

# Ulster Literacy Changes People's Lives

## Estimated 25,000 in UC Need Help Reading

"Once you learn to read, you will be forever free." — Frederick Douglass.

In recognition of National Literacy Month in September, the staff and volunteers of the Ulster Literacy Association have carved out September 16-22 to bring attention to the vital work their agency is doing to instill reading skills locally.

"I think it's important for people to know that in Ulster County, one in five adults is likely struggling with reading. That's over 25,000 adults in our county who are not proficient readers," says Ulster Literacy Executive Director Amy Lenard. "Literacy is certainly the social justice issue of our time."

Lenard said poor literacy costs the U.S. economy \$225 billion a year in lost productivity. Meanwhile, children whose parents have low literacy levels have a 72% chance of reading at the lowest level in school.

Ulster Literacy is trying to turn the tide by helping about 300 adults every year through one-on-one tutoring for adults reading below a 5<sup>th</sup>-grade level. The organization also offers one-on-one tutoring for adults learning English as a new language, as well as group classes called English for Parents.

Ulster Literacy's correctional education program has helped more than 150 learners through creative writing, art therapy, and



initiatives; and hosting a fundraiser.

Lenard said businesses can also consider making a tax-deductible monetary or in-kind donation since Ulster Literacy is a non-profit.

"Literacy changes everything," she said. "A stronger literacy community is a stronger business community. It enhances every area of our civic and economic lives."

Lenard, who has worked in literacy her entire career, has been with Ulster Literacy since 2010. She took over the top spot from former Executive Director Casandra Beam in 2022 after serving as the organization's Program Director, a role that saw her teach, train tutors and organize literacy classes in Kingston, Saugerties and New Paltz.

Lenard said the job gives her incredible satisfaction watching people overcome and gain skills that open the door for employment and improving their lives.

"I'm so profoundly grateful to be able to work with adults who work extremely hard to make their lives better for their family and for their community," she said.

"My life has been greatly improved by the people that I've been able to meet who have come through our door asking for

help with their reading or help with their English. It's made my understanding of the world more enhanced. I think that's one of the things that makes it special for all of us at Ulster Literacy because we all care deeply about everybody who comes through our door."

Ulster Literacy Association, located at 480 Aaron Court in Kingston, can be reached at (845) 331-6837 or [ulsterliteracy.org](http://ulsterliteracy.org).

## SHOP LOCAL

### Ulster County Regional Chamber of Commerce



GED preparation at the Ulster County Jail. The program, which is about 20 years old, was suspended during COVID-19, but has been back for about a year with expanded programming.

Ulster Literacy does it all with over 100 active tutors, many of whom are retired and dedicated to helping. "It's the volunteers who really carry out our mission," Lenard said.

Lenard said she saw many volunteers and learners "become very close to each other," which was especially true during the isolation of the pandemic.

"It's a very beautiful relationship to see," she said. "It makes our community better to see how deeply people learn to care about one another and their experiences."

Lenard said Chamber members can help spread the word about Ulster County Literacy Week by posting flyers, bookmarks and other materials in their businesses; providing social media support; and by donating a portion of sales from some point during the week.

Chamber members can help all year by encouraging employees to become a volunteer tutor for one hour each week; supporting workplace literacy by hosting a literacy or English class for workers; including Ulster Literacy in workplace giving

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## UPCOMING CHAMBER EVENTS

**Tuesday August 6 | 5:00 - 7:00 pm**

**Networking Mixer @ Front Street Tavern**  
 63 N. Front Street | Kingston, NY  
 There is no cost for Members and Prospective Members. Reservations are required.  
**Sponsor: Berardi Realty**

**Thursday August 22 | 9:00 - 10:30 am**

**Business Card Exchange**  
 Holiday Inn Express & Suites  
 1835 Ulster Avenue | Lake Katrine, NY  
 There is no cost for Members and Prospective Members. Reservations are required.  
**Sponsor: Hudson Valley Credit Union**

**Wednesday September 4 | 5:00 - 7:00 pm**

**Networking Mixer @ Stone Dock Golf Course**  
 12 Stone Dock Road | High Falls, NY  
 There is no cost for Members and Prospective Members. Reservations are required.  
**Sponsor: Village Apothecary**

**Reserve Your Booth Now!**  
**Wednesday September 18 | 12 noon - 4:00 pm**

**Buy Local Expo**  
 Diamond Mills Hotel & Conference Center  
 25 S. Partition Street | Saugerties, NY  
**Presenting Sponsor: Naccarato Insurance**  
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**Thursday October 24 | 5:30 pm Cocktails 6:30 pm Dinner**

**Business Recognition Awards Dinner**  
 Diamond Mills Hotel & BLACKBARN Hudson Valley  
 25 S. Partition Street | Saugerties, NY  
**Interested in Sponsorship Opportunities?**  
**Contact Ward Todd 845.338.5100 x2**

**More Info and Registration [UlsterChamber.org](http://UlsterChamber.org)**  
**Questions (845) 338-5100**