

Impact100 Metro Denver 2022 Grantee

The Learning Source (TLS)

Project: Hybrid/Online Learning Hub for Adult Learners

Impact100 2022 Grant Priority Area: Education and Lifelong Learning

**Organization Information:** Founded in 1964 by Sister Cecilia Linenbrink, The Learning Source (TLS) began in a church basement with 40 students, 16 volunteers, and no paid staff. Today, it is one of the oldest and largest adult education agencies in the state of Colorado. TLS' mission, to *promote and provide educational opportunities through collaborative partnerships for adults and families to support their future achievements*, is at the cornerstone of its success—providing services in areas of greatest need to adults, in collaboration with community partners.

TLS believes collaboration is the key to successfully providing services throughout the region. TLS combines its expertise with that of other organizations to effectively target populations and provide adequate and holistic resources for the student. TLS currently collaborates with over thirty community partners who, together, help TLS to build a stronger community of educated adults who have access to better opportunities and resources for themselves and their families.

TLS provides services at no cost to adult learners. Programs support individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds, specifically related to poverty, social justice issues and unemployment. Fifty-four percent of program participants are Latino/Latina, 21% Caucasian, 14% Black/African American, 8% Asian, 2% American Indian and 1% Unidentified. Sixty-nine percent of program participants earn below \$17,000 annually. In comparison, the Colorado Center on Law and Policy's most recent study determines self-sufficiency in Denver County for a single adult as \$21,916 annually (*The Self-Sufficiency Standard for Colorado 2020*). TLS programs are designed to support communities of greatest need to serve adults and families from the early stages of literacy through post-secondary education.

- The **Family Literacy Program** is a mother/child education program providing services to 335 individuals in twelve schools in two school districts. The program is designed to help parents of school-aged children become more actively involved in their children's education in a traditional elementary school setting. The Learning Source approaches this by providing parents with educational instruction in reading, writing and speaking English in the schools their children attend.
- **The Learning Collaborative (TLC)** has served a total of 1000 students, with 126 students enrolled in the fall semester and an anticipated 150 to enroll for the spring semester. This program is designed to increase successful transition of high barrier adult learners into Red Rocks Community College where students have great opportunity to attain self-sufficiency and a living wage.

- The **High School Equivalency and Career Pathways Program** through TLS prepares over 600 students to achieve their General Education Degree/High School Diploma equivalent. Each student enters the program by taking an individual assessment and begins his/her preparation at the level at which best suits their needs and skills. Students are supported through onsite instruction, small group work, one-on-one learning, or individual classwork during a 15-week semester. TLS works with funding partners to pay for testing and also offers career pathway programming, college transition opportunities and vocational certifications for students while co-enrolled in High School Equivalency programming.
- **English Language Acquisition (ELA)** classes are taught in three levels of English proficiency with the goal to have students graduate reading, understanding and speaking English fluently by the completion of the third level. Each course is 2 ½ hours, four days a week for a year. In FY 2020, 825 students participated in this program.

TLS continues to evolve and innovate programs to increase a value proposition to students that meets their needs in an ever-changing economic landscape. An education revolution is taking place and adult education across the nation and State of Colorado is being left behind. Adult education programming serves individuals from age 16 to 64. In Colorado, over 447,000 individuals are in need of basic adult education services (Coalition on Adult Basic Education, 2021).

**Need for Project:** Adult education is allocated at less than 0.1% of the state education budget. With limited funding, adult education programs lack the resources to sustain, let alone innovate, programming. For the vast majority of adults in Colorado in need of educational services, the services are not available or are located far enough away to create barriers for enrollment and success. Students have given feedback that programs are difficult to get to and inflexibility in delivery make attending challenging (The Learning Source, 2018). Adult education students have more barriers to success than traditional students; they work two or more jobs, have families, limited transportation options, and budget constraints to name only a few. They deserve better. They deserve the equitable resources necessary to succeed. Adult education students work harder than any other group of learners, but they can only give so much. With demanding schedules and a long list of responsibilities adult education students need us to meet them where they are and give them the supports and resources necessary to deliver quality education that offers rigor, support and flexibility. Currently, the state provides services to only 1.8% of the adult population that needs them.

Adult Education programming should offer more distance and hybrid forms of education to students. This would lead to leveraging technology to provide equitable student-centered solutions by mitigating the primary barriers of time and distance, increasing the amount of time a student has for both their studies and their lives. Providing this transformational programming is not a fairy tale. Educational offerings through technology exist and demonstrate effective outcomes double what the average of the state currently provides. It would also increase the number of students able to participate in educational offerings by over 400%.

**Grant Request:** TLS, with funding from Impact100, can lead the entire state of Colorado into the 21st century of adult education programming. TLS recently purchased a three-story building in the historic Five Points neighborhood of Denver. The building has been renovated

and will be utilized for adult education programming beginning January 4<sup>th</sup>, 2022. With \$100,000 in seed funds from Impact100, TLS can turn this building into an adult education technology hub and amplify its current program transformation while also offering low-cost services and resources for other Denver Metro and Colorado programs to begin the important work of programming transformation. These funds would be a catalyst for change to the entire metro educational ecosystem—providing the value and equitable support nontraditional students need to follow their dreams and succeed.

This transformational plan will focus on two strategies:

1. Increasing the technological resources and training necessary to offer high quality innovative hybrid and online adult education programming
2. Supporting adult education instructors across the State of Colorado in hybrid/online instructional best practices, training in exemplary online programming, resources available to create online content, and evaluation and continuous improvement support to innovate and improve existing adult education programming.

The building is in need of renovations - most underway - however in order to offer robust online and hybrid (along with traditional in-person) programming each classroom (total of 12) will need to be set up with the technology necessary to offer high quality online instruction. Also of need will be hard-wired classrooms for maximum bandwidth in order to have highly reliable internet service for students and instructors. Further technology needs include ADA compliant and Universal Design supports for those with learning disabilities; interactive technology for instructors; integrated synchronous and asynchronous instruction capabilities utilizing learning management systems, and a studio to produce high quality online content for student learning.

The budget for this project focuses on infrastructure and preliminary training. The funding itself outfits a larger than 6,000 square foot building into an educational technology design hub, and online and hybrid program operation that can offer up to six classes simultaneously. The technology design hub would allow TLS staff the ability to create unlimited classes, lectures, and online trainings of high quality and deliver them to students through a learning management system (LMS). This means over time a repository of online curriculum, workshops, classes, lectures and other content will be available to faculty to use in their classrooms as well as for students to access from anywhere at any time.

**Project Impact Evaluation** By using the new TLS Headquarters as a hub for hybrid and online learning, TLS will move from serving an estimated 400 students to over 1,200 in only two years. This will maximize efficiencies in the metro area, where 8 of 10 prospective adult education students have no current options. TLS measures success based on quantitative program outcomes, longitudinal education and economic outcomes, and from the voices of the community.