

EL Civics Making a Difference in the Community Awards

A key focus of the California English Literacy and Civics Education (EL Civics) program is for adult students to acquire the language and literacy skills to become citizens, exercise the rights and duties of citizenship, and enrich the communities in which they live. This award recognizes EL Civics programs that teach skills required for citizenship and empower students to take the initiative to make a difference in the community. In conjunction with the WIA Title II program specialists and the Program Evaluation Team, CASAS staff and the California Department of Education identify programs that are making a difference through EL Civics lessons and activities. To be recognized as a Making a Difference Award recipient, agencies must meet specific data collection criteria, document the effectiveness of their project, and show that the project goes beyond the classroom to affect the community in a positive manner. The following agencies have been selected as the 2007-08 EL Civics Making a Difference in the Community Award recipients:



A Harbor House student shows her son the colorful quilt she helped make in her EL Civics class. Harbor House's innovative quilt making program enables students to learn about US history and culture while creating products that reflect their own immigrant experiences.

Harbor House — U.S. History and Culture Class: Harbor House has developed an innovative curriculum for students at the lowest ESL instructional levels. These EL Civics students study the history of the United States using children's literature and other unique methods, focusing on the history of immigration in this country. Topics covered include African-American history, the Great Depression, Chinese immigrants during the Gold Rush, the Westward Movement, and other related topics. For each unit, students collaborate on the planning and making of a quilt. The quilts have helped students form a connection between the history that they have studied and their own experiences as immigrants. Classroom quilts have been displayed at Mills College, the East Bay Municipal Utilities District (EBMUD) main office, the San Francisco Foundation, and California Prudential Realty offices in Berkeley. Students have attended receptions at Mills College and EBMUD to share their stories and explain the quilts. The success of this project is measured by the students' pass rate for EL Civics assessments, increased confidence in public speaking, and a broader knowledge of U.S. history and culture. The impact on the community is evident through the widespread interest in student quilts and the positive feedback from community members about the program.

New Haven Adult School — Windows into Culture: To promote awareness and understanding of the many different cultures of their students, New Haven Adult School created the Windows into Culture project. The culminating activity, a cultural showcase, enables students to learn about one another through songs, dances, skits, monologues, food, and a fashion show of traditional costumes. Students prepare for the cultural showcase all semester. They make costumes, organize presentations, and work in groups according to their countries of origin. Students work with instructors to plan and practice their presentations for the showcase. At the showcase, which is attended by family and community members, students learn about different cultures and share their own cultures with others. New Haven Adult School attributes its success to a cohesive faculty and staff, which has a strong emphasis on staff development activities. The success of the Windows into Culture project is seen in the increased participation since the first showcase, the attendance by community members outside of the adult school, and the feedback received from those involved in the project.

San Diego Community College District, Continuing Education — Communicating Immigrant Rights Information to Friends, Family, and the Community:

The immigrant rights project of the San Diego Community College District (SDCCD) was created after an assessment survey indicated that students wanted to learn more about what they could do in situations involving immigration status or rights within the community. These inquiries were addressed in EL Civics class lessons. The specific goal of the lessons was for students to share information about immigrant rights and services, to help people feel safe as they commute to school and work, to be more aware of their rights, to know where to get help when needed, and to respond with confidence when facing challenging situations. Students were enthusiastic about sharing this information to their family and friends.

Students worked together in small groups to make posters presenting information about immigrants' rights, which were hung in the school corridors. In addition to the posters, each student made a directory of immigration service providers. Many students photocopied these directories and presented them as gifts to family and friends. The success of this program is evident through responses to student questionnaires, high pass rates on EL Civics Assessments, and feedback from community members and instructors.

Ventura Adult and Continuing Education Environmental Participation — Channel Islands Restoration:

Ventura Adult and Continuing Education reached a new level of participation for field trips with the Channel Islands Restoration Project. Fifteen EL Civics students participated in a four-day field trip to Santa Cruz Island and assisted the Channel Islands Restoration (CIR) personnel at the University of California at Santa Barbara field station. Forty students from two classes were involved in planning the trip. These students set up travel, lodging, clothing and equipment. During the trip students had hands-on experience in environmental conservation. After seven-hour workdays the students enjoyed trips to different parts of the island to learn about the history and unique ecology of the island. They also participated in group discussions and attended presentations from CIR personnel. This trip provided students with four days of total immersion in English, with an emphasis on ecology. Upon their return, participating students gave presentations and were also interviewed by the local newspaper.



Above: New Haven Adult School students present at the Windows into Culture Showcase while learning about the cultures of other students. The showcase includes dancing, singing, monologues, and a fashion show.

The success of the field trip is evident from the comments of the CIR personnel, who stated that they had never had such hard-working volunteers. The project's success is also reflected in comments from students who said they did something they never would have done otherwise. They said that now they know what the islands need and have informed their families and friends.

The EL Civics students in these programs can now do something they could not do previously. Their lives, the lives of their families, and communities have been changed forever. This is the goal of the EL Civics program in California. The complete narratives are posted on the CASAS Web site (www.casas.org).