

40
years

INDY READS

EST. 1984

Literacy for All

IMPACT REPORT

Fiscal Year
2023-2024



*Celebrating our
Ruby Slippers
40th anniversary!*





Our Mission

Our mission is to build the literacy, English language, and job readiness skills to empower adults and their families to reach their full potential.

Our Vision

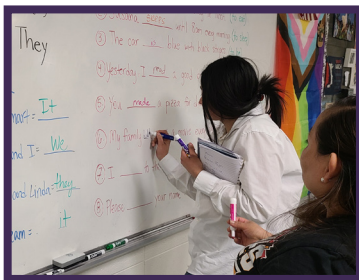
100% literacy for all.

Our Core Values



★ Student-Centered

We adapt our curriculum to meet the needs of individual students to ensure they can envision their own paths forward.



★ Inclusive

We create welcoming environments where students, volunteers, and supporters from diverse backgrounds gather.



★ Innovative

Both forward-thinking and flexible, we model best practices in adult education and nonprofit management, aspiring to excellence in everything we do.



★ Literacy

Our programs help people develop basic literacy skills (reading, writing, speaking and comprehending) and apply them in all aspects of their lives.



From our Chief Executive Officer

Our 2023-2024 program year marks the 40th anniversary of Indy Reads! Since 1984, this organization has led the way for bringing Hoosiers together to learn from and with each other to elevate English literacy and language skills for all.

In our ruby anniversary year, we served **413 adult learners** in our adult education programs who dedicated **22,975 hours** to their education in our Community Classrooms. Throughout this report, you will see the impact of those hours spent on developing reading and English language skills, earning High School Equivalency diplomas, gaining hands-on experience in our workforce certifications programs, and shining as leaders in our community bookstore programming.

Launched 12 years ago, our community bookstore welcomed nearly **22,000 visitors** celebrating the joy of literacy. It is humbling and motivating to see this engagement in our space. Our wide-ranging initiatives include our book club, our student-led Spanish Conversation Circles, our dedicated free and pay-what-you-can book selections, and hosting difficult conversations with our neighbors. Indy Reads' community bookstore has emerged as a reflection of our Community Classrooms—it is a safe, inclusive place that makes literacy accessible, engaging, and relevant to all, regardless of birthplace, race, education level, religion, socioeconomic status, or age.

Forty years ago, Indy Reads was founded by a group of volunteers and librarians determined to continue a volunteer tutoring program that helped adults develop their foundational reading skills, one adult and tutor pairing at a time. Since then, we have evolved to meet the growing and expanding needs of adults and their families, **offering certifications, diplomas, and a classroom model** that empowers students to learn from each other and teachers to learn from their students. Our program model is sought after by adult learners who tell us we are the first place they feel seen; the first place someone has believed in them. We are honored to be that place for our community—and we commit ourselves to be worthy of this honor.

We see our students, **96% of whom are immigrants, people of color, and/or people living below 200% of the federal poverty level**, as the biochemists,



teachers, essential healthcare personnel, service providers, lawyers, parents, artists, and entrepreneurs they are. By growing our understanding of who our students are and what becomes possible for individuals, families, and communities with literacy, we are better able to serve our entire community with student-centered pedagogy, and programming that promotes agency for us all.

Still, 1 in 6 adults in Central Indiana are unable to read above a fifth-grade level. Last year, we saw a 94% increase in student demand for Indy Reads programming. There is much more to do to advance social equity through literacy in our state, and we cannot do it alone.

As was our practice 40 years ago, it is only thanks to our dedicated team of staff, teachers, board members, and volunteers who uplift each of our adult learners and community programs that we are able to bring our mission to life. In particular, it is thanks to a record **321 volunteers** who last year demonstrated their commitment to *literacy for all*, giving 7,360 hours of service as tutors, bookstore helpers, and behind the scenes supporters of administrative and special projects.

There is something special about the magic that is Indy Reads. We are what we are, because you are part of our community. Thank you for being a part of Indy Reads, for supporting us for 40 years, and for helping us to launch the next 40 years of literacy for all!



Ruba Marshood
Chief Executive Officer

Our Impact

22,975

cumulative hours students dedicated to their Indy Reads education this year.

88%

of students who completed their High School Equivalency (HSE) exams earned their diplomas.

92%

of students who completed their certification program earned their credential.

84%

of students who were post-tested made at least one Educational Functioning Level gain.



Our Community

413

students served across 20 course offerings.

96%

of students are immigrants, people of color, and/or living below 200% of the federal poverty line.

48%

of students have children under the age of 18.

48

different countries of origin are represented by our student body. Top five: 1. United States, 2. Mexico, 3. Haiti, 4. Venezuela and 5. Colombia.

35

different primary languages are represented in our student body. Top five: 1. Spanish, 2. English, 3. Haitian Creole, 4. French and 5. Kinyarwanda.

~22,000

people visited Indy Reads.

2,858

people participated in 254 community bookstore programs.

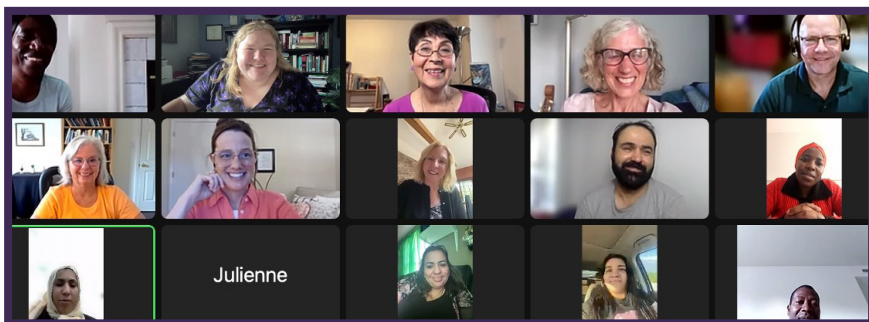


Our Programs



★ Literacy Foundations

These in-person classes are designed to support the 1 in 6 adults in central Indiana who cannot read above a 5th-grade level develop basic reading and writing skills. Indy Reads is the only adult education organization in the region that formally serves these students.



★ Pathway to Literacy (ELL Literacy Foundations)

In partnership with Immigrant Welcome Center, these classes serve adults at the most beginning literacy level in their native languages. This course supports ELL students with 6 years or fewer of formal schooling in any language.



★ English Language Learning (ELL)

Our fastest growing program, ELL classes support adult learners at all levels of the English literacy spectrum as they develop their speaking, listening, reading, writing, and comprehension skills to unlock their economic and social potential. We also offer weekly ELL Conversation Circles open to the public in our community bookstore.



★ High School Equivalency (HSE)

11% of Hoosier students did not graduate from high school in 2023. Our HSE classes cover all 5 subjects in the HiSET exam (reading, writing, math, social studies, and science), preparing students to earn their HSE diploma.



★ Customer Service and Paraprofessional Certifications

Our industry-recognized Paraprofessional and Customer Service certifications help adults in Indiana stand out in today's competitive job market and across sectors. Customer Service trainees can complete a paid internship in our community bookstore.

Community Bookstore

Our independent bookstore in Fountain Square makes the joy of reading accessible to all with a wide selection of both new and affordable used books. We welcomed nearly 22,000 visitors this year!

We gratefully accept used book donations on the first Friday of each month and new book donations for our free Banned Bookshelf, a new initiative this year.

Proceeds from bookstore sales and events help to keep our adult education programs tuition-free for students. Learn more about book donations here: www.indyreads.org/donate-books.

As Indiana author Ross Gay writes, "A good little bookstore is a laboratory for our coming together."

Programs this year included

- ★ Poetry & More Open Mic Night
- ★ ELL Conversation Circles
- ★ Spanish Conversation Circles
- ★ World Book Day
Multilingual Reading
- ★ Drag Story Hour
- ★ Art and Writing Workshops
- ★ Big Chair Story Time
- ★ The Indie Indy Book Crawl
- ★ Summer Reading Club
- ★ Community Discussion
with JVP Indiana
- ★ The Indy Reads
Book Club
- ★ The Bookworm Bash
- ★ Meet and Greet
with Kwanzaa Claus
- ★ and more!

2,858

people attended

254

bookstore programs



Highlights from the Year



August 2, 2023

Indy Reads Selected as Gen Con Charity Partner

More than 70,000 people attended this 4-day convention. We were given a free booth space, received half of all proceeds from official Gen Con charity events, and had a fabulous time bringing literacy to the world's largest tabletop gaming convention!



February 19, 2024

Presidents' Day Book Giveaway

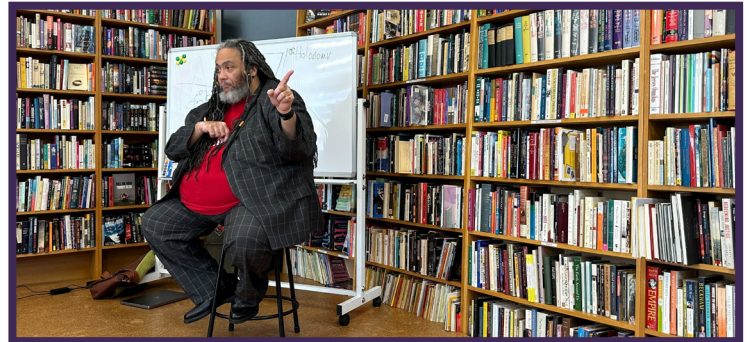
Thanks to our partners, the Central Indiana Community Foundation, the Herbert Simon Family Foundation, and Teachers' Treasures, Indy Reads facilitated the distribution of 31,510 children's books to 39 schools and organizations in Indiana.



May 30, 2024

End of Year Class Parties

Indy Reads students celebrated their achievements at class parties. With a 45% increase in students served this year, we had a lot to celebrate!



November 9, 2023

Pedagogy of the Oppressed Staff Training

As a student-centered, literacy and learning organization, we dedicated the last program year to a study of Paolo Friere's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. With thanks to Friirian scholar, Dr. Brandon D. Cosby, for facilitating an all staff book discussion, we continued the professional development all year, including with our board, and it is still ongoing!



April 18, 2024

Ruby Slippers 40th Anniversary Breakfast

400 community members joined us to celebrate 40 years of Literacy for All at Ivy Tech Community College Conference Center. Co-host Rashidah Johnson (HSE, Class of 2022) and speakers Lacha Santiesteban (ELL student), Jeffrey Young (HSE student), Camilo Santiesteban (ELL student), and Katleeanna Harris (HSE, Class of 2023), made it a particularly powerful morning.



1984

The Greater Indianapolis Literacy League is founded as a 1:1 English literacy tutoring model.

1998

The organization changes its public (DBA) name to Indy Reads.

1999-2012

Indy Reads grows from a two-person operation with a limited budget to a 12-person operation with close to \$1M in budget.

2012

Indy Reads opens *Indy Reads Books* on Massachusetts Avenue to advance its vision of 100% literacy for all.

2017

Indy Reads reimagines its program model from 1:1 tutoring to Community Classrooms, where trained educators and volunteer instructors support cohorts of students learning together. Complying with Federal Education Standards, it becomes a state-recognized adult education provider and receives its first grant from the Department of Workforce Development.

2020

In response to COVID-19, Indy Reads restructures its programming to serve students virtually. This option continues to mitigate barriers to access today.

2021

Indy Reads and *Indy Reads Books* merge. Indy Reads relocates to historic Fountain Square.

2022

Indy Reads hosts more than 150 community and family programs open to the public. It launches its Customer Service Skills Program (CSSP), enabling adult students to participate in a paid internship in Indy Reads' community bookstore.

2023

The organization adopts a new strategic plan that centers students as leaders of their own educational journeys.

TODAY

Indy Reads grows to a staff of 20 members, serving more than 400 adult learners in its classrooms and nearly 3,000 participants in its bookstore.

40 Years of Literacy for All

For 40 years, Indy Reads has been a place for literacy. Even before 1984, Indy Reads was a volunteer-driven initiative to match a tutor with an adult learner for literacy practice. Throughout our history, Indy Reads has been driven to tap into our community's potential, engaging our neighbors to help each other by reading together.

Today, Indy Reads offers an array of courses for the most beginning level adult learner and beyond—from foundational reading and writing classes, to English language classes, to High School Equivalency diplomas and industry credentials—even offering Customer Service students paid on-the-job training in our community bookstore.

Now, thanks to our community bookstore and classroom model, we are a place where our students and our wider community come together. This allows our definition of "neighbor" to expand to include people whose life paths and histories we might otherwise never have known.

We are a place where we engage our students' children, because when children and their grownups learn together, the whole family does better.

We are a place where our adult learners' voices are sought, nurtured, and amplified to shape, inform, and lead our programming, so they may further inspire change in our community, our city, and beyond.

There is no place like Indy Reads.



Stories from our Community



"They threw me through the [public education] system, but I couldn't really read or write or do math. [With Indy Reads,] I'm already reading a little better. The teacher sticks with me. We're reading a Martin Luther King, Jr. book right now. He was a great leader, and I am really enjoying it!"

-Jeanenne B., Literacy Foundations Student

"One issue that we have as newcomers to the United States from another culture, is getting to know everything about the US. I didn't have any idea about American books, and it is good to know now, especially so that I know them for my kids. We need to know what they are doing and reading and learning. The environment at the bookstore is so friendly. I enjoy Indy Reads' commitment to community empowerment. As a Bookstore Associate, I appreciate the opportunity to interact with diverse individuals and support their literacy journeys."



-Zeynab 'Sarah' Hoveyzeh, Customer Service Skills Program Graduate and Bookstore Associate



"I'm a dancer in the Indianapolis Ballet. I also work in a restaurant. My sister and mother are also in Indy Reads' ELL class. My advice is that the more you talk to people, the faster it happens, the faster you speak English. But it's hard to start. It is hard to start when you are many years old. We are so thankful for Indy Reads' teachers and volunteers. They are amazing and very patient."

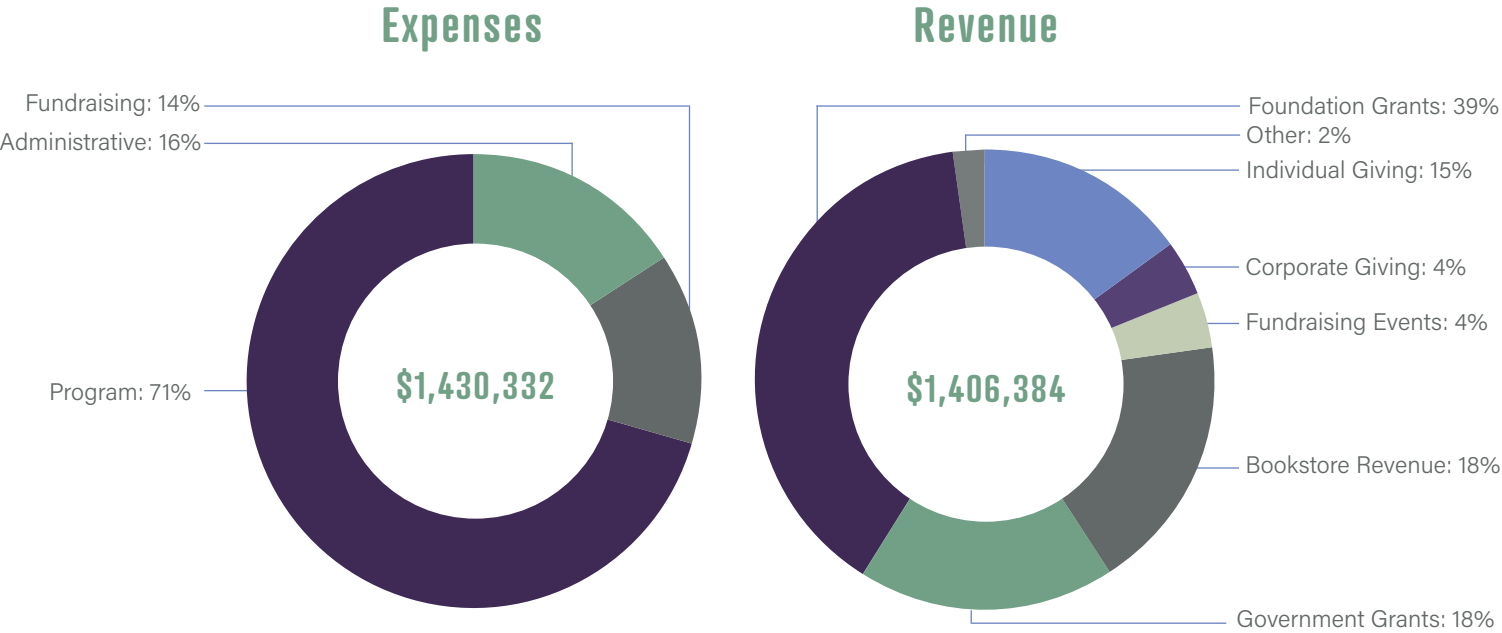
-Camilo Santiesteban, English Language Learning Graduate

"I realized, even though I'm a go-getter, that I'm 44 years old. I'm not going to be able to keep doing labor, even though I like to stay busy and use my hands. I figured that it was time to get my life back. If I can spend 16 hours a week in the gym, working on my body, then I can spend 16 hours a week working on my mind. During class, if I told David, the teacher, there was something I needed help with, he would put us in a breakout room and we would work on it. David's a really good teacher! If you tell him that you are lacking in something, he'll help you with it and then you get confident in it."

-Bill M., High School Equivalency Graduate



Organization Financials



Our Board



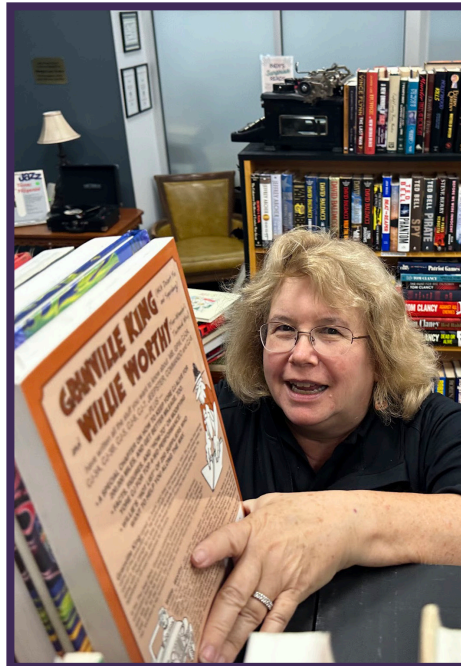
The FY24-25 Indy Reads Board of Directors met on August 1, 2024 to welcome three new members, affirm their commitment to our vision of 100% literacy for all, and review the strides we have made towards our strategic plan. Thank you to our outgoing board members Chad Schenkel, Christopher Scott, and Lindsay Gramlich for their dedicated board service. Learn more about our Board of Directors by visiting www.indyreads.org/board-of-directors.

Our Staff



Indy Reads added four new permanent staff positions including an Indy Reads graduate in PY23-24 in line with our strategic plan. Pictured: Indy Reads staff members at the Ruby Slippers 40th Anniversary Breakfast (April 18, 2024). Learn more about our team by visiting www.indyreads.org/our-team.

Our Volunteers



321 unique volunteers dedicated 7,360 hours of service to Indy Reads this year. Volunteer opportunities with Indy Reads include classroom tutoring (pictured left), bookstore volunteerism (pictured center), special projects during days of service (pictured right), and administrative service. Get involved by visiting www.indyreads.org/volunteer.

Our Donors

Literacy League

Our Literacy League members are donors who have pledged a monthly gift of \$5 or more to support Indy Reads. Their steady support is honored with a nameplate in our community bookstore, as well as a free used book each month. To become a Literacy League member, visit www.indyreads.org/league.

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Our Donors

Ruby Slippers Fundraising Breakfast Sponsors

Our 40th Anniversary Ruby Slippers Breakfast, held on April 18, 2024, was an inspiring morning of learning about the value and impact of literacy for ourselves, our families, and our society. The event welcomed nearly 400 members of our community and was possible with the generosity of our sponsors. To discuss meaningful sponsorship opportunities, please email giving@indyreads.org.

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