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BOOKS

Learn how to help the fight against illiteracy

- Advocate News Features staff
- Published: Sep 12, 2010

The Greater Baton Rouge Literacy Coalition (GBRLC) and the East Baton Rouge Parish Library have partnered to present a volunteer fair 2-4 p.m. today, Sept. 12, at the Main Library, 7711 Goodwood Blvd., in honor of International Literacy Day, celebrated worldwide on Sept. 8.

Community members are welcome to drop by, meet volunteer coordinators with several local literacy sites, and pick up information about their volunteer programs.

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), more than 780 million of the world's adults (nearly two-thirds who are women) do not know how to read or write, and between 94 million and 115 million children lack access to education. "Considering the magnitude of this international crisis, local communities must be empowered to effect change close to home," stated Debbie O'Connor, GBRLC executive director.

In Baton Rouge, up to 20 percent of the population lacks basic literacy skills, and there is a definite need for community members who can volunteer their time or their business expertise to local literacy service providers, who lack the resources to continue educating low-level learners during tough financial times. As employees are laid off, many of them learn that they lack the literacy skills needed for current job openings and thus return to literacy sites to prepare to earn GEDs, or even improve their English language and computation skills.

"Breaking the cycle of generational poverty necessitates access to literacy services," explains O'Connor. "With the literacy level of the parent being the greatest predictor of their child's future academic success, we must address the education of low-income parents as well as their children. Studies show that teenagers are less likely to drop out of high school if they have parents who are attending classes or are in job training. Last year in Baton Rouge alone, 2,000 students dropped out of high school. Without services to help them prepare to earn GEDs, so that they may enter job training programs, these students are three times as likely to live in poverty as adults, compared with their peers who earn diplomas. Our community feels this impact in our crime rates, incarceration and re-entry costs, health care costs, and a skilled workforce shortage. In turn, these realities impact our quality of life as well as our tax base."

For more information on International Literacy Day and the Adult Literacy Volunteer Fair or services offered by Greater Baton Rouge Literacy Coalition, call (225) 381-7141 or e-mail Debbie@brac.org.

Link to article in The Advocate: <http://www.2theadvocate.com/entertainment/books/102645224.html?showAll=y&c=y>