

Need for Just Read

Is illiteracy an epidemic in America? No, and as a consequence it does not receive the attention it requires. The community often views gang activity, drug use, and truancy as more important, and more threatening. However, illiteracy is often the cause of these major problems, and if properly combated, could reduce the impact of these other issues. Just Read, and programs like it, is dedicated to this struggle, and requires the help of the community to succeed in its mission.

Illiteracy in America, although not widespread, is still a serious problem. A survey conducted by the National Assessment of Adult Literacy in 2003 revealed that at least fourteen percent of American adults are "below basic" in their literacy level[1]. For these adults, learning to read now would be especially difficult, not only because of the limited availability of such programs, but also because the amount of time it would require is often more than they can spare. Sadly, for these adults, their primary focus is (and should be) keeping themselves employed in whatever way possible, so that they can live from day to day. The most effective way to fight illiteracy would be to do so at a young age, when the people should have learned in the first place.

Just Read and other programs like it realize that some high school students need extra help. Just Read offers the extra attention and assistance required for these high school students to learn English and become literate -- before it is too late. Without this program, those students having trouble reading would be sent off into the world without graduating, joining the fourteen percent of illiterate adults in the country.

A recent article in Time magazine stated that about one in three high school students would not graduate[2]. For the illiterate, the percentage of drop outs is much, much higher. When a student is unable to read, he/she no longer sees the use in returning to school each day. Eventually he/she will just stop coming. Because these drop outs do not have a high school education, it is very difficult for them to find jobs, and so they resort to other sources of income such as selling drugs or burglary. This ugly series of events is all too common, and could easily be stopped with the extra attention that Just Read provides.

Unfortunately for these students, the extra attention they need is often not available to them. Sometimes called "invisible" students, these kids are often overlooked in favor of bigger issues. They fall through the cracks in the administration's priorities, which often has more pressing problems to deal with such as funding or staffing. In an interview with Just Read founder Molly McCrory, she explained that this lack of attention and consequent lack of success can lead to these students to engage in gang activity, as they look for some source of attention, validation, or belonging.[3] These very serious issues of drug use, burglary, and gang activity can all be traced to the problem of illiteracy. Just Read is determined to fix this problem by addressing its source.

Just Read has already had great successes in the short time that it has been around. One such story was Jaime Antonio, who in 2004 had a 0.8 GPA and was quickly heading towards jail. Remembering his situation, Jaime says, "I was proud about it. I thought it was a big honor." Fortunately for him, he was referred to the Just Read program in Mountain View. After years of hard work, Jaime graduated high school and was on his way to Foothill College, working fulltime at a Safeway with plans to attend San Jose State and then business school[4].

Jaime's life was turned around, just by learning how to read and feel accomplished. Just Read offers their services to anyone who needs it, but they can only do so much with what they have. In order to continue helping people like Jaime, Just Read needs help themselves. More tutors are always welcomed, as well as funding or volunteers of any kind. By helping Just Read, volunteers are helping members of their community find new lives. -----

[1] "Literacy." Wikipedia. 7 Feb. 2007. 8 Feb. 2007

<<http://www.wikipedia.com>>. Path: Wikipedia: Literacy.

[2] Thornburgh, Nathan. "Dropout Nation." Time 6 Apr. 2006. 8 Feb. 2007

<<http://www.time.com>>. Path: Time: U.S: Articles.

[3] McCrory, Molly. Personal interview. 14 Jan. 2007.

[4] Naguchi, Sharon. "Special Tutoring: Volunteers Transform Lives as Graduates Find Work, Aim At College." San Jose Mercury News 18 July 2006: 2 pp.