THE YEAR IN REVIEW 2019
We work to increase the combined impact of our community’s literacy organizations through creative and effective collaboration.

Working together, we envision a 100% literate Chicago.
On the Cover:

In the last year, we crossed paths with thousands of people. Whether we were simply tabling at an outdoor literature festival or holding events in our own space for people who are already familiar with us, one thing they all had in common was an underlying love of reading and an awareness of the power of literacy.

The sticky notes you saw on the cover are their real, hand-written responses to this question:

What does literacy mean to you?
“I am, somehow, less interested in the weight and convolutions of Einstein’s brain than in the near certainty that people of equal talent have lived and died in cotton fields and sweatshops.”

- Stephen Jay Gould
This report shares stories of how the CLA promoted engagement, efficiency, and effectiveness for, within, and among our member organizations. We do this vital work every day—enabling our member organizations to devote more energy to serving Chicagoans.

As we look ahead, we are refining these goals to emphasize building capacity for our members, helping align efforts to promote better literacy outcomes, and advocating on behalf of our member organizations. This is more an evolution than a revolution in our strategy, reflecting our awareness that literacy is essential to unlocking the full potential of our community.

The Stephen Jay Gould quote to the left was part of a discussion at the CLA’s January 2019 Confab, focusing on equity in literacy education. The Confab is our flagship program, and an opportunity for us to drive collaboration in a proactive way on key literacy issues.

Gould’s statement urges action when looking at data like that found in the 2017 National Assessment of Educational Progress. The NAEP reading scores showed African American students scoring an average of 38 points lower than whites; low income students scoring an average of 38 points lower than middle and upper income students; and Hispanics scoring 29 points lower than non-Hispanic whites.

People often wonder what we mean by a “100% literate Chicago.” It means several things, but it definitely means eradicating these disparities in educational outcomes. It is imperative that we do. It is not only about finding a new Einstein, but also a new Sandburg, a new Brooks, a new Cisneros. Furthermore, it is not only about finding the geniuses among us, but the genius within each of us.

Literacy expert Maryanne Wolf writes, “every child who learns to read someone else’s thoughts and write his or her own repeats [a] cyclical, germinating relationship between written language and new thought, never before imagined.” This is a helpful reminder that we drive literacy not solely so that others might learn, but so that we might learn from the “never before imagined” thoughts from the pens of people empowered to write. Our future depends upon it.

At the CLA, we are all about the “never before imagined.” You have a standing invitation to join us as we put our best efforts to unlocking the potential of reading and writing for all Chicagoans. If you want to see how we’re doing it, please read on.

Sincerely,
Ken Bigger, Executive Director
Linas Grikis, Board Chair

Photo: CLA Executive Director Ken Bigger (left) and Board Chair Linas Grikis (right) in the Lit Loft. Completed in April 2019, the Lit Loft is the Literacenter’s newest expansion.
We’re the Chicago Literacy Alliance (CLA): an association of more than 120+ organizations who work across disciplines, age groups, education levels, and neighborhoods across Chicago to create crucial literacy services and educational programming that improves lives. We bring them together, providing work space, professional development, and programs tailor-made to increase their capacity, foster collaboration, and ultimately, increase their impact.

Your support creates powerful efficiencies in their work, creating a robust network of stakeholders who are aligned in their work and their goals. With their collective voice, they’re able to elevate their work in an unprecedented way, generating impact and pushing the envelope for literacy in Chicago and beyond.

Our shared goal is to work towards a 100% literate Chicago, and your support breaks down the barriers they face, building collaborative partnerships to work more strategically and efficiently. Ensure that we’ll continue to be here for the organizations we serve, and together, we can make a 100% literate Chicago a reality.

39% of Chicago’s public school students do not meet or exceed reading standards.

30% of adults in Chicago have low literacy skills and would benefit from basic literacy services.

61% of low-income households do not own any children’s books.

Together, we can do better.

Statistics are courtesy of the Chicago Citywide Literacy Coalition, Chicago Public Schools, and Children’s Literacy Foundation.
Jaime Freeman, the Chicago Literacy Alliance Board Treasurer, found her way to the CLA through a combined love of reading and giving back to the community. She was a kid who carried books in her pockets who grew into an adult who discovered a love of service. She volunteered with the United Way of Chicago’s Mid Day Mentoring program and on Working in the Schools’ (WITS) associate board. Eventually, after discovering the CLA and learning more about our work, she joined the Board of Directors.

"I loved the idea of looking at Chicago through the CLA’s geographic and demographic assessments, and thinking about how we could more efficiently bring services to the places that need it most," says Freeman. "Efficiency is an ideal, but many of the organizations don’t have the resources to dedicate to it, so I love the idea of the CLA bringing this vital resource to the people and organizations who are providing mission-critical direct services in the field."

Apart from investing her time, Freeman also finds value in making other contributions to the CLA. For the last few years, Jaime has supported the CLA with a monthly gift, which makes her one of the first members of the Friends of the CLA. Friends of the CLA are people who donate monthly and provide ongoing, sustaining support for our mission. The benefit of this type of giving is multi-faceted.

"I like the consistency of giving monthly," she says. "It’s very helpful to the organization from a planning perspective, and if I’m trying to help the CLA be efficient with those funds, it’s nice for them to know how much those funds are and when they’re coming, and it’s nice to have that consistency."

Jaime’s gifts not only help our organization - they help the field of literacy as a whole.

"As a monthly giver to the CLA, I think potential donors should choose the CLA if they want to really increase their impact on literacy in Chicago, which advances the cause on a greater and broader scale than donating to any individual organization."
Chicago Literacy Alliance members are literacy and education organizations that serve people throughout Chicago. Although they work in diverse demographics and neighborhoods, their work focuses largely on literacy, which is why this network is so effective. We believe that when we bring like-minded organizations together and lower the barriers to their work, their impact is more powerful.

More than 120 organizations make up the Chicago Literacy Alliance, and our membership structure is built around creating a community of organizations that have access to the CLA and each other to collaborate and accomplish their goals together. Your support helps create programming that increases their impact, adding to their capabilities and contributing to the work they do across Chicago's communities.

CLA members work in every neighborhood in Chicago - see opposite page for a break down, per neighborhood, of just how far our members’ work reaches. With your support, we can create opportunities and programs that help member organizations do more vital, impactful literacy work throughout the city.
### Programs by the numbers:

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**Our members are...**
Access is central to our mission. We create access to increased literacy and empowerment for the communities that our members serve, access to resources for our members, and access to our diverse, high-impact network itself.

This resource came into play for a groundbreaking collaboration between Open Books, a founding CLA member, and Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library. Open Books, which provides access to books and works to increase literacy for Chicago’s communities, has partnered with the Imagination Library to roll out a program providing free books to Chicago’s children from birth to age five. With this huge task on their hands, they knew where to turn to get help.

“As we roll out this program, the first thing we ask is, who can we work with that’s part of the CLA?” says Curtis Shaw Flagg, the Marketing Director at Open Books. “We go there first, instead of saying, well, how many organizations are there in Chicago that we can work with?”

To roll out the Imagination Library program, Open Books created partnerships with several organizations, including America SCORES Chicago.

“We connected with Open Books at one of the Confabs,” says Jessica Lopez, Director of Programs and Operations at America SCORES Chicago, which combines poetry and soccer to create after-school programming for Chicago school kids. “One thing we kept coming down to is that two of our three community schools are in North Lawndale, and that was right around when they were getting the Imagination Library program up and running.”

“We did story times during their soccer games, and at the same time, we were also able to create access to books for America SCORES Chicago,” says Flagg. “That raised awareness of our organization and what we did, so just being present really does a lot for both organizations. Now we’re exposed to their audience, and they’re exposed to our networks, and we’re both promoting the fact that we’re working together.”

When it came time to introduce the Imagination Library program in the Chicago neighborhood of Austin, their relationship paid dividends. Open Books was able to connect to more families through America SCORES Chicago’s neighborhood programming, which meant more sign-ups for the Imagination Library program and more children receiving free books.
“We tried to put [Open Books] in spaces where we knew there would be a high community presence,” says Lopez, “so that they could share out about the Imagination Library program.”

“[America SCORES Chicago] was very instrumental in bringing out families,” says Flagg. “With their support, we were able to enroll a few hundred families in the blink of an eye.”

The truest embodiment of the CLA’s mission is when our member organizations leverage our network to accomplish the essential work they do. Whether collaborations are actively facilitated by the CLA, or form naturally in our network, the very existence of this network proves to be a powerful asset for Chicago’s literacy community.

"We know that a membership with the CLA means something," says Flagg. "The organizations that are members of the CLA are very effective stakeholders in the literacy community and the education community. It all starts with the CLA."
Resources that nonprofits could spend on delivering mission-centered programming all-too-often go towards supporting brick and mortar costs instead. Nonprofits’ needs vary widely - with irregular hours, tight funding, and variable (but usually small) staffs, nonprofits are often relegated to working in sub-par office space or from homes and coffee shops.

This resource scarcity, combined with insufficient opportunities to connect regularly with similar organizations or find efficiencies through collaboration and economies of scale, contributes to a precarious landscape for them. These barriers stand in the way of their missions, as they expend time and resources on just staying afloat.

Addressing this critical issue for literacy-focused nonprofits in the city was a core motivation for founding the Literacenter, the offices and co-working space of the Chicago Literacy Alliance. The Literacenter creates vital workspace for our members, and with an initial membership of 17 organizations since the Literacenter opened in 2015, we now serve more than 120, with more than 50% of members using space at the Literacenter for office, co-working, and event space.

As we continue to grow and evolve, the Literacenter does too.

In April 2019, we opened the Lit Loft, a cutting-edge new space that adds capacity and workspace for the CLA and our members. The opening of the Lit Loft, one floor above our main Literacenter space, added 9,000 square feet of new space, including four meeting rooms, 11 private offices, and open working space to the Literacenter portfolio - resulting in more dedicated workspace for five existing residents, and six new organizations moving in.

"Before the third floor opened, we were limited to just the two large rooms downstairs [on the Literacenter’s main floor],” says Ama Appenteng, Program Director at Center for Companies that Care. At the Literacenter, Appenteng runs summer educational programming for Chicago students who are on summer break.

Efficiency, our second strategic goal, is central to everything we do. We work to harmonize the efforts of our members and reduce their costs through economies of scale.

The Lit Loft, opened in April 2019, adds new meeting rooms, event spaces, offices, and open working space to add capacity and workspace for CLA members.
The addition of the new space also extended event capabilities, with a new catering kitchen and modern, modular large event space for even more flexibility for our members and their diverse needs. The new space already spells increased capabilities for our members.

"Most of our groups are classes of at least 30," says Appenteng. "With the third floor opening, we've had the opportunity to host more programming without worrying about the availability of other large spaces."

For Literacenter residents, the space is for more than just their work. Along with the opportunity to take part in the CLA's programs, members also have access to networking and professional development opportunities, and they rub shoulders with other literacy organizations sharing the space.

"The people that come here not only share the same mission, but the same values," says Appenteng. "I get to meet so many people just from bumping into them and starting conversations, which is really hard to do when you have your own independent office and don't have time to network."

Whether they're older, larger organizations looking to establish a presence at the Literacenter, or newer, smaller organizations moving here from other co-working spaces, offices that didn't meet their needs, or even their own living rooms, the Literacenter carries advantages for everyone.

"We were looking for centralized nonprofit/socially-minded space," says Priya Shah, Executive Director of The Simple Good, a youth-focused arts organization that co-works out of the Literacenter on a daily basis. "We didn't have regular access to a printer, board rooms, conference rooms, or even just central space to have meetings. Having a place where people know where to find us has been really good for our growth."

Benefits for The Simple Good, founded in 2015, go beyond just the physical facility.

"It's really helpful to have a thought-sharing space," says Shah. "What do Executive Directors do? It's been nice having a space where we can share growth experiences and run into each other."

In the resource-strapped world of mission-driven organizations, reducing barriers and finding efficiencies in our work translates directly into increased impact. Efficient organizations are streamlined, agile, and - most importantly - they're effective. The Literacenter is a resource designed to empower organizations to realize their missions more effectively and more collaboratively than they can on their own. With member organizations directing fewer resources going towards just staying afloat, more can go towards service delivery – directly to the communities they serve.

Simply put, reducing barriers to our members’ work increases the impact they have on literacy in Chicago. Through the Literacenter, we aim to create a space where Chicago’s literacy organizations not only survive - they thrive.

In June 2019, we hosted our first-ever Volunteer Fair, which connected organizations to people looking for volunteer opportunities with literacy-focused nonprofits.

$817,450
How much members estimate we saved them in FY19.

92%
of Epic and Legend members say we increase their capacity to deliver their programs and services. For more about our network, please see page 6.
Every month, people come together from across our member network to share top-level insights from their work, connect around shared goals, and work towards collaborative solutions to Chicago’s literacy gaps. This monthly convening, called the Confab, is a springboard of collaboration for our network. With themes like Teacher Preparation, Professional Learning and Development, Administrators as Literacy Leaders, and more, each Confab proves effective in tackling the literacy community’s most pressing issues.

“The trainings and Confabs that the CLA offers are amazing,” says Ruby Camacho, Associate Director at the UIC Center for Literacy. “I’ve attended quite a few, and when I can’t, my team members do, and we share that information with each other.”

Networking is built into each Confab. This year, for the first time, we implemented a longer Confab program that provided dedicated time for organizations to connect and discuss projects and initiatives that they could focus on together.

“You feel comfortable just saying, ‘Hi, I’m from this literacy organization, this is what we’re doing, we can connect and maybe work together, or we could help each other out with some brainstorming’,” says Camacho.

This new focus on networking enabled the creation of Confab working groups, and Memo to the Mayor is an example of how people come together for this shared cause. This working group was born when Claire Haasl of the David L. Hoyt Education Foundation and Lola Harrison of Concordia University met at the April Confab and realized they were in a position to begin shaping a powerful message about adult literacy in the city.

"We wanted to talk about how we, as organizations, were talking about adult literacy," says Haasl, "and what language we could start using as a collective to help encourage a more positive message."

Through this Confab, and after being able to network with other organizations on the topic, they went on to form the...
Memo to the Mayor working group, which convened conversations on how literacy providers could craft a message that would raise the importance of adult literacy for the city’s residents.

"For the CLA to take on this challenge and bring people together, and to foster relationships and partnerships...is ideal," says Harrison, who is also a frequent Confab attendee. "We don’t have to struggle with where we’re going to meet, and we also have the support of the CLA."

For our members, collaboration is an essential benefit of being based in the Literacenter. Nonprofit centers like the Literacenter provide access to collaboration and a community of like-minded nonprofits and people. We provide the opportunities and physical space for organizations to come together and determine how to best educate and mobilize people and institutions for the cause of literacy. Whether they work out of the Literacenter, or simply come to the CLA’s programs, members of all types find benefit in our collaborative initiatives.

“The Confab is great for staff development because it’s available to everyone, it’s free, and it’s a great opportunity for people to get a broader understanding of literacy in Chicago and all the issues that are there,” says Rita Kahn, Executive Director of Chicago HOPES for Kids (HOPES), which provides educational support and resources to children living in Chicago’s homeless shelters. “And it’s right here, so we don’t have to send everybody travelling to attend it.”

Like many other organizations, the connections that HOPES has made through the Confab have translated directly into increased effectiveness for their programs.

“One of the things we do is provide children with enrichment opportunities, and there are a number of organizations that are part of the CLA that are potential enrichment partners,” says Kahn. “We connected with Classroom, Inc. when they came to a Confab and talked about the programs they have for middle school students. We ended up working with them for a summer and a semester for the kids, which was a great fit for the middle school program we were developing.”

Programs like the Confab connect organizations directly to the CLA and to each other on a regular basis, and the end result of that is a community that is stronger and does more effective, impactful literacy work.

"Working with the CLA has allowed us to talk about the issues we care deeply about as individuals and as organizations," says Haasl. "The organizations at the CLA are very passionate about literacy - we can hear that passion and I think that’s really beneficial."

74% of members say that the Confab increases their ability to coordinate with other member organizations.

As length of their membership increases, the total number of collaborations with other member organizations also increases.

Other high-impact collaborations that have taken flight through the CLA include...

- Word Play Way, a David L. Hoyt Education Foundation and Chicago Poetry Center collaborative installation combining public art with word play in Douglas Park
- Collaborations between the Poetry Foundation and the Chicago Public Library on programs including the CPL Poetry Fest and the ChiTeen Lit Fest
- A bid to win an XPrize Communities Competition prize by the Chicago Citywide Literacy Coalition, David L. Hoyt Education Foundation, The Learning Center, and St. Joseph Services
- Many, many more!

These partnerships have wide-reaching impact for not just the organizations involved, but the mission to push literacy forward in Chicago as a whole.
Financial Highlights

Revenue & Support

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<th>Other</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interest</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Other</strong></td>
<td><strong>108</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total Revenue and Support** | **2,367,843**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expenses</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Program Services</td>
<td>1,736,391</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative</td>
<td>418,202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development</td>
<td>361,502</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Expenses</strong></td>
<td><strong>2,516,095</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Net Assets (Deficit)**

| Beginning of Year         | (531,342)                     |
| End of Year               | (679,594)                     |

*Does not include event sponsorships.*
Our Supporters

To advance our work and our mission, the Chicago Literacy Alliance relies on the support of our incredible community. In 2019, we:

- Launched Friends of the CLA, a new monthly giving program, and the Boundless Society, which recognizes our most generous donors.
- More than doubled corporate sponsorship for One for the Books, our premiere annual fundraising event, and grossed $61,676.61, a 72% increase over 2018 totals.
- Awarded our first recipients of the Champion of Literacy Award (Mike Ban, first Executive Director of the CLA), and Leader in Literacy Award (Yelp Foundation).
- More than doubled Giving Tuesday fundraising from FY18 to FY19.

On the following pages, we recognize the people whose generosity made our work possible in FY19.

- Board of Directors
- Friends of the CLA
- CLA Staff
- Literassociates
- Boundless Society

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Amazon Smile
Mollie Anderson
Anonymous (5)
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Anthony Araneta
Jean Araujo
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Kristen Ban
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Claire Haas
Carol Haenicke
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Our Team:
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Mollie Anderson, Chief Development Officer
Ken Bigger, Executive Director
Charles Borom, Community Assistant
Kaitlyn Childs, Network Evaluation Assistant
Jen Daniels-Lake, Director of Impact and Evaluation
Damika Davis, Finance Manager
Destiny Jackson, Community Assistant
Usman Khan, Marketing Manager
Julie Lanham, Annual Giving Manager
Jimmy Martin, Managing Director
Erin McCann, Community Director
Anjali Misra, Institutional Giving Manager
Rocio Ortega, Program Coordinator
Stacy Ratner, Co-Founder
Amber Robbin, Member Relations Manager

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