

Overcoming Barriers to Literacy

~ Literacy, Noun: The ability to read, write, speak, and listen in a way that lets us communicate effectively and make sense of the world. ~

Roughly 21% of Americans are illiterate, more than 50% have a literacy rate below a 6th grade level, and the United States ranks 125th in the world for literacy. What is it about reading, writing, listening, and speaking that instills so much fear, even in the heartiest of us? The fear is so great, that many would rather die, than have to read out loud, especially in front of others. Many come from a dark place of not being able to read or comprehend the words they are reading. Some, can read with effective comprehension, yet the fear of doing so aloud, is paralyzing. Over time, this fear becomes so prevalent, that it creates barriers to personal growth and advancement in every facet of life. People are literally shamed and ridiculed for their lack of ability to read, comprehend, and effectively communicate with their peers. There is even the story of someone who was attending college, yet was unable to read box letters spelling out their own name. This individual was very offended, became defensive, and felt shut off from the world around them.

Out of this need to gain confidence with regards to overcoming barriers to literacy, a program called Read-To-Lead was created. This program was designed to “Empower the next generation of readers and leaders.” The program has had a great deal of success, especially with younger generations. It is fun and exciting, and utilizes many different styles to engage students in literacy. It uses hands-on, audio/visual techniques, including signing Karaoke. It has helped many overcome barriers to literacy by helping them feel more confident and engaged in the subject material. The belief is that a program like Read-To-Lead will help build life-long, stronger readers and leaders for the future. It helps build better understanding, is a morale booster encouraging people to become more engaged individually, and as part of their greater community.