

For Immediate Release

Media Contacts: Melinda Haines, CEO, The Literacy Alliance | (260) 423-0001

Tracy Warner, Communications Manager, Indiana Michigan Power | (260) 479-9484

AEP Foundation Grant Empowers Program Expansion at The Literacy Alliance

Fort Wayne, Indiana – January 18, 2023: The Literacy Alliance has received \$25,000 in catalyst funding from the AEP Foundation on the recommendation of Indiana Michigan Power. This gift will assist in TLA's efforts to expand the **Project Connect** program, designed to teach English language skills to adults whose primary language is not English.

"Over the past two program years, we have seen an exponential demand for our English language learning classes," says Melinda Haines, CEO of The Literacy Alliance. "We have made progress in adding a few classes at convenient times and locations, but there is more that we can do to meet the needs of these students, who are often under-employed due to a lack of English skills that prevent them from fully utilizing the academic skills and professional experience they bring here from their native counties."

"Making these improvements will greatly increase the reach and efficacy of our Project Connect classes," says Haines. "Our goal is to raise \$125,000 for this expansion project. We are grateful to the AEP Foundation for leading the way."

Goals for expansion include the following:

- Move to computerized assessments
- Increase the number of assessments
- Improve metrics to show skill gains
- Improve onboarding process
- Provide beginner, intermediate, and advanced classes
- Increase the number of classes to at least six

"Removing barriers leads to increased opportunity and the ability to unlock potential," says Kelly Rentschler, External Affairs Manager for Indiana Michigan Power. "The AEP Foundation is proud to be the catalyst funder for this expanded Project Connect program within the communities Indiana Michigan Power serves."

Other free programs of The Literacy Alliance include:

- **Project Reads** pairs kindergarten through third-grade students reading below grade level with trained volunteer tutors. This mentoring program helps students improve their reading skills which can lead to future academic success.
- **Project Build** teaches people to read and improve basic academic skills. TLA is the only adult literacy program in the area with a program designed to assist adults testing below a sixth-grade reading level.
- **Project Graduate** helps adult students finish high school by preparing them for the high school equivalency, or HSE, exam.
- And through **Project Aim**, TLA offers career and certification training to local employers.

The programs at The Literacy Alliance are possible due in part to amazing community partners like the AEP Foundation. Visit literacyalliance.org for more information on TLA's programs.

Literacy changes lives. Our mission is to empower people and strengthen community through education. Since 1972, The Literacy Alliance has helped more than 15,500 students improve their skills to work, live, and raise their families. For information on the program at The Literacy Alliance, please visit literacyalliance.org or contact Melinda Haines, chief executive officer, at (260) 423-0001 or melinda.haines@literacyalliance.org.

