

State raises awareness of adult education

By [Dave Perozek](#)

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NWA Democrat-Gazette/SPENCER TIREY Ed Rogers, an advanced ESL teacher, teaches an adult education class Thursday at the Northwest Arkansas Community College. Arkansas Adult Education hosted its second annual Adult Education Open House at NWACC Thursday. Simultaneous open houses were also held at a number of network adult education centers around the state to raise awareness about adult education programs including the Centers in Northwest Technical Institute and Ozark Literacy Council in Fayetteville.

Mei-Hui Lo already knew some English upon moving from Hong Kong to Northwest Arkansas last year, but she was determined to improve her familiarity with the language.

Lo, 45, enrolled in the English as a second language class in Northwest Arkansas Community College's adult education program.

Adult education sites

Arkansas Adult Education offers seven locations in Benton and Washington counties:

BENTON COUNTY

- Community Literacy Program, 123 Roller Ave., Decatur
- Dogwood Literacy Council, 100 S. Broadway, Suite H, Siloam Springs
- Literacy Council of Benton County, 205 NW A St., Bentonville; www.goliteracy.org
- Northwest Arkansas Community College Adult Education Center, 1 College Drive, Bentonville; www.nwacc.edu/web/adulteducation

WASHINGTON COUNTY

- Fayetteville Adult Education, 612 S. College Ave., Fayetteville; <http://district.fayar.net/o/fps/page/adult-community-education>

- Northwest Technical Institute Adult Education Center, 610 E. Emma St., Springdale; www.nwti.edu
 - Ozark Literacy Council, 2596 Keystone Crossing, Fayetteville; www.ozarkliteracy.org
- Source: Arkansas Department of Career Education

"I find this school has this program, and it's free," Lo said. "It's a wonderful opportunity for people like me."

She spent six months in a class that met four hours a day, five days a week. She landed a part-time job as an administrative assistant in the adult education department and enrolled this summer in the college's retail analyst program.

Lo, who lives in Bella Vista with her husband and son, is one example of the impact Arkansas' adult education programs are making.

Arkansas Adult Education, a division of the state's Department of Career Education, sought to raise awareness of those programs last week with its second annual statewide open house. Adult education centers across Arkansas opened their doors for a couple of hours Thursday to highlight what they do and some of their success stories.

"We want to get the word out about the free services we provide," said Trenia Miles, deputy director of Arkansas Adult Education. "We felt we weren't really reaching as many people as we probably could or should be. So we want to give people an opportunity to come and learn about the services we offer."

Northwest Arkansas centers that participated in the open house included the college, Northwest Technical Institute in Springdale and Ozark Literacy Council in Fayetteville.

Arkansas Adult Education offers seven locations in Benton and Washington counties. The 36 locations statewide served about 24,000 people last fiscal year.

All of their services are free. Arkansas Adult Education runs on about \$24 million in combined state and federal money each year.

Adult education programs offer help for people pursuing a GED. About 18 percent of Arkansas adults, more than 500,000 people, did not finish high school, according to Miles.

There are also classes for people learning to speak English and those seeking to become U.S. citizens. Workplace education classes, tailored to the needs of a specific employer, are available as well.

The college's Adult Education Center was at the Center for Nonprofits in Rogers for five years before moving in 2015 to the Shewmaker Center for Workforce Technologies on the northwest corner of the college's Bentonville campus. The center served about 2,000 students combined last year in its English as a second language and GED test preparation courses, according to Ben Aldama, dean of adult education.

Moving adult education to the main campus saved the college nearly \$300,000 annually on rent at the Center for Nonprofits. But the move also made it easier for the college to showcase its facilities and degree programs students could move into once they completed adult education classes, Aldama said.

Ed Rogers is in his fourth year as a full-time English as a second language teacher at the college. He used to teach English as a second language to middle school students in California.

"Teaching adults is just fantastic. We have motivated students who never miss a day," Rogers said. "I look forward to coming to work every day."

Rogers estimated 60 percent of his students are from Latin America and the rest are from Asia.

More students also are showing up with bachelor and graduate degrees from their home countries, he said. Recent students have included a lawyer, a dentist and nurses.

The first thing he tells his students is, no matter how much they may want to know everything, he can't teach them everything about English in 20 hours per week.

"I've been speaking English for a long time, and I still make mistakes," Rogers said.

Carin Perkins has been in the English as a second language program for a year. Perkins, a native of Honduras, moved to the United States 26 years ago after marrying an American. She was a stay-at-home mom, but is thinking about training to become a certified nursing assistant.

Perkins called the English as a second language class "wonderful," adding she wishes she'd done it earlier.

"They don't only teach us grammar, they teach us the idioms," she said.

Northwest Technical Institute also offers free instruction to adults learning English as a second language, who need to obtain a GED or wish to improve basic academic skills.

Last fiscal year, the institute served more than 1,126 students. More than 80 percent of them were enrolled in English as a second language classes, said director Nicholas Ryburn.

Eight people turned out for the adult education open house at the institute, all of whom were interested in English classes, Ryburn said.

Both the college and the institute also offer classes for those seeking U.S. citizenship. The institute normally has at least 25 students enrolled in its citizenship courses at any given time, Ryburn said.

The Ozark Literacy Council has been around since 1964. It provides instruction for students to improve their literacy skills and for those studying English as a second language.

The council's number of students served has soared from 80 per year to 400 per year in the past decade, said Patty Sullivan, executive director. In the last three years, those students have come from more than 50 countries.

The council held its open house Thursday night, but Sullivan wants people to know the council's home at 2596 Keystone Crossing in Fayetteville is regularly an open house.

"Our mission is welcoming all adults to language and literacy," she said. "People are welcome every day. We call it 'radical hospitality.'"

The council runs on a \$250,000 annual budget, two full-time and four part-time employees, and dozens of volunteers, Sullivan said.

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