

The problem of illiteracy

Recently I had the opportunity to meet an extraordinary and courageous person, Monica Boyd. Monica, a lifetime resident of Barrett Station and 1983 graduate of Crosby High School, suffered with a major personal condition that embarrassed her and placed limitations on her ability to lead a normal productive life. When she graduated from high school, Monica took with her a dark secret that left her ashamed and with low self-esteem. Monica couldn't read.

After graduation, Monica enrolled at Lee College where it became obvious that her reading limitations would not allow her to pursue higher education. One of the Lee College instructors referred her to the adult reading literacy program at the Sterling Municipal Library. With the library's program help, coupled with strong family support and her own determination Monica began the long road toward literacy. It wasn't long before her improved reading skills enable her to pass the exam to become a security guard and she is presently employed as a security guard at Lee College.

When her two children, Marissa and Jermane, began struggling in school,

Monica met with their teachers and discovered they suffered the same problem, the inability to read. Jermane, a second grader was reading at a pre-k level, and Marissa, a sixth grader was reading well below her grade level. Monica was determined they would not relive her experiences in school. She began working with the school in an attempt to provide her children the necessary skills to become better readers. She became frustrated when the school district diagnosed her children's problem as simply a reading disability and offered little assistance. Determined to find help, Monica began searching for a reading program outside the school district, finally turned to the Sylvan Learning Center in Baytown. Working with the Sylvan instructors, Monica's children began not only to improve their reading skills, but their self-esteem as well. Jermane is now reading at his grade level and improving, Marissa is slowing getting close to her reading grade level, and her math skills have shown a vast improvement.

The first priority in our education system is to teach reading skills to every child. Reading is the prerequisite for every area of education, and the development of basic life skills. With a free compulsory

education system that dedicates more money and resources to education than any other country in the world, coupled with strict teacher certification requirements, it's hard to understand why America has a reading problem. However, according to the National Adult Literacy Survey, 50 million Americans read only at a fourth or fifth grade level. One of every four high school graduate read at an eighth grade equivalent. An adult with a reading comprehension level of the sixth grade or below is considered functionally illiterate. Many adults can recognize certain words and read particular passages but are unable to understand or use the information productively. This lack of comprehension prevents them from completing the most menial of tasks.

Monica Boyd's personal struggle with literacy combined with her children's, made her acutely aware of the problem of illiteracy in the world. Because of her perseverance, she was able to find the necessary resources to assist her and her children to become literate. Monica also became aware of others in her community who are unable, because of limited resources, to attain the necessary assistance needed to help their children overcome their reading deficiencies. She began thinking of ways she could help those with the need, but lacking the resources. She presented her plan to The Sylvan Learning Center, several people

in the community and Lee College personnel. The response Monica received was overwhelmingly positive, leading to the formation of the Monica Boyd Foundation, a non-profit organization, whose purpose is to provide resources to assist young people with reading problems. The Sylvan Learning Center have committed to providing their services at a discounted rate to the Foundation. Lee College is in full support of Monica's efforts and will provide some logistical support for the Foundation. The Monica Boyd Foundation is still in its infancy but is committed to being part of the effort to stamp out the silent epidemic of illiteracy in America

We must ensure every child in this country is capable of reading. But, it is also apparent that we must deal with adult illiteracy as well. Teaching adult illiterates to read and write effectively will enable them to function productively in society.

Many variables contribute to America's high illiteracy rate. The fact that so many Americans graduate high school without basic reading and writing skills points to not to just a breakdown in our education system, but our nation's social structure as well. For us to be a viable and successful society, we cannot tolerate the fact that a significant number of people in our country cannot read.

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