

COMMUNITY ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

for Volunteers in Adult Basic Education



LITERACY ACTION NETWORK
ADVOCATING FOR MINNESOTA ADULT BASIC EDUCATION

Why This Advocacy Toolkit?

The Volunteer Engagement Committee of Literacy Action Network (LAN) created this toolkit to help literacy volunteers raise awareness in their communities about the importance of adult literacy and how it impacts the lives of the learners with whom we work. Adult Basic Education (ABE) and ABE learners could not accomplish their goals without the work, expertise and dedication of volunteers like you. When ABE volunteers, learners, teachers and staff work together, the classroom experience is enhanced and everyone is energized.

This toolkit is designed to take this experience and energy to the next level! This toolkit can be your guide through the process of sharing your experience and advocating for our learners at whatever level of involvement you choose. With education occupying such a focus of our state's legislative arena, we cannot afford to stand by and watch while others make decisions that have a tremendous impact on the well-being of all Minnesotans. It is important to use our experience, knowledge, and relationships to share our stories, strengthen our communities and help to shape policy.

Types of Advocacy

There are many types of advocacy, and many ways to take action on behalf of your ABE learners, including:

- **COMMUNITY ADVOCACY:** we define community advocacy as people coming together around a common cause or causes to help make positive change in their communities and uplift those around them.
- **LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY:** we define legislative advocacy as any action designed to influence the status of impending bills before a legislative body. It includes attempts to mold public opinion and affect legislative action by supporting or opposing specific legislative issues or philosophical attitudes.
- **POLITICAL ADVOCACY:** we define political advocacy as any action intended to influence the nomination, election or appointment of any person to public office.

While each of the above forms of advocacy are important and valuable, this toolkit is intended to assist you to engage in community advocacy.

How to Use This Toolkit

We encourage you to use this toolkit to:

- Increase your own knowledge of ABE in Minnesota
- Share stories with your friends, family and people in your communities
- Engage those in your community about issues relevant to ABE
- Advocate for ABE and ABE learners in your communities

Inside this toolkit you will find:

1. Current trends and the impact of ABE in Minnesota
2. How to leverage your relationships to engage others and advocate for ABE
3. How to share your experience of being an ABE volunteer
4. Where to share your stories
5. Ways to build community among your network and ABE learners

We encourage you to become knowledgeable about ABE and explore ways to share your story. The role that you play as a volunteer in ABE is vital to the field. Your firsthand experience and the relationships that you build with ABE learners can have an important impact in your broader community.

The Impact of Minnesota ABE

To successfully advocate on behalf of others, a first step is self-education. To help you build your knowledge and awareness, here are some key facts about Minnesota ABE.

To hear firsthand how an ABE program had an impact on one woman's life, [watch Juwaria tell her story.](#)



Who does ABE serve?

In 2015-2016, Minnesota ABE served more than 66,000 Minnesota adults with a wide range of educational needs and abilities:

- 39% are English language learners
- 56% lack a high school diploma
- 26% are unemployed
- 12% receive public assistance
- 8% had no prior formal education before enrolling in ABE

What services does ABE provide?

ABE provides a variety of services to help adults build skills and increase employability:

- GED® and adult diploma classes
- English language acquisition classes
- College and postsecondary education preparation
- Occupational and workplace skills preparation
- Family literacy and parenting instruction
- Citizenship/civics education
- Basic skills enhancement
- Digital literacy

ABE key goals

Adult literacy programs work to:

- Prepare adults for living wage jobs to support themselves and their families
- Ensure that adults seeking higher education are academically prepared, and that high-quality career training programs prepare them to enter jobs with a clear pathway to greater skills, earning and responsibilities
- Assist new Americans in gaining English language skills and experience navigating life in the U.S., so they can be productive workers and fully participate in their communities
- Help adults gain computer skills and access online learning so they can pursue programs toward their academic and language goals

Sources:

- Minnesota Adult Basic Education Report, Literacy Action Network, retrieved 4/24/17 from mnabe.org
- Overview of ABE in Minnesota, 2015-15 Program Year, retrieved 6/22/17 from mnabe.org

The Impact of My ABE Program

We encourage you to ask questions of your program staff about the ABE program where you volunteer.

Use this page to make some notes.

Who does my ABE program serve?

Number of students per year _____

English Language Learners _____

Learners without a high school diploma _____

Learners who are unemployed _____

Learners who receive public assistance _____

Learners with no prior formal education before enrolling in ABE _____

Other notes:

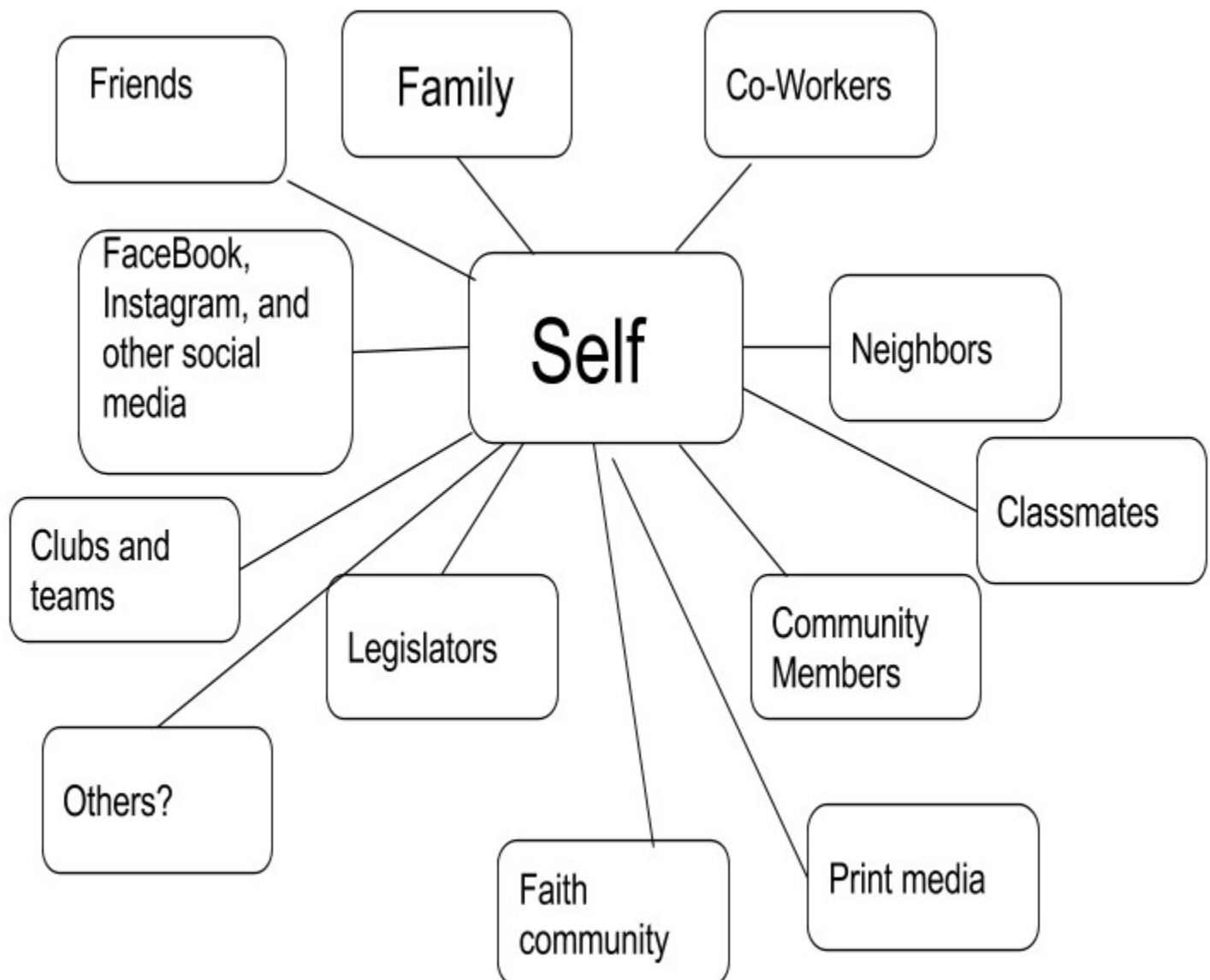
What services does my ABE program provide?

ABE provides a variety of services to help adults build skills and increase employability.

How to Leverage Your Relationships to Engage Others and Advocate for ABE

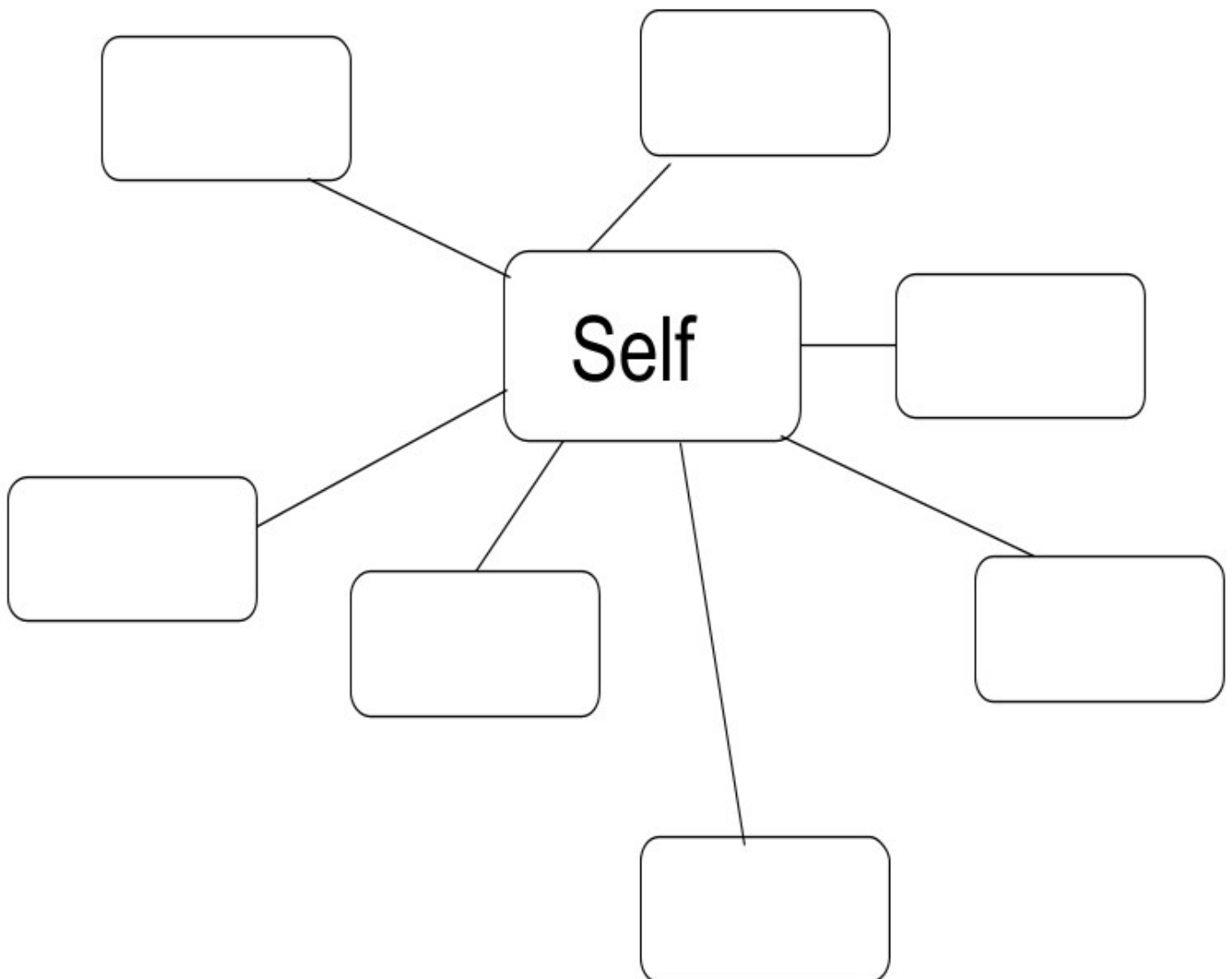
As you think about your work with ABE learners, it is useful to imagine how and with whom you will share these experiences. The relationships you have with your family, friends, coworkers and others are prime potential audiences for your story.

“Mind mapping,” as depicted in the diagram below, can be a helpful exercise to brainstorm key relationships in your life and how these people might receive your story. These relationships, or your “network,” can include people who you see every day, occasionally or just a few times a year.



Leveraging My Relationships to Engage Others and Advocate for ABE

Now, take some time to reflect on your own communities and networks. Fill out the mind map below with some of the important people or groups in your life who might be potential audiences for your story.



How to Share Your Experience of Being an ABE Volunteer

Communicating stories from your experiences working with ABE learners is a way of sharing a part of who you are AND it also helps to inform and educate the people with whom you live and interact. Friends, family and colleagues who know and trust you are likely to consider your story with more weight than if they hear it from an unfamiliar source. Just by sharing stories with others who you know, you are making an impact.

Give Your Story a Voice

As you think about how to share these stories, consider the following points:

- When crafting or writing a story, use the SUCCESS formula: Simple, Unexpected, Concrete, Credible, Emotional, Stories.
- Spread positive and realistic messages: pick and choose what messages you're repeating or sharing, try not to get too hung up on the negative.
- Consider the different people, groups and colleagues that comprise your network from the earlier mind mapping exercise. What anecdotes or stories would be appropriate or even strategic for certain audiences? For example, your public administration class might be interested in knowing how your ABE learners have navigated paperwork associated with obtaining housing, school registration or child care.
- Develop different versions or adaptations of your story. You might have a 30-60 second version for a quick, spontaneous exchange and a 3-5 minute version for a longer conversation. Different versions may be basically the same story with slightly different emphases.
- You may have opportunities to elaborate on your story by making a presentation or leading a discussion in a group setting. In this case, be sure to clarify your role with the ABE organization and what your relationship is with the learners. You may consider including resource materials such as a short video, brochures or fliers. (See the additional resources section in this toolkit.)

What Story to Tell?

You may already have a story in mind; however, here are a few ideas:

- What is one common myth or misconception you hear about immigrants, refugees or someone without a high school diploma in your community or in the media? Write a brief story from your literacy program or life that dispels that myth.
- What is one thing you would like the community or media to know about your learners?
- People are more likely to be receptive to new ideas when the ideas appeal to their own values. Write a character description of one of your learners that illustrates a particular value that you share and that you think your audience would also appreciate.

Refine Your Story

Once you have drafted your story, refine its message by asking, "Is it personal, distinct and consistent? Does it avoid clichés, inspire innovation and effectively convey my message to my network?"

Tell Your Story

Finally, practice telling your story so that you can tell it comfortably and genuinely. Consider asking your volunteer coordinator to act as a sounding board.

How to Share My Experience of Being an ABE Volunteer

Give My Story a Voice

What story or stories would I like my communities to know about ABE and ABE learners?

Develop My Story

How can I apply the SUCCESS formula to make my story more powerful or engaging?

SUCCESS stands for Simple, Unexpected, Concrete, Credible, Emotional, Stories.

Simple:

Unexpected:

Concrete:

Credible:

Emotional:

Refine My Message: Reflection Questions

Is my story personal, distinct and consistent?

Does it avoid clichés?

Does it inspire innovation?

Does it effectively convey my message to people in my network?

Where to Share Your Stories

As you share your stories with the people you know, think about revising it to share with the broader community through social media, print and other mass media.

Social Media:

***BEFORE YOU SHARE** any photos of learners on social media, be sure to check your program policies and get your learners' permission to post.

Social media suggestions

1. Tweet about a happening at your program or learning center. What was the highlight of your day?
2. Share your story using the SUCCESS model on Facebook. This can be the same story you share with individuals in person, or a different story.
3. Do you have a video of you working with students or teaching? Share it on YouTube.
4. What classroom objects do you use when volunteering? Make a board on Pinterest and share them there.
5. Share a photograph via Instagram. Could you share a picture of a lesson, an object you used for your lesson or a student's assignment?
6. Update your LinkedIn profile to highlight the work you are doing at your program. What work are you proudest of?

Social media examples

1. Twitter: [Neighborhood House 2017 Journeys authors](#)
2. Facebook: [Victor earns a computer](#)
3. YouTube: [One volunteer's story](#)
4. Pinterest: English Learning Center's [English Class page](#)



JennaRose and Victor celebrate Victor's new computer.

Article in Local Newspaper or Electronic Newsletter:

Even if you don't personally know the broader audience, a story that highlights your experience with ABE learners may be very relevant to a particular community or organization. For example, non-profit, civic and faith organizations, as well as local clubs, are often looking for content for their newsletters. As you share your story with wider audiences, make sure that you are lifting up learners' voices and supporting ABE.

Here are some recent examples of newspaper articles related to ABE:

- [Exuberance & Excitement Exudes at Franklin Learning Center & Library](#) article in *The Alley Newspaper*
- [Language Opens Doors](#) article about volunteer Susan Moss in *Minnesota Women's Press*
- [Franklin Learning Center Offers English Lessons](#) article in *Star Tribune*

Letter to the Editor:

A letter to the editor is one way to share the importance of ABE and the impact it has on the community. An effective strategy is to use your story as a way to respond to a particular issue. If your letter refers to your elected officials, it is more likely to be read and has that double impact. Refer to the [LAN Legislative Tool Kit 2017](#) for tips on how to write an effective letter to the editor.

Emails and Phone Calls to Legislators:

The LAN Legislative Advocacy Committee monitors relevant legislation at the state and national levels. If there is any pertinent legislation pending that affects ABE or ABE students, the committee sends out alerts to those who are interested and concerned. For suggestions and templates for contacting legislators, refer to the [LAN Legislative Tool Kit 2017](#).

Where to Share My Stories

Use this space to write notes about where you would like to share your stories.

Social media:

Letter to the editor:

Article in local newspaper or electronic newsletter:

Emails and phone calls to legislators:

Other ideas:



Ways to Build Community Among Your Network and ABE Learners

Bringing people together face-to-face helps to develop trust and understanding of one another. Directly sharing your ABE volunteer experience by inviting people in your network to your ABE program or learning center can be very effective in building new relationships and developing this important sense of trust and mutual understanding. Here are some ideas to help you share the vital work that you do. Some of these ideas require significant support from the program administrator and/or volunteer coordinator. Please be sure to collaborate with them in the event planning and implementation.



ESL learners practice a conversation activity.

- Ask your program what types of advocacy work they are already doing, and how you can contribute and enhance their current efforts.
- ABE Program Open House: There is nothing like experiencing adult literacy programs in action! Bring friends and family to your program so that they can meet your ABE learners and the incredible work they do. This, of course, requires planning and support from the program administrator and volunteer coordinator.
- Individual visits: Bring family and friends to your program for an individual or small group visit. Please clear this ahead of time with the program director and teachers.
- Celebrations and gatherings: Get to know your neighbors by inviting ABE learners, staff and members of the local community to come together for a special celebration or an informal gathering. Have a potluck meal where learners, volunteers, neighbors and staff can share food and conversation together. If a potluck is not possible, consider serving something simple such as cheese and crackers, fruit and juice. It is also helpful to have name tags, time for informal conversation and an activity to get to know one another. Depending on the event and topic of conversation, translators may be necessary to facilitate the discussion.
- Host an event that highlights the work of the ABE learners to the community such as a special open-mic reading from the adult learners. This provides an opportunity for ABE learners to practice writing stories and reading them in front of an audience. The English Learning Center and Franklin Learning Center in Minneapolis have hosted open mic and readings which have been very moving experiences. Grants from the Minnesota Literacy Council may be available to help fund events like these.
- Attend the Minnesota Literacy Council's monthly movie/book group or develop one of your own. This brings the community together and encourages discussion and lifelong learning around a particular topic that is relevant to the group.
- Share student testimonials about your program.

Ways to Build Community Among My Network and ABE Learners

Use this space to reflect on the ways you might want to build community among your network and your learners.

What gatherings do I attend throughout the year?

How might I incorporate ABE advocacy into those events?

What activities from the list on the previous page would I like to explore?

Other reflections:

Conclusion

As literacy volunteers, you play an important role in helping learners meet their professional and personal educational goals. Your experience working with ABE learners is valuable not only for your students and you as the volunteer, but for others as well. Think about the many ways you can share your story and the impact it will have in your network and the wider community.

We encourage you to consider many of the ideas in this toolkit and implement them as you feel comfortable and appropriate. We know the tremendous impact that volunteers have on our ABE learners and programs and are confident that you will have the same sort of impact advocating for ABE learners and engaging others to get involved as well.

Thank you for your valued support of ABE in Minnesota.

Additional Resources

General Literacy Resources

- literacyactionnetwork.org
- mnabe.org
- mnliteracy.org/advocacy
- proliteracy.org

Refugees, New Americans and Immigration

- iimn.org/get-involved/advocate-new-americans
- lirs.org/learn
- mnliteracy.org/journeys
- immigrationadvocates.org
- cair.com

About Literacy Action Network

LAN is an organization of professionals serving adults with literacy needs through legislative advocacy and statewide support of quality ABE programs. LAN produces relevant research and tools through member based committees working on membership and marketing, professional engagement, volunteer engagement, Summer Institute planning and legislative action.

Permanent Web Link to Toolkit

This toolkit was created by LAN's Volunteer Engagement Committee in July 2017. The most recent version may be found at literacyactionnetwork.org/cat

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www.literacyactionnetwork.org