

Spring Newsletter

The Open Door Collective (ODC) assists poverty reduction initiatives to take advantage of, expand, or improve adult basic skills services to meet the needs and broaden the economic opportunities of low-income adults. We advocate for effective policies and program designs that will reduce poverty, narrow income inequality, and provide free basic skills education for all adults in the United States. Improved policies and programs will enable adults living in poverty to increase their incomes as well as enjoy more economic stability and better health. These outcomes will diminish the need for social services, increase tax revenues, and lower overall healthcare costs. Expanded adult basic skills services will, therefore, pay for themselves.

Steering Committee Members

John Comings john.comings@gmail.com

Judy Mortrude judy.mortrude@gmail.com

Steve Reder stevereder@gmail.com

David J. Rosen djrosen123@gmail.com

Gwenn Weaver gwwork50@gmail.com

ODC Issues Groups

- Workforce Development and Labor
- Public Libraries, Digital Inclusion
- Community Health and ABE
- Safety Net Services Advocacy
- Criminal Justice Reform
- Immigrant and Refugee Education Integration
- Public K-12 Education and Intergenerational Literacy
- Digital Inclusion

ODC's mission is to help adult basic skills advocates make common cause with advocates for other issues (health, employment, incarceration, libraries, etc.) in order to build an integrated approach to ending poverty. The ODC advocacy issues groups, therefore, are the engines of ODC's efforts. They produce advocacy papers, presentations, and videos that set out the common cause within each ODC issue group. We do this because we believe that the efforts taking place within other issue areas will be more successful if adult basic skills advocates and practitioners support them and they support adult basic skills. In addition, we believe that an integrated approach to ending poverty that includes adult basic skills and all of the other issues groups is the only way to be successful.

Open Door Collective May 18th presentation by Peter Waite and David J. Rosen at the Vermont Public Libraries Conference sponsored by the Vermont Library Association



Top and bottom left photo by Thomas Lee; bottom right photo courtesy of Belgrade Community Library

David and Peter had good fortune in being the first workshop after an outstanding keynote speaker, Erica Freudenberger, the Director of the Red Hook Library in Dutchess County New York, in 2015 a finalist [*nominee for the best small library in America*](#). She laid perfect groundwork for their session. Her talk emphasized that the future of libraries was “developing rich, abiding relationships in the community.” She said that the focus of public libraries now should be to transform communities, that they are perfectly suited in the age of a “sharing economy” (Uber, Lyft, Airbnb) and a “knowledge economy” to meet the needs of communities in this new age, and that the public library is a critical part, perhaps a hub, of “a much larger socio-economic system”. She referenced [ALA’s “Transforming Communities”](#), and that collaboration (a partnership, for example) is not necessarily community engagement, and that libraries should attend to “a needed shift from expert knowledge to public knowledge” to avoid being obsolete. She talked about a community engagement process based on the Harwood Tools. (See “[Turning Outward Resources for Libraries](#)” on the ALA website.) Erica, her Library board members, volunteers, students from nearby Bard College, and other volunteers all participated in an extensive process of collecting information about community needs through home visit interviews — a one-on-one “Ask”, small “Aspiration” group interviews, and larger community conversations. These Harwood process tools were all based on these questions:

1. What kind of community do you want to live in?
2. Why is this important to you?
3. How is this different from how you see things now?
4. What are some of the things that need to happen to create that kind of change?

Erica Freudenberger and her many supporters and partners were able to transform what the town of Red Hook had regarded as a largely irrelevant, and hardly-used institution to a vital, highly-regarded community resource, and in the process, she was able to more than double the library's small budget at a time when the county had a 2% cap on government budget increases. David wondered if a process like she described, led by a public library in a community, could focus on the issue of reducing poverty. Could this be a new focus for the ODC Public Libraries Issue Group, perhaps building on the ALA Turning Outward tools, using the Red Hook library as one example, and of course including adult basic skills partners as part of the important community needs assessment effort?

Peter and David could not have had a better introduction to their 50-minute session on the importance of library partnerships with Adult Basic Education programs. At the outset, they asked who was in the room. All librarians, of course, and nearly all worked in local public libraries across the state. About a third were local library administrators. One person was a state level library administrator. David asked what they hoped to get out of our session, what drew them to it. Several said that in their communities they directly experienced the increase in poverty and that they want to do something about it. Others were interested in learning more about partnering with ABE programs. Many were interested in how to find out if there was a nearby ABE program. David introduced them to the National Literacy Directory website as an easy way to find out. Few had linked in any way to an adult literacy program and only one participant had a partnership with a local adult literacy program. They appeared to understand the importance of linking up, but had not done so. Peter and David hope they may have helped to change that.

Peter introduced them to the ALA- and ProLiteracy-sponsored Adult Literacy Action Agenda as a way that any library, regardless of size, budget, or involvement or lack of involvement with adult basic skills programs could find activities to move forward with including adult basic skills.

The participants had some good questions, for example: about whether or not a private space was needed in a library for adult literacy tutoring. David responded that that would be ideal, and Peter rightly added that this isn't always possible. There was a question from the state level person about English language services for immigrants, and another about how libraries across the state could partner with adult basic skills programs. Peter will follow up with him to discuss that. There was a question about how libraries might address poverty issues of older adults, for example transportation when their car broke down and they had no money to fix it, and there was a question about how library collections could help people who had low-literacy skills. David suggested a partnership with a local adult basic skills program, where the librarian would visit the program, teachers would bring their classes to the library, and on a tour of the library the librarian could introduce adult learners to the high interest, low-level reading books as well as to the children's collection.



Communications Committee

The [Open Door Collective website](#) has been getting a lot of viewer traffic. Although the range in March and April was from 50 to 500 views per day, on April 10th, for some reason, we had over 2,000 views from over 900 unique visitors. The web page getting the most views, over 9,000 the past month, is this paper: Education in Adult Basic Skills Can Contribute to Reducing Incarceration and Alleviating Poverty. The next most popular web page was the website landing page, with over 3,000 views.



As of March, 2018, eight completed Make the Case papers have been published on the ODC website under the “ODC Papers” tab.

At the [2018 COABE Annual Conference](#) in Phoenix on Tuesday, March 27th, a panel of ODC members including Judy Mortrude, Jen Vanek, Kathy Harris, Alicia Suskin and David Rosen presented five of our ODC "Make the Case" papers. This was a Monday Morning 8:00 – 9:15 A.M. session so we were expecting around twenty people although we followed the COABE guidelines and brought 45 copies of each paper. To our surprise, we ran out of copies. There were well over 50 people for our session. After the terrific short presentations by the ODC panelists we broke into four discussion groups. At 9:25 David announced that the session had officially ended ten minutes earlier, that those who needed to leave should do so, but that others were welcome to stay. Only a couple of people left. At 9:45, when the facility staff came to take down the tables we had to leave. There was an amazing energy in the group, and we now have several new ODC members from those who attended the session. Clearly conference presentations are an important way to get the word out to others who are concerned about poverty and adult basic skills.



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Phoenix Downtown Hotel

COABE
COALITION ON ADULT BASIC EDUCATION



Criminal Justice Reform Issues Group

This coming quarter the Criminal Justice Reform taskforce is continuing to explore the connection of incarceration and immigration. Janet Isserlis and Margaret Patterson are working with Heide Wrigley from the Immigrant and Refugee Education and Integration taskforce. Work on a literature review is ongoing this quarter.