

# Literacy Initiative...

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education level of newly admitted offenders, serving two years or more, is grade seven. These realities contribute to a person's chances of incarceration in the first place. Without addressing the root causes, the possibility of rehabilitation is also seriously hindered.

"Investing in literacy, especially for families and youth at risk, is an effective crime prevention strategy. Early prevention strategies that include literacy can help reduce the risk factors such as poverty, unemployment and isolation that can lead to crime."

Laurie Robinson, assistant attorney general for the Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs, states, "While literacy alone will never be a vaccine against criminality, it is one of many skills needed to function – and function well – as a responsible and law-abiding adult in our society."

One finding of *Literacy Behind Prison Walls* was especially telling: Prisoners who were incarcerated for crimes involving drugs (one quarter of all prisoners) were the least literate; those serving time for crimes involving property were the most literate.

## What can we do TODAY?

The Mayor's Literacy Initiative, which no doubt will be tremendously effective and probably a national prototype, is a long-range plan. It may take several years to gain measurable results, but we can't afford to wait several years to improve literacy among adults. If improving literacy can decrease, to ANY degree, crimes in our community (especially those involving drugs), we must act now.

Jacksonville has several reading programs for adults, some of which are listed below. Some



Mayor John Payton and Ann Dugger display RALLY Jacksonville backpacks.

offer free tutoring, others charge for their services. Still others use volunteer tutors to help those seeking to improve their reading skills.

Take an hour or two a week and become a tutor; it's not hard to do. Help someone learn to read. Encourage non-reading friends or family members to take advantage of available resources. There IS help and they are not alone with their problem.

**Remember: ONE person CAN make a difference.**

*\*Fran Coker, a local author, has been commissioned to write 12 books for children, each focusing on different aspects of Jacksonville: its bridges, its history, the zoo, the Timucuan Reserve, and so on. After getting the first book in the backpack, each child will receive a new book every month for a year.*

# Literacy Services

## LITERACY SERVICES

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The **Center for Adult Learning** is headquartered at the Main Library (122 N. Ocean Street) with outreach programs available at several branch libraries. Testing, instruction and referral services are all **free of charge**. The program at the Main Library serves adults (age 16 and older) who read between the second and eighth grade levels. Adults reading below the second grade level are referred to **Learn To Read** for one-to-one tutoring.

Adults can sign up to use the library's computer lab for help in reading, spelling, writing, math, and GED preparation. Teachers are always available in the lab to help when needed. While the computer lab has helped many students achieve their goals, others prefer working with a teacher in a classroom setting. Small groups of four to eight adults work together with an instructor to improve their reading and basic math skills.

Adults interested in the program should call **(904) 630-2426** for more information.

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**Individualized Education Services, Inc.**, located at 402 Loring Avenue, Orange Park, provides tutoring and educational therapy for K-12 youth, college students and adults throughout North Florida. The IES Team, comprised of educators, therapists and psychologists, has created services which are tailored to each individual and are offered on a one-on-one basis.

The services of IES consist of the following components for tutoring and educational therapy: Reading Evaluation and Testing, Educational Evaluation, Psychological Evaluations and Services, Academic Therapy, Behavioral Services, Academic Tutoring, Basic to Advanced Computer Training and Corporate/Business Leadership Training.

For more information, call **(904) 269-7377** or visit their website at [www.iestutors.com](http://www.iestutors.com).

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**Learn To Read, Inc.**, serves adults 16 years and older who are not enrolled in a secondary education program and are reading below a third grade level. They also offer ESOL classes for beginning students. Services are free to any eligible participant.

Learn To Read offers monthly tutor training classes at 917 Children's Way in San Marco. Any adult interested in helping another adult learn to read is welcome to attend. For more information, please call **(904) 399-8894** or visit their web site at [www.learnreadinc.org](http://www.learnreadinc.org).

# Donald's story

by Shirley Shaw

Donald Riley is an articulate, soft-spoken 49-year-old man who has been in prison five times – all for selling drugs. Although he attended school, he is functionally illiterate and may have a learning disability. He worked at menial jobs as a young man but found himself unable to get the kind of employment he sought because he couldn't fill out an application.

"No one wants to help you," he states matter-of-factly. "I did everything I could to get a job. I would tell them up front, 'I have a reading problem. Give me an opportunity to show you my skills. I'll work one day free for you so you can see what I can do.' It was so embarrassing and discouraging, I finally began selling drugs to survive."

Donald, his sister and three brothers were reared in Key Largo, mostly by his mother. His dad, who had other families, was absent much of the time and the kids hardly knew him. His mother eventually became an alcoholic and would leave her children with her parents for long periods of time while she tried to pull her life together. His grandmother took him to church and instilled good values in him, which he never forgot, even in prison.

When he had the opportunity to attend school, he enjoyed it. He was good in math, but "reading and spelling just wouldn't stay with me. The teacher would show me words and help me read and spell, but two or three days later, I couldn't read it, I'd have trouble with the words."

As an adult, Donald worked for the sanitation department, as a roofer and in several "scum jobs." He obtained his motorcycle license and took an oral test for his Class D driver's license, but he couldn't read street signs to know where to go. Nor could he read instructions about assignments on his jobs. The secret word is literacy.

When he worked for a supermarket, he could stock shelves by matching canned goods already in place, but if asked to find an item, he couldn't read aisle instructions or know what particular brand or product was wanted.

Finally, in his 30s, he started selling drugs to make a living.

"I always wanted to do the right thing," he said. "I cried many times over the hurt I caused people by selling drugs, the condition I saw them get into. But when I would get out of prison and try to get a job, I would always go back to the only way I knew to make good money."

Things began to change for him a few years ago when he turned his life over to God. Seeking a way to survive after his release from prison, he wrote letters to prospective organizations or ministries asking for help and guidance. He would barter soap or deodorant, a honey bun or a bag of chips for someone to write his letter, then he would copy it in beautiful, almost calligraphy-quality script.

Prisoners of Christ, a local organization which facilitates ex-prisoners' rehabilitation process, presented the best opportunity for him. He came to Jacksonville and, as required of all newcomers, helped around the place doing odd jobs, cleaning or making repairs. Dan Palmer, POC Executive Director, said they saw great potential in Donald and that he had a heart for the ministry, so they offered him a maintenance job on their staff. His salary is minimal, but he is determined, with God's help, to succeed in his new life.

He knows that learning to read will make the difference in his future and he contacted adult learning organizations for help. Because of a lack of tutors, however, he has been added to a three-month waiting list. He's willing to wait. He's determined to learn to read. He's confident that, with literacy skills, he can have a happy, productive future.

*Editor's note: As a former Learn to Read tutor, I became challenged while interviewing Donald Riley to take a refresher course and help him learn to read. I'd like to encourage others, as well, to volunteer for this very rewarding, much-needed role in our community. It's not hard to do, just a commitment to spend a couple hours a week, and the reward is the satisfaction of opening a whole new world to a new friend.*

**"I cried over the hurt I caused people by selling drugs, the condition they got into."**