

Suggested Improvements to Local Student Referral Systems

Since 2001, with the help of a partnership with Dollar General Literacy Foundation, ProLiteracy America has been able to refer over 46,000 potential students to local literacy programs through its **Student Referral Project**.

In 2005, ProLiteracy conducted the Student Referral Expansion Project, which was designed to help ProLiteracy take a closer look at referrals to determine what helps turn student referrals into student enrollments in local literacy programs.

The Student Referral Expansion Project was a collaborative effort between ProLiteracy America and three national partners: the Commission on Adult Basic Education (COABE), the American Library Association (ALA), and Literacy USA. Over the course of the project, ProLiteracy worked with 174 literacy programs in nine local communities, covering eight states. These local programs, the national partners, and ProLiteracy staff identified actions that, if taken, might enhance student referral systems at the local level.

The following suggestions came from the partners involved in this project.

To Enhance Individual Program Referral Follow-up Strategies:

1. Establish a system to improve contact with referred students. For example:
 - Establish a timeframe within which referrals receive follow-up
 - Act upon referrals quickly, ideally within 48 hours of receiving them
 - Employ multiple follow-up strategies such as phone calls and letters when trying to contact referrals
 - Be persistent in efforts to contact prospective students and enroll them in instruction as soon as possible
 - Collect or confirm the most important information during the initial contact with the referral
2. Establish policies and procedures for handling referrals. For example:
 - Establish a regular process for communicating information on referrals within the organization
 - Hire staff or recruit volunteers to help maintain information about the referral system
 - Develop or refine referral tracking systems for individual referrals and their current status in the program
 - Keep good records
 - Document the organization's current referral system
 - Keep the referral system updated
 - Regularly evaluate the current referral system to identify areas in need of improvement

To Enhance Community Referral Network Follow-up Strategies:

1. Establish effective communication strategies with referral network partners in the community. For example:
 - Assign a specific person as a point of contact from each agency within the community referral network
 - Determine a way to communicate with referral partners on a quarterly basis
 - Establish a regular process for communicating time-sensitive information and updates within the community referral network
 - Set a schedule for regular community referral network meetings
2. Increase the knowledge base of community referral network partners. For example:
 - Know the literacy providers in the local service area and their services, capabilities, and strengths
 - Keep an updated list of the agencies in the community that provide referrals
 - Maintain an updated referral binder with information about community referral network members and other community agencies and their services
 - Understand the geographic restrictions of agencies within the community referral network and the impact of these restrictions on their ability to serve referred students
 - Invite potential referral network partners to attend a breakfast or lunch to learn about the network and talk about their agencies and services
3. Establish policies and procedures for handling inter-agency referrals cooperatively and effectively. For example:
 - Engage community referral network members in discussions to document, evaluate, and improve current program and network referral systems
 - Ensure that community referral network members' referral forms include all relevant information
 - Determine a strategy for making appropriate referrals
 - Develop or refine inter-organization guidelines for responding to referrals
 - Create or refine referral tracking systems within the community referral network
 - Review and evaluate information provided by the tracking systems
 - Work through a unified system to avoid duplication of effort

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