2 million individuals in NYC are low English proficient and/or lacking a high school diploma, and adult literacy classes have proven effective in helping immigrants learn English. However, access is a significant issue, and, unfortunately, the recent trend to focus on workforce development outcomes is useless to immigrants unless they have some preexisting English language skills. According to the Migration Policy Institute's 2016 report, ["Immigrants and WIOA Services,"](#) immigrants' median earnings are significantly lower than native-born residents', resulting in a much higher rate of immigrants living in poverty than native-born residents. The report finds that a contributing factor to this disparity is that immigrants cannot access relevant and useful programs that support their acquisition of the English language ***and*** remove the barriers they face daily.

Digital literacy and decreasing the digital divide is imperative for adult learners. The impact of the Internet on education and in every aspect of our community is profound. Access to the information available is crucial because it can be used in routine everyday life for education, business transactions, personal communication, information gathering, job searches and career development. We ask you to empower programs and institutions and fund a model that is flexible to meet our new reality of remote, in-person or blended learning. This will allow us to focus our efforts, energy and resources on supporting literacy and learning, two-generation approaches, mental health and other critical services to set our communities on the path to recovery from the pandemic. A flexible funding model would allow us to sustain the services we instituted to bridge the digital divide and address the digital literacy gap.

Language is more than classes: it is access to food, fair housing, mental health services, civic lessons, citizenship, workforce development and attainment. Language is for nurses, doctors, deli workers, cashiers, janitors, child-care workers; language is for the single mom; it is for the grandmother raising her grandchildren.; Language transcends all communities, and the benefits of learning and feeling "a part of" far exceed the investments we are asking you to consider today.

Thank you.

Rachael Rinaldo
Senior Director, New Americans Initiative and Global Partnerships
YMCA of Greater New York

Good morning everyone,
My name is Xiaoli Qiao, I am the Program Director of Adult Literacy at the YWCA of Queens. I am very happy to be here today to testify how our Literacy and digital support have impacted our immigrant community.

Our department runs an ESL program and a High School Equivalency program; we serve around 500 clients every year and most of them are new immigrants or seniors who do not speak English well. Due to the impact of Covid-19, all our classes have been moved online. I still remember how frustrated both our instructors and our senior students were back in March because a significant number of our ESL students were not tech savvy at all. I still remember how many times that we had to mute and unmute the students during the classes because the students did not know how to turn on and off their microphones; we could not do group discussions like we always do in the classroom as students did not know how to join the breakout room on Zoom. It was not fun at the beginning.

However, little by little, our instructors taught the seniors from the very basic. Our seniors learned how to use the smart phone, how to set up an email address and send homework to teachers by email; they also learned how to take a picture or even make a video, then share it with the classmates via Zoom. We were so impressed by our senior students' progress on using smartphones and computers day by day. Eventually, we realized that as time goes on, things have changed, our seniors started to enjoy the new technology and eager to learn more. They became so excited when they finally figured out how they could share their pictures with classmates via Zoom. Today, I would like to share a letter that I received from one of my ESL students. Her name is Clara Kown and she is 75 years old.

In the letter, she said "I learned new technology by taking online classes at the YWCA of Queens. Previously, I did not know what Zoom was or how to use it. Now I know. I know how to take my homework from email and send it back to my teacher. My daughter made me an email address a few years ago, but I had never used it before the online class. Learning new technology makes me excited and I feel proud of myself. As a 75-year-old, when it comes to learning and using a new technology, I need someone to assist me. I feel the online class helps me a lot and let me know how much I can still learn even when I am old. Now, not only my English is improving and at the same time, I learned how to download and send cute Emojis to my grandson on my phone. That is a big deal for me. Now, I have a lot of fun with my grandson. I can feel that he is proud of me and, I feel that I am a cool grandma."

I almost had my tears in my eyes when I read the letter at the first time. As the program director, I am so proud of my teachers. We have put a lot of effort in teaching our students how to get through the anxiety and conquered the challenges to enjoy the new technology; but I am even more proud of our senior students, they never gave up, and they can learn so much more than what we expected. Also, once they know the technology, it changes their lifestyles, it makes them live better lives. Adult Literacy and digital literacy services are

extremely important, especially in this pandemic. We connect our seniors in the community together by providing these amazing services and we look forward to continue to serve them in the future.



Asian American Federation

Testimony to the New York City Council Committee on Immigration

October 14, 2020

Written Testimony

I want to thank Committee Chair Menchaca for holding this important conversation on an issue that has had a serious impact on our community. This Committee has served a critical policymaking role during this crisis and has been instrumental in giving our immigrants and the organizations who serve them the voice they deserve. I'm Ravi Reddi and I am the Associate Director for Advocacy and Policy at the Asian American Federation.

Digital literacy should be a critical piece of any conversation that's seeking to understand how our immigrant communities are coping with the multitude of crises hitting our City at this moment, including a pandemic, the ensuing economic damage and the unprecedented challenges regarding their civil rights. But discussing digital literacy in our community starts with addressing the digital divide.

First, it's our job to provide you with the context and when it comes to the Asian American community and our immigrants, the context presents a challenge in itself. In our community, the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a [35% increase in deaths compared to the five-year average](#). Our recently released report on the devastating impact of COVID-19 on jobs our community relies on shows that our community has been hit harder by unemployment than any other in our City. And social isolation amongst our seniors combined with unprecedented strains on basic supplies have overwhelmed our community resources.

And there are layers to the difficulties our community is facing. COVID-19's strain on our community is set against the backdrop of some disturbing statistics. Overall in 2019, 14% of Asians in New York City lived in poverty, compared to a statewide poverty rate of 16%. Among seniors, 23% of Asian New Yorkers lived in poverty compared to almost 19% of all seniors in the city.

Additionally, language barriers remain high among Asian New Yorkers. Overall, 48.4% of Asians have limited English proficiency in New York City.

These dynamics exist in the context of an explosion in the Asian population in the past 20 years, and they have created a perfect storm for a public health crisis. Since 2000, the Asian population in New York State increased by 62%, growing from 1.2 million in 2000 to over 1.9 million in 2019. In the counties outside of New York City, the Asian population grew even faster (94%), from 296,000 in 2000 to almost 577,000 in 2019. Overwhelmingly, Asian New Yorkers are immigrants, with 2 out of 3 in the state being foreign-born.

It's in this context that issues relating to the Digital Divide and tech-focused adaptations are taking on greater urgency amongst our member and partner agencies, several of whom will be testifying today; and our community members who find themselves relying on these agencies and the City for their basic needs.

Telehealth

First and foremost, amidst a pandemic that has resulted in unprecedented social isolation for our senior populations and has exacerbated existing community-wide mental health issues, telehealth has been an adaptation our community service providers have embraced and that our City and State have supported. For many of our partners and our community members, telehealth could very well be a fixture of their continuing healthcare well beyond this pandemic, and the City's support for this work is an example of supporting innovations and adaptations for the long-term.

But as the Asian American Federation conducts roundtables with mental health service providers regularly, a continuing theme has been the difficulty in reaching those most in need of mental health services through technology that is unaffordable or requires English proficiency beyond their ability, above-average technical know-how and/or a stable internet connection.

Our service providers are doing their level best, with many providing effective programming through telehealth as a result of regulatory easing at the city and state level. But systemic inadequacies in how we connect our most vulnerable, technologically, means that this isn't a matter of telehealth initiatives reaching their full potential, it's a matter of telehealth initiatives reaching the people who are at once the most in-need of these services and the least likely to have access to them.

Senior Services

And the limitations regarding telehealth are compounded when it comes to our seniors. Many are afraid to go outside due to fear of getting COVID-19 and rising anti-Asian xenophobia and violence. And it's this population, already significantly isolated before the pandemic due to language limitations, who most urgently need connections to their basic needs the way they need them.

Limited access to technology and limited funding for service providers to address the Digital Divide with this population are requiring most services to be conducted over the phone, such as mental wellness calls and coordinating food deliveries. Some service providers are even being forced to teach ESL and citizenship classes to our seniors over the phone.

Immigration and Civic Engagement

And while the Trump Administration has been doing everything in its power to dismantle employment and family visa policies and instilling fear amongst our immigrant communities with its Public Charge assaults, the digital divide is presenting a significant vulnerability in our safety net. Many in our immigrant community are constantly looking over their shoulder for fear of detention and deeply entrenched government distrust is resulting in limited engagement with government processes online.

Others with relatively more residential security are finding it difficult to navigate, amidst an ongoing pandemic, civic processes that have given technological access outsized importance, like processes relating to getting government services, registering to vote or filling out the Census.

Language Access

But part of why the digital divide is so significant in our community is because of an issue that we have sought to raise when discussing almost every facet of government work with our community, language access. Language access efforts are a significant part of our broader fight for more culturally-competent services for our immigrants, elders, small businesses and other vulnerable populations during this pandemic, and beyond. If technological applications are required to navigate the census, or register to vote, or apply for unemployment or receive small business assistance funds, they absolutely must be created with the end-user in mind. In our community, as in many of your districts, that is more often than not someone who has limited English proficiency and/or limited access to technology.

Recommendations

- Telehealth
 - From our partners, we're hearing that the City must do a better job of offering trainings to providers and community members, alike, on telehealth programming and medical portals, all the while ensuring HIPAA compliance.
 - Likewise, our smaller community service providers are struggling to transition from in-person to telehealth service provisions without adequate funding or capacity. These service providers fill critical gaps in our health safety net when it comes to reaching our most vulnerable and isolated populations, and grant and capacity support must be made available to avoid interruptions in services deemed essential by our community members.
- Senior Services
 - Our senior service providers are stretching every penny as far as it can go in providing services to our seniors, from culturally-competent meal delivery to mental health wellness checks and innovative senior programming. But our partners need funding and they need in-kind technological assistance to help bridge the digital hardware and knowledge divide as the pandemic and social isolation continues for our senior populations. We need help getting devices and know-how to our seniors in culturally competent ways so they can receive services they need and are entitled to, as seamlessly as the circumstances will permit. A telephone call shouldn't be the only way they can connect to the outside world.
- Immigration and Civic Engagement
 - When it comes to our new American communities, the lack of culturally-competent technology, alongside well-founded trust issues with the government that the Trump Administration has sought to exacerbate, have created an urgent need to re-engage this vulnerable population in innovative ways during the pandemic. If technology is the best way to conduct outreach, our partners need assistance from the City to help reach our most vulnerable populations about the services they can continue to receive despite this Administration's Public Charge assaults, how to register to vote, how to navigate the census process, and how to become fully engaged with the city they help fund.
- Language Access

- We need city initiatives to receive the funding they need to fully implement the new citywide languages covered in Local Law 30 and we need to amend contracting processes to allow Asian-led nonprofits to more accurately reflect the cultural and language expertise they bring when serving our community members.

On behalf of the Asian American Federation, I want to thank you for letting us speak with you on this important subject. The work is difficult, and we understand the difficult position this City and our State are in, financially. But the work of this Committee is critical during this once-in-a-generation crisis, and we're ready to be partners in making sure our immigrant populations get access to the services they deserve, how they need them.



Testimony

Presented by Karen Zhou

Executive Director, Homecrest Community Services

On

NYC Council Committee on Immigration

On

Monday, October 14, 2020

Good afternoon everyone. Thank you Chair Menchaca, Chair Rose and members of the Immigration Committee for this opportunity to testify today. I hope everyone is staying safe and healthy at this time!

My name is Karen Zhou. I am the Executive Director of Homecrest Community Services (HCS). We are a multi-social service agency with over two decades of providing community services in Brooklyn, New York. We operate two large senior center programs serving Asian immigrant seniors.

Due to the pandemic, what started as a remote experience to shelter in place to contain COVID-19 is now becoming the new reality for many immigrant seniors we care for. Because this group is most vulnerable to COVID-19, the CDC have continued to advise for our seniors to stay at home and avoid social gatherings.

As seniors remain isolated at home, we are concern about their mental and emotional health without their daily activities to help them get through their day. Seniors living alone under these circumstances may feel depressed, lonely, hopeless and scared. Maintaining mental health and safety for our seniors have become a top priority for us.

According to the Asian American Federation of NY's 2016 study, "Asian American Seniors in NY", Asians are the fastest growing senior population in NYC. They now make up 16% of the senior population. In terms of limited English proficiency, 9 out of 10 Chinese immigrant seniors can't read or write English fluently. Almost half of the Chinese immigrant seniors never completed high school. At our centers 98% of our

seniors speak Chinese as their primary language and so when we started our free ESL adult literacy program for older adults many years ago, it was well received and have been an important ongoing program that we offer. Seniors attending this program says they sign up for ESL classes because they want to learn to better communicate with their grandchildren and to be more self-sufficient in society.

Since the pandemic, we have had to act nimbly to pivot our programming from onsite to online activities so services can be continued uninterrupted. Like schools, we offered free virtual learning and activities for our seniors throughout the day. Similar to public school students, not all of our immigrant seniors have access to Wi-Fi and many do not have laptops or computers to be able to go online. So while technology have helped play an enormous role during this time of social distancing to help connect one another remotely, there still remains a large digital divide between those with access and those without. This inequity is unacceptable. Learning should be accessible to all.

We would like to advocate to the city and this committee to find ways to bridge this gap either by providing technology funding to senior centers so we can purchase laptops or iPads as well as supporting funding to provide Wi-Fi accessibility for both seniors and students who many because of income lack the ability to afford Wi-Fi services on their own.

As senior center providers we know the needs first hand and we can be accountable for the distribution of laptops to senior's homes. We also have had great success in training and teaching many of our immigrant seniors how to use the technology remotely over the phone. Once seniors learn how to use apps like zoom, their lives changes because now they can see their friends, attend classes and return to some sense of normalcy even though the pandemic still rages on outside in hotspot areas.

In these uncertain times, one thing still remains clear: we must do more to protect and support our most vulnerable populations including the many immigrant seniors in NYC. Because we do not yet have a vaccine and seniors are remaining at home, technology funding would make a world of a difference to help increase mental wellness and reduce social isolation for seniors at home. In the past, our immigrant seniors were reliant on senior centers to get them through their day and now they need us more than ever to help get them through this pandemic!

On behalf of Homecrest Community Services, I thank you for your time and consideration on my testimony today!



45 Broadway, 22nd Floor, New York, NY 10006
Tel: 212-967-0322 | www.unhny.org

**New York City Council Joint Hearing: Adult Literacy and Digital Literacy
Committee on Immigration, Council Member Carlos Menchaca, Chair
Committee on Youth Services, Council Member Debbie Rose, Chair**

Testimony of Lena Cohen, UNH, October 14, 2020

United Neighborhood Houses is grateful for your continued leadership in supporting nonprofit human services organizations during the COVID-19 pandemic. United Neighborhood Houses (UNH) is the association of 44 nonprofit settlement houses and neighborhood centers, reaching over 765,000 New Yorkers every year. Settlement houses and the larger human services sector are at the frontline of this pandemic providing food, shelter, childcare, mental health, and other critical services, and their survival or failure directly impacts how quickly communities will be able to recover from the pandemic. Human services providers need economic relief, so we ask that you continue to advocate for the needs of the sector to ensure that emergency relief funds reach the nonprofit sector to keep a low-paid workforce economically stable and available to deliver services to those in need.

We thank the City Council for negotiating a FY2021 budget that included \$9 million for New York City adult literacy programs. This testimony will focus on the network of adult literacy services in New York City and recommendations to strengthen these programs moving forward.

UNH Recommendation

Immigrant & low-income New Yorkers are serving on the front lines of the city's response to COVID-19. However, adult literacy programs are one of the only services available in New York City to support their educational and economic growth. Additionally, now that the school year has begun, programs are expected to open across the city without any assurances from the city of getting reimbursed; and smaller organizations are not able to float the funding upfront because any extra resources are exhausted from covering costs associated with re-opening.

In the absence of economic relief from the federal administration, which has excluded immigrants from any COVID-19 federal stimulus package, the city must keep these programs whole by ensuring that FY21 DYCD contracts are paid in full so that community-based providers can continue serving New Yorkers in need of English language services and digital literacy support.

Adult Literacy Overview and Need

We are living at a moment when the need for digital literacy and health literacy; the ability for parents to independently support their children's education; and the ability to access, understand, and interpret complex information; has never been more apparent. Yet, today in New

York City, there are more than 2.2 million adults who lack basic literacy, numeracy, English language proficiency, and/or a high school diploma. Many of these 2.2 million adults are on the frontlines of the current pandemic, performing essential work that is sustaining our communities. Some are the grocery store workers, delivery workers, and home care workers who are risking their lives to maintain their livelihoods and to care for us all. Others are the restaurant workers, salon workers, and domestic workers who have lost their jobs and incomes and face a harsh reality with no safety net. Adult literacy education – and the additional support services that adult literacy programs provide – will play a vital role in the coming years to help stabilize the lives of many of our most essential, yet vulnerable, fellow New Yorkers.

Digital Literacy

Since COVID-19 forced New York City to go on pause, adult literacy programs have transitioned to remote learning with positive results. Community members who have previously been unable to attend in-person classes due to needing to take care of family members and/or children have found remote learning to be a more convenient opportunity for educational gains.

Remote learning has allowed students to balance consistent participation in literacy classes with supporting their children in school, meeting work responsibilities, and providing care to family members. Additionally, through remote classes, students gain much-needed digital literacy skills through new learning tools such as video conferencing, online task management, and information searching as they navigate new platforms. These skills will help put our community members in a stronger position as New York City rebuilds its post-COVID economy.

Keep Literacy Programs Whole

The benefit of keeping program staff employed is critical for New York State as we face economic uncertainty and extreme public health concerns as a result of COVID-19. In order to ensure that all New Yorkers who wish to access these programs can continue to do so, United Neighborhood Houses urges the City to keep adult literacy programs whole and make timely contract payments to DYCD-funded adult literacy education programs that are operating classes online.

Thank you for your efforts to ensure that adult literacy services providers are funded to provide vital education and support to vulnerable New Yorkers during this pandemic. We look forward to working with you to restore this essential funding for community-based adult literacy programs.

For questions, please contact Lena Cohen at lcohen@unhny.org.

Student Story

Yekaterina, University Settlement:

“My name is Yekaterina. I am from Kazakhstan. It’s really far from here—it’s close to Russia.

I've been living in New York for about two years now. I like to go out for fun and just to walk around New York because there's still a lot of places that I didn't visit yet. And there's always something new you can find on the street.

I speak Russian, that's my first language, I speak English, Chinese, and Ukrainian.

My friend told me that there is a program in Manhattan that provides intensive English classes. Adult Literacy helped me a lot and our teacher was great. His name was Jay, and he was a great teacher—he taught me a lot and I learned a lot from him.

My goals were to find a place in the United States, to start a new life and first of all I needed to know the language that people speak around me to find a good job and to fit in the society.

I found my first job at University Settlement at Adult Literacy. While working as an office assistant, I learned a lot about the environment in the office. That's the first thing that was a bit different for me because that was the first time that I worked in the United States and everything is new. So that was a big, huge step for me here in the United States to get a job in the office.

Thanks to Adult Literacy I found another job, a full-time job, at University Settlement at the Consultation Center. The Consultation Center is a mental health clinic at University Settlement. We help people who struggle with mental health issues and I am an administrative assistant there. I'm happy to have that job because, again, it helps you a lot when you move from another country and you start your life from zero to get a full-time job in an office and with a good environment—it's amazing!

I want to tell you that program is an amazing program, Adult Literacy is an amazing program, because you can find a program that's free and it's intensive English and they help you with your job, they help you to build your resume, they help you to study English, and there's so many things that this program helped me with. So I'm really grateful for that."

New York City Council Committee on Immigration and Youth Services

Honorable Carlos Menchaca, Chair

Honorable Deborah Rose, Chair

Oversight Hearing on Adult Literacy and Digital Literacy in Immigrant Communities

October 14th, 2020

Testimony by Hannah Babiss, Fordham Masters of Social Work Candidate

Good afternoon and thank you Chairs Menchaca and Rose for the opportunity to testify. My name is Hannah Babiss and I am a Masters of Social work student at Fordham University. Additionally, I have been teaching English to speakers of other languages for over four years. As a higher education student and an ESOL teacher, I have seen first-hand the impacts that proficiency in English language can provide for individuals, families and communities.

I would like to start off by sharing a personal story. In 2017 I was working as an English teacher at the University of Ibagué in Colombia. This is where I met a student named Daniela. Daniela was a 16-year-old high school student, who took intermediate English classes on the weekends, at the University. She was a student of mine for 2 years. After one year of classes together, I knew so much about her; her favorite color was purple, she loved fashion, she wanted to be a doctor, and she always dreamed of traveling to England. One day after class she asked me where I went to university and what I studied. After telling her a bit about myself, I asked her what she planned to do after she graduated high school. She told me that she wanted to go to University in England to study medicine but that it was too expensive. After that conversation Daniela and I began to meet on a weekly basis after class to talk about her university options. I helped her find a scholarship that suited her, research universities in England with biology majors, order an ACT prep book, review her entrance essays, and tutored her for the IELTS, English language proficiency test. After months of preparing, exam taking and essay writing, Daniela was ready to apply. Daniela was admitted to Birkbeck college of Medicine in 2019, and to this day continues to live and study in London. Her long-lived dream of going in England finally came true.

The impact that English proficiency had on Daniela's life was certainly extraordinary, but is not by any means an isolated experience. Students have such grand capacities and with some

added support from a teacher or mentor advocating and rooting for them, they can expand their success and thrive. Teachers in general provide access to so much more than just classes. They are intrinsic pillars and connectors of communities. Classrooms have the capacity to physically bring communities together. They are a space for sharing resources and creating access to social services. In the case of Daniela, she gained access to recourses to prepare for college internationally, as well as the confidence to believe that she could do so.

Now more than ever, during the covid-19 global pandemic, a community space, such as a classroom and the support of a community member, such as a teacher, is imperative, especially for limited English proficient speakers. During this global crisis, New York City ESOL teachers have connected their students to get access to recourses such as free food, information on their children's public schools, updates on policies, such as the stimulus bills, safety protocols for covid-19, and information on changing political rhetoric.

As a social worker, teacher and community member, I firmly believe that ESOL classes provide supportive services and integrate students into the community. If you are in agreement with this statement and believe that now more than ever it is important for individuals to remain connected with their community, I ask that city funded adult literacy programs are fully restored this year.

Thank You

New York City Council

Committees on Immigration & Youth Services

Hearing on Adult Literacy & Digital Literacy in Immigrant Communities

October 14, 2020

Testimony from Anthony Tassi of Literacy Partners

Introduction

Good afternoon members of the Committee. My name is Anthony Tassi. I am the CEO of Literacy Partners and I am pleased to have this opportunity to share a few thoughts with you about adult education in the era of COVID19 recovery.

Adult Literacy for Parents is a Crucial Bridge in Immigrant Communities

Simply put, adult literacy classes for immigrant parents are an incredibly important bridge to wellbeing in low-income communities:

- They can prepare residents for workforce development and job training programs;
- They can be a lifeline to parents in helping them promote their children's academic development at home, especially when schools, Head Starts, and childcare programs inevitably close as the pandemic returns in full force;
- They can help community members build the skills, knowledge, and networks to become more civically engaged and advocate for themselves, their families, and their neighbors; and
- They can help families manage their health by demystifying the health care system, improving access to care, and promoting preventive steps we all need to take to avoid contracting or spreading COVID-19.

Literacy Partners Background

Literacy Partners operates in all five boroughs of the City of New York with the singular goal of enabling low-income and immigrant families to achieve their fullest potential. Our unique role in the City's education system is to focus on parents of young children and our unique approach includes working with mainstream media to create content that engages and inspires Latinx

families. We partner with Head Start programs, UPK and 3-K programs, elementary schools, and other community-based organizations to offer educational programs that meet the needs of low-income and immigrant parents and caregivers of young children.

Our free classes, community workshops, and educational media programs help parents develop the skills they need to achieve success for themselves and a bright future for their family. Our programs support community development, help break the cycle of poverty, improve job prospects, and close the achievement gap among children before they even begin school.

Literacy Partners COVID19 Response

In early March, Literacy Partners saw the need to suspend in-person program and make a transition to online programming. The last day of our in-person programming was March 10th, and we spent the next five days working with our teaching and other support staff to move our programming online. Our first day of online English for Parents (ESOL) classes was March 16th. We have been using What'sApp to stay in communication with our students, Zoom to host our classes, and Google Classrooms to share class materials and assignments with our students. In addition, we have been posting segments of each of our classes on YouTube for students who miss classes or would like to review what was covered in previous class sessions. Since the suspension of our in-person programming, we have moved our La Fuerza de Creer (Spanish language program for parents), We Speak NYC, and Adult Literacy programs online and have continued to remain connected to the families we serve.

The Promise of Educating Immigrant Parents – with Head Start & UPK

Our primary objective in our English for Parents program this year, in addition to family literacy, has been health literacy and child-well visits in collaboration with our partner the Sunset Park Family Health Centers of NYU Langone. Despite our transition to online programming, we have continued to be successful in achieving our key performance indicators for the program.

Class:	FY18	FY19	FY20 YTD
% Increase Frequency Parents Reading w/ Children	58%	72%	76%
% Increase Time - Parents Reading w/ Children	-	52%	55%
% Increased Confidence Speaking English	48%	63%	64%
% Class Helped Improve English	99%	99%	100%
% Class Helped Reduce Stress	90%	94%	92%
% Child Benefited from What Parent Learned	98%	97%	93%
% Would Recommend Class to Friend or Family	98%	100%	99%

As we transitioned to online programming, we found that not all of our students would be able to continue in the program due to increased childcare responsibilities, the challenges of helping young children with their online school work during the day, or not having access to reliable internet service or the necessary technology needed to attend online classes. The week children started online schooling in NYC, our attendance dropped significantly, and we worked closely with our students to move the program from a morning schedule to an afternoon and weekend schedule that would allow a majority of our students to continue participating in our classes. We have since retained 72 of 96 students in the transition from in-person to online programming.

At the request of our students, we shifted from reviewing previous course topics to covering new material and have been able to continue our health literacy curriculum and child-well visit intervention that we had been working on since the start of the winter semester in January, which our students have continued to engage with and find helpful for themselves and their families. We are currently in the process of working to connect the students in the English for Parents program with volunteers who will host 30 to 45 minute weekly video calls with our students in order to provide additional English speaking practice outside the classroom.

In response to COVID19, we have worked with the Sunset Park Family Health Centers of NYU Langone to provide important resources to the families we serve. Through our partner organization, we have been able to provide our students and their families with access to a food bank as well as assistance with signing up for SNAP, WIC, health insurance, and other important services at this time. We have helped connect our students with COVID19 testing centers and antibody testing centers, and continue to support our students and families with all that we can during this time.

The Promise of Helping Young Adult Parents Transition to College – with High School Equivalency Programs & CUNY

Our Leadership for Education and Parenting program with students currently enrolled at Bronx Community College for the winter/spring semester was designed to provide continued to support for the parents of young children who had participated in our program last year. We were able to enroll 10 of our former program participants into the program, but had to transition the program online after the in-person orientation due to COVID19 and the city's stay at home orders.

In order to ensure all of the students had the equipment they needed for the program, we purchased Chromebooks and headsets for each of the students and provided two students with WiFi hotspots, so they could participate in our program and continue their college studies.

Throughout the current programming, we have had the students assist us in making videos of the program for the Literacy Partners' YouTube channel with the intention of sharing the real-world experience of our students excelling in their college classes while raising young children.

What it Takes (Literacy Partners College Transition): <https://youtu.be/ZgZCsjf5PXc>

Mothers & Daughters (Literacy Partners College Transition): <https://youtu.be/NpbMWSwG6aE>

The Promise of Parent Education for Spanish-Speaking Parents and Caregivers – with Head Start, UPK, & CBOs

Literacy Partners, working in conjunction with Univision, has developed a unique program to address this inequity: *La Fuerza de Creer* parent education workshops. *La Fuerza de Creer* is a 5-episode mini-series about a community center threatened by real estate development. The families who rely on the center for child care must rally together with the staff to save the center. Woven into the narrative arc of the story are scenes of parents interacting with their children in ways that are known to promote early learning and social emotional development.

The miniseries was broadcast nationally on Univision in 2019 with average daily viewership of 1.4 million Hispanic viewers, including 284,000 average daily viewers in the New York metro area.

Before COVID19, the *La Fuerza de Creer* in person programming was showing excellent results across all indicators for the program. We had been hosting in-person programming at a number of Head Start, UPK, and CBO programs across the city and working with partners in Texas, Florida, and Pennsylvania to lead the programming in their communities.

Class:	FY20 YTD
% Increase Frequency Parents Reading w/ Children	38%
% Increase - Parents See Themselves as Their Child's Best Teacher	59%
% Parents Who Can List 3 Language Rich Activities w/ Their Children	74%
% Parents Who Have Implemented 2 or More Strategies Learning in LFDC	99%
% Parents Whose Knowledge of Child Development has Improved	89%
% Parents Who Agree That Building Child's Vocabulary (about Feelings) Increases Literacy Skills	98%
% Class Helped Reduce Stress	100%
% Child Benefited from What Parent Learned	100%
% Would Recommend Class to Friend or Family	100%

During our COVID-19 response, our program has helped parents with their digital literacy skills and with their children's remote learning.

New Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)	Total -- 8 Groups
% of Parents Increasing Frequency in which they use online resources to read with their children	61%
% of Parents Increasing Confidence Using Online Resources w/ their Children	53%
% of Parents Increasing Confidence Using Online Educational Platforms [Self]	54%
% of Parents Increasing confidence helping children use online educational platforms	53%

In response to COVID19, the *La Fuerza de Creer* programming was temporarily suspended while the program shifted online. In addition to continuing on-line programming utilizing the *La Fuerza de Creer 2* video series, we are in the process of creating a new website with digital media that all Spanish speaking families will be able to access and utilize. We are currently producing a short daily show, finalizing some of our Moments of Connection videos, and are compiling video recorded read alouds of children's books in Spanish that will all be accessible upon the launch of the website.

Conclusion:

I want to thank members of this Committee for convening this important and informative hearing. It is clear from your remarks and the testimony of all those who appeared today that this Committee has a unique opportunity to redress the systemic failures of our education system in the past and strike a blow for a brighter, more equitable future.



New York City Council

**COMMITTEE ON YOUTH SERVICES, JOINTLY WITH THE COMMITTEE ON
IMMIGRATION**

OVERSIGHT HEARING

Adult Literacy and Digital Literacy in Immigrant Communities

Wednesday, October 14, 2020

Good morning. I am Steven Mahoney, Assistant Director of Adult English Language and Literacy at The New York Public Library (NYPL). I would like to thank Speaker Corey Johnson, Committee on Youth Service Chair Deborah Rose and Committee on Immigration Chair Carlos Menchaca, and the entire City Council for holding this hearing and your tireless commitment to libraries and immigrant rights. I am grateful to the City Council for the opportunity to testify on our work and dedication to ensure newcomers and immigrants have resources to support their lives in the United States.

As the nation's largest public library system and third-largest globally, NYPL features 88 neighborhood branches and four scholarly research centers which serve communities throughout the Bronx, Manhattan and Staten Island. For 125 years the Library has provided resources and opportunities for New Yorkers of all walks of life and offers immigrants and their families access to cultural programming, literary resources, language classes, and other critical supports across all ages, backgrounds, educational levels, and ethnicities. Regardless of legal status, language ability, or affiliation, The New York Public Library continues to provide a welcoming space for people from diverse backgrounds in an environment that fosters kindness, dignity, and respect.

Libraries serve as vital community hubs throughout New York City, home to approximately 3.2 million immigrants. NYPL provides essential technology services that play a role in closing the digital divide, critical English language and literacy classes, essential homework and tutoring services, comprehensive career and job resources, and over 103,000 free programs serving all New Yorkers from toddlers to older adults. These services reinforce the Library's dictum as an essential provider of free books, information, ideas, and education for all New Yorkers.

Adult Literacy Services

NYPL offers a variety of language instruction services and programming to help immigrants improve existing language skills, advance their careers, interact in their communities, and ensure the next generation has the tools to succeed. From English as a Second Language (ESOL) classes to our multilingual storytimes, NYPL provides resources for families to build language skills at any age.

For the past eight years, NYPL's ESOL, Adult Basic Education (ABE), and English for Work classes provide newcomers with foundational literacy skills while continuing to expand our educational footprint. Before the pandemic, NYPL taught ESOL classes in 39 locations across the Bronx, Manhattan, and Staten Island. Amid the pandemic, NYPL pivoted to an online platform, accommodating students' needs, as well as health and safety guidelines. Despite having to shift to an online platform due to the pandemic, we were able to serve over 76% of our existing clients in FY'20, 5,337 individuals. Comparatively, in FY'19, NYPL served over 7,000 individuals through our in-person language instruction programs.

Given the sensitivity around privacy for our students, we utilize a virtual platform that ensures personally-identifiable information is protected while enabling students accessibility on cell phones and computers. In a recent internal survey of our most recent cohort, 77% of respondents indicated Google Meet was a straightforward way to communicate with their instructors and fellow students. As we continue to bring literacy instruction to communities across New York City in this new age, it reinforces NYPL's position as a keystone of civic and community engagement and hub of information.

That same survey states that 43% of students, representing 51 countries, build on their language proficiency acquired through ESOL classes. With over 4,000 participants in FY'20, our ESOL classes provide our students with the foundation they need to participate fully in the city and career opportunities. The Library's ESOL classes provide patrons with critical resources, such as ebooks, which help them complete the curriculum regardless of where classes are featured. Additional resources like We SpeakNYC are incorporated into the curriculum, which builds on students' language competencies. Transitioning to an online platform allowed students to participate in more organic ways and have better access to our resources and collections. As such, NYPL continues to seek innovative and accessible methods to reach our core audiences -- alleviating physical barriers to access, while creating access to digital literacy programs on various technology platforms. Moreover, through an FY'20 City Council allocation, NYPL provided ESOL classes at two correctional facilities on Rikers Island this year, offering literacy services to a significantly vulnerable population.

Many of our students have signed up for the Library's intermediate language classes: Adult Basic Education classes, geared for students who want to improve acquired English literacy, and the advanced level language class English for Work. These foundational classes build upon existing language skills to ensure students can use their acquired skills in real-world opportunities, including our career counseling services, becoming a U.S. citizen, or enrolling in post-secondary education. Additional funding will help us to expand both formalized and drop-in literacy and language instruction.

To foster literacy skills in our youngest readers, NYPL offers bilingual and dual-language storytimes and early literacy kits in multiple languages. With dual-language storytimes in Spanish, Arabic, Japanese, and Hebrew, our storytimes bring the joy of reading and early literacy tips to youth across the City. In FY'20, NYPL featured 22 virtual multilingual storytimes available on our website and Vimeo. However, for patrons who have limited technology, NYPL distributed books through its Summer Reading book-kit distribution. We coordinated the delivery of 40,000 Summer Reading book kits to students in underserved communities throughout our system via existing community-based organizations, like East Side House Settlement, NYCHA facilities, and the Manhattan and Bronx Borough Presidents' offices. Of the 40,000,

we distributed 2,163 Spanish dual-language book kits to families in underserved communities across the city.

Besides book kits, NYPL created online booklists for various age groups celebrating events such as Immigrant Heritage Week, Welcoming Week, and Immigrant Heritage Month. In FY'20, NYPL welcomed over 24,000 attendees for 1,000 programs and services to educate, inform, and celebrate the vibrant multicultural diversity in New York City. Despite the pandemic, enrollment and program offerings increased by 62% from FY'19, when we served 15,000 attendees and provided over 850 programs. With a rich selection of bilingual storytimes, technology classes, and book discussions in languages other than English, NYPL added to its robust list of language learning opportunities.

We have partnered with the Cayuga Center to connect unaccompanied immigrant children and their foster families to library services in previous years. We donated Spanish-language children's books and worked through our branch libraries near these centers to conduct outreach and educator workshops. Due to COVID-19, we could not continue these services but hope to reinstate them in the future.

Digital Literacy

Since 2012, the Library's TechConnect initiative has supported adult learners of diverse careers, educational backgrounds, and cultures in their pursuit to upskill in technology. In partnership with The New York City Department of Information Technology and Telecommunication, Arthur W. Koenig Foundation, NYC Connected Communities, and many more, TechConnect offers technology classes in multiple languages, including Spanish, Chinese, and Bengali, for patrons of all levels. The TechConnect curriculum provides a range of programming from Microsoft Office to coding languages to 3D Printing and much more. Following the closure of our physical branches, TechConnect classes pivoted to an online platform with classes scheduled throughout the day. Serving approximately 100,000 students a year, our programming broadens students' knowledge of digital literacy and beyond, leading them on a path to acquire much-needed skills in an increasingly digital world.

The pandemic caused an acute transition from in-person programming and physical literary resources to online programming and digital collections for our patrons. Since the library's virtual transition, we have increased our literary collections via SimplyE, by the thousands. SimplyE is the Library's free open source e-reader app that brings our entire collection of more than 300,000 ebooks and audiobooks to our readers in an accessible format. Since March 2020, we have purchased 133,724 ebooks and audiobooks. Approximately 63,000 of those books are written in languages other than English to ensure patrons can access our diverse collection including books in Spanish, Chinese, Japanese, Arabic, Polish, and many more. Our robust collection of resources - also available to patrons throughout New York State - provides a vast literary collection to thousands of patrons, including an additional 57,000 readers since our libraries closed in March 2020.

Conclusion

From non-native speakers to the intermediate and advanced speakers, NYPL provides early education to formalized adult language instruction, which supports critical literacy skills for all New Yorkers across

the City. As vital community hubs for people of all ages, backgrounds, ethnicities, and educational levels, our resources offer an entry point to gain needed literary skills. Whether our programming takes place in-person or virtually, The New York Public Library's diverse program offerings and targeted services continue to help immigrants succeed in all areas of their lives.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.