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## **Literacy programs need volunteers**

### **Saturday event will focus on recruitment**

By **BRIAN SEALS**  
The Salinas Californian

Dozens of tutors work with Monterey County residents who are learning to read and write in English. But literacy experts say their programs actually need thousands of volunteers.

Illiteracy can cost its victims jobs, quality health care, housing, relationships and more.

Salinas-area agencies are using Saturday's International Literacy Day, declared by the United Nations, and Monterey County Literacy Week, which the Board of Supervisors declared for Monday through Friday, to encourage more people to get involved in tutoring.

"Tutors play a key role in literacy," said Janet Shing of the Community Foundation of Monterey County. "We have more people who need help than there are tutors available."

The foundation launched a literacy campaign in 2006.

Today, about 90 tutors are paired with learners by the Monterey County Free Libraries literacy program, but the program needs thousands, said Kary Shender, literacy program specialist. Those learners come from 14 different language backgrounds, Shender said.

The library system received a grant last year to expand beyond its Seaside location to Castroville and Soledad.

"We have the books; we don't have the teachers," she said. "We could make a phenomenal impact if we had more people."

Sustaining even existing learner-student pairs can be difficult. People move away, schedules change and other obstacles develop over time, Shender said.

"There's flux in both the lives of the learners and the lives of the tutors," she said.

## **Students defy stereotypes**

Also seeking volunteers is the Salinas Public Library system, which has a bevy of literacy-related programs ranging from one-on-one and small-group literacy training to family literacy programs.

"We are in great need of volunteers," said Senior Librarian Maria Roddy.

"Our demand is great."

Roddy said she could use 25 additional tutors "this very minute."

Those who use the services are a wide range of people who defy stereotypes, Shender said.

One student, for instance, is a well-organized office manager who wants to work on her language skills, she said.

Another is a successful business owner who wants to improve his English: Antonio Morales, who has owned San Pablo Bakery in Seaside for 18 years.

He gets tutoring, he said, because he wants to improve his grammar and vocabulary and go to college.

He prefers a tutor to studying in small groups.

"That's easier for me," Morales said.

"We can focus on just one thing."

But many literacy students struggle in the work world, experts say. A 2004 survey of area businesses found literacy was a common concern, Shing said.

"Businesses said their entry-level high school graduates weren't qualified to do entry-level work," she said.

That prompted the foundation to focus on the issue. In December, it doled out \$300,000 worth of grants to seven organizations that operate literacy programs.

The campaign especially focuses on people ages 18 to 35. Some 25 percent of that age group in Monterey County read at or below the fourth-grade level, according to the foundation. Moreover, those people are of parenting age - and the hope is that improving their literacy will help reinforce their children's education.

"That age group is interested in upward mobility and getting a better job," Shing said.

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