

SPOTLIGHT ON

Literacy Council of Buncombe County

Nonprofit organizations throughout Asheville and the surrounding area nourish the people within our communities, caring for those in need, protecting our historic heritage, educating young and old, and nurturing our cultural soul. Each month, The Laurel is bringing to our readers some of the stories behind these agencies. This month, the "spotlight" is on the Literacy Council of Buncombe County, an organization helping people enjoy more productive, more profitable, and more enjoyable lives.

BY PAUL M. HOWEY



Amanda Edwards and Erin Krauss

Chances are, you take for granted the skills necessary to read and comprehend this article. There are thousands of others in our area, however, who lack the basic reading skills to do so.

In fact, nearly one in five Buncombe County residents is at the lowest level of reading comprehension as defined by the National Adult Literacy Study. The problem is getting worse, too, as one-third of all Asheville students are expected to drop out before graduation.

You can add to these numbers our growing population of immigrants (there are more than 10,000 Buncombe County residents who do not speak English at home) who also need assistance in learning to read, write, and speak English.

The Literacy Council's volunteer tutors have been helping area residents improve their self-esteem and their prospects for a better life since the organization was founded in 1987.

How does the Literacy Council measure success?

"There are so many ways," answers Amanda Edwards, executive director. "There is the joy of being able to read a story to their child at night, to get promotions that would otherwise be denied them, in some cases simply not losing a job."

Amanda has been the organization's executive for the past five years. Before that, she helped manage Friends of Literacy in Knoxville, Tennessee. She oversees the Literacy Council's small staff and the more than 200 volunteers who work with approximately 360 adults each year. "We provide both one-on-one and group instruction," she