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We’re taking urgent action on illiteracy

Five decades ago, just over half of adults worldwide could read and write. Now, 86 percent of adults* have basic literacy - a testament to the work of governments, educators, and practitioners working side by side to meet this challenge.

And yet, we know we have more to do. With rapid population growth and inadequate financial support for literacy programs, progress has stalled. 758 million adults* today still lack basic literacy, limiting their access - and right - to quality education.

If we are to achieve the ambitions of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, then we cannot afford to accept this slow rate of progress. We must continue our steady march toward universal literacy, to help solve some of the world’s most pressing problems.

Pearson, the world’s learning company, launched Project Literacy in 2015 as a diverse coalition-based campaign to raise public awareness of illiteracy and accelerate innovation. In the past two years, we have built a network of over 90 diverse partners, reached over 2 billion people with our core messages about the literacy crisis, and supported 700,000 children, parents, and adults through direct programming.

This is just the start. We know we can accomplish more together as activists, practitioners, public servants, journalists, business leaders, and entrepreneurs. And, we know that the solution doesn’t lie with any one of us working in isolation - but rather collectively, leveraging each other’s insights, expertise, and advocacy.

Together, we have the opportunity to combat the devastating effects of illiteracy, helping to ensure that people everywhere can achieve a better job and a better life - by fulfilling their potential through the power of words.

We invite you to join the Project Literacy movement.

Kate James
Chief Corporate Affairs and Global Marketing Officer, Pearson
Spokesperson, Project Literacy

* data from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics
What is Project Literacy?

A global campaign to close the literacy gap by 2030

Around the world, 758 million people are unable to read or write a simple sentence. This scale of illiteracy underpins many of the world’s most pressing social and economic challenges.

Project Literacy is a global campaign founded and convened by Pearson, the world’s learning company, to bring together people and organizations from diverse sectors and regions in a powerful partnership to combat illiteracy. Together we’re:

- raising awareness and mobilizing action;
- advancing best practice; and
- innovating for new solutions to accelerate global progress on literacy.

Project Literacy launched in early 2015, and 2016 was a year of action toward our bold aim that by 2030 no child will be born at risk of poor literacy.

Here’s what we achieved in 2015 and 2016:

- 2.25 billion reach (online, print and broadcast)
- 700,000 program beneficiaries
- 250,000 online community
- 20,000 volunteer referrals
- $15,000 crowd-funded donations to partners
- 600 media stories
- Five prestigious awards including Cannes Lion Grand Prix
- 90+ partners
Spreading the word to make change happen

Project Literacy is building a movement to advocate for greater investment in and attention to literacy. Why? Because the extent of the problem and its potential impacts on our world are huge and we’ll need everyone on board to close the literacy gap.

Raising awareness with award-winning marketing campaigns

In 2016, we launched the Alphabet of Illiteracy, a targeted marketing campaign combining an insight-driven creative platform with specific calls to action. Aimed at millennials who are more likely to spread the word through social media as well as volunteer their time and donate their money, this award-winning campaign challenged consumers to see illiteracy differently, by connecting the issue to major global challenges they already cared about. Bolstered by support from key celebrities and influencers like Lily Cole, Emma Watson, Nick Kristof, Usain Bolt, and Elton John, the campaign captured a media reach of 1.5 billion and helped elevate illiteracy on international policy agendas.

Advocating for change with a powerful voice

Project Literacy is a cross-sector movement representing diverse communities and interests from around the world, and we’re using the power of our collective voice to push for change at local, national, and multilateral levels.

In September 2015, we launched the Unsigned Petition during the United Nations General Assembly week to advocate on behalf of the 758 million people worldwide who cannot read or write, and we continued to promote the petition throughout 2016. The 30,000-signature petition calls upon world leaders to acknowledge the urgency of the international illiteracy crisis and pledge to take meaningful action to address it.

In 2016, Pearson, on behalf of Project Literacy, accepted an invitation to become a member of UNESCO’s Global Alliance for Literacy. This official body guides member governments, businesses, and third-sector organizations toward achieving the literacy targets within the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals. Pearson participates and shares feedback on behalf of Project Literacy’s 90-plus partner network.

Building our network with expert partners

To deliver on Project Literacy’s ambitious aims for 2030, it’s crucial that we create and sustain momentum. Throughout 2016, we expanded our partner network to more than 90 members.

With regular peer-to-peer learning and knowledge-sharing workshops and the establishment of the Project Literacy Advisory Group, we’re developing and strengthening a highly expert and deeply connected community that will enable us to continue raising awareness, increase engagement, and create adoption at scale.

To see a list of our partners and Advisory Group members, please see pages 16 and 17 of this report.
Supporting the things that work

Project Literacy is partnering with organizations that are already implementing proven literacy interventions and helping them to grow. Why? Because there are some things that we know work, and we need more of them.

Scaling digital learning

We’ve partnered with Brazil’s Center for Studies and Research in Education, Culture, and Community Action (CENPEC) to scale a proven digital training platform for literacy and Portuguese-language teachers. In August 2016, the platform launched in the state of São Paulo featuring unique content and videos to support teacher professional development, with 40 teachers trained in the first phase. Joining forces with other partners such as the Lemann Foundation, CENPEC will aim to expand the platform to other provinces.

Inspiring young readers

In the UK, we partnered with Book Trust’s annual Read for My School initiative, which challenges primary and secondary pupils to read as much as they can in a two-month period. In 2015–16, the initiative engaged thousands of children from schools across the UK, with more than 590,000 books read by the children.

Promoting accessible digital technology

Pearson is partnering with UNESCO on a research project to investigate and share innovative case studies on inclusive approaches to digital innovation across multiple sectors, including agriculture, the environment, health, and government services. The project aims to encourage the development of more accessible technologies to benefit low-literacy and low-skilled youths and adults.

Empowering parents

UK charity National Literacy Trust (NLT) has launched Early Words Together, a targeted literacy peer education program that empowers parents to support their child’s early learning through small group sessions with trained volunteers. Pearson and NLT partnered to replicate the program in schools in Greater London, with highly positive results. These include a statistically significant difference in the percentage of children achieving the expected level in the prime areas of literacy, communication, and language.

Engaging struggling readers

Reading Partners is a national US non-profit working with under-resourced schools, engaging volunteer tutors to help develop foundational skills for students who struggle with reading. Pearson is supporting the organization’s ambitious strategic growth plan and helping it deepen and expand its reach. In 2016, 13,502 community volunteers served 10,925 students at 209 schools throughout the country. Program satisfaction was extraordinarily high, with 98% of principals agreeing that Reading Partners is a valuable asset to their school.

Delivering high quality content

Pencils of Promise (PoP) is a US non-profit that builds schools and provides quality educational programming to increase literacy rates in Ghana, Guatemala, Laos, and Nicaragua. Through Project Literacy, Pearson provided free licenses to Spanish-language content delivered by PoP to 210 students across three communities in the Sololá region of Guatemala. By providing access to these digital books, Project Literacy has helped democratize access to reading. Since each tablet is able to have the full digital library, students no longer need to share devices and each one is able to read both independently and at their own speed.
Developing game-changing innovations

Project Literacy is partnering with organizations to design, build, and rigorously test game-changing approaches. Why? Because new solutions will be needed to reach those most marginalized and to achieve scale.

Accelerating Entrepreneurship

The Unreasonable Group works with entrepreneurs to address major challenges such as poverty and social injustice, providing world-class mentors, funders, and partners to help grow their impact. Our partnership with Unreasonable provides an accelerator in key markets, supporting rapid-growth enterprises that can help tackle the global illiteracy gap. The first accelerator program featured 16 companies across 32 countries, reaching a total of 11 million people worldwide. These ventures have raised a total of $68.5 million in funding, and 80 percent have seen increased or equal results in their impact performance since the accelerator launched.

Leveraging mobile technology

Worldreader is a non-profit aiming to bring digital books to every child and their family. Together we launched Read to Kids, a pilot project in India using mobile devices and applications to empower parents to read more to their children. In 2016, more than 100,000 parents received tips and information through mass media behavioral change campaigns. And thanks to a $1 million grant from the Stavros Niarchos Foundation and additional support from Jordanian social and education entities, Worldreader now plans to expand the program to support refugee populations in Jordan.

Too Small to Fail is a joint campaign of the Clinton Foundation and the Opportunity Institute, helping parents and businesses take meaningful actions to improve the health and well-being of young children. Pearson and Too Small to Fail are partnering to build an evidence base on the use of mobile technology to empower parents and build children’s preliteracy skills. Results will be available during 2017.

Jumpstart leverages the power of community and adult-child relationships to build children’s key language and literacy skills, and since 1993 it has helped transform the lives of 76,000 preschool children in the US. Pearson and Jumpstart partnered with San Francisco State University (SFSU), piloting a program to engage parents and deliver parts of the Jumpstart early literacy curriculum through mobile technology. Researchers found that the majority of parents successfully received text messages and that, overall, parents thought the texting program was helpful and would recommend it to other parents.

Designing cross-sector programs

Pearson and Project Literacy are partnering with All Children Reading – a joint initiative of USAID, World Vision, and the Government of Australia – to leverage technology to create and apply scalable solutions to increasing literacy in developing countries. The initiative will launch in 2017.

Supporting employability

We are partnering with the International Literacy Institute at the University of Pennsylvania, Microsoft, and ProLiteracy to develop and market a digital platform to support employability for out-of-school and out-of-work low-literacy youths and adults. With a pilot launching in 2017, the program will help individuals assess their literacy levels against the skills required for the jobs and careers to which they aspire.
Our people

We know we can’t do it alone. Project Literacy brings together a 90-strong network of expert partners, including non-profits, social enterprises, multinational companies, multilaterals, and government agencies. The Project Literacy Advisory Group comprised of diverse talent across global education policy, corporate social responsibility, business, and media-works with the campaign staff to help shape the strategy and key priorities for Project Literacy.

Our Project Literacy Advisory Group members

Aria Finger
CEO, DoSomething.org

Ben Goldhirsh
Co-Founder & CEO, GOOD Worldwide

Jeff Hoffman
Entrepreneur (Priceline.com, uBid.com, Colorjar), Experienced CEO, Worldwide Motivational Speaker, Board Advisor, Film and Music Producer

Jane Nelson
Senior Fellow and Director of Corporate Social Responsibility Initiative, Harvard University

Kate James
Chief Corporate Affairs and Global Marketing Officer, Pearson, and Spokesperson, Project Literacy

Michael Lombardo
Founder & President, BookNook; Former CEO, Reading Partners

Marianne Ponsford
Director, CERLALC (Centro Regional para el Fomento del Libro en América Latina y el Caribe)

Priscila Cruz
Founder & Executive President, Todos Pela Educação

Rapelang Rabana
Founder & CEO, Rekindle Learning

Our partners

Our Official Partners

28 Too Many
826 National
Achievement for All
Action on Addiction
AFRipads
All Children Reading
Angaza
Asia Foundation
Book Aid International
Books Beyond Words
Book Trust
Breakthrough Collaborative
Bulverde Spring Branch Library Foundation (BSBL)
CENPEC
Center for Literacy
Children Reading
Cradles to Crayons
Doctors of the World UK
Edom
Edovo
Eduze
EYelliance
FCB INFerno
Feed the Minds
Fight for Peace
First Book
Football Beyond Borders
GOOD Worldwide
Guru-G
Guten
IGAUPM
Impact Network
Indy Reads
Insane Logic
Jumpstart
Karadi Path
Kingo
Lanka Jathika
Lessons for Life Foundation
Library For All
LightSail
Literacy Action
Literacy Inc.
Literacy Partners
LitWorld
Livox
Mary Ward Center
Microsoft
Ministry of Stories
Minnesota Literacy Council
National Braille Press
National Literacy Trust
NOW
Nutrition & Education International (NEI)
Office of Adult Education – City of Philadelphia
Parent-Child Home Program
Pearson
Pencils of Promise
Pledgeling
Pratham Books
Project Literacy of Bergen County
ProLiteracy
Raising a Reader
Reach Out and Read
READ Alliance
Read Easy UK
Read On. Get On.
Reading Is Fundamental (RIF)
Reading Partners
Results for Development Institute
Robbie AI
Room to Read
San Francisco Education Fund
Shannon Trust
SunCulture
TabLab
Tales2go
Team Read
The Beat Within
The Big Issue
The Dream Center
The Hunger Project
The Indigenious Literacy Foundation (ILF)
The Institute for Strategic Dialogue
The Reading Agency
ThinkCERCA
Too Small to Fail
True North
Ubongo
Un Millón de Niños Lectores
UNESCO
Unreasonable Group
Veerini Project
War Child UK
Weber Shandwick
We Need Diverse Books (WNDB)
Western Cape Primary Science Programme
Womankind Worldwide
World Literacy Foundation
Worldreader
In 2016, Project Literacy campaign funding totaled £6,600,000. These funds supported activities across our three strategic pillars: raising awareness and mobilizing action, advancing best practices, and innovating for new solutions.

2016 Funding by Activity
One-third of Pearson funds – £1.15 million – was allocated to raising awareness, which leveraged additional in-kind donations valued at £2.5 million. The remaining funds supported programs to enhance best practices in the field of literacy and to identify effective new approaches to closing the literacy gap.

Funding by Source
As convener and founding partner of Project Literacy, Pearson contributed the majority of funds – £3,400,000 in 2016 – with additional support from non-profit, corporate, and individual sources.
Project Literacy is supporting direct programming through its partner network in 35 countries, with a major focus on Brazil, India, South Africa, the United States and United Kingdom.
Progress on literacy calls for a new way of problem-solving, one that brings together different partners in the common fight against illiteracy. The challenges we face are complex and interconnected. To meet them, we must find ways to collaborate across business, civil society, and government—and even with sectors that we may think have little in common with each other, from economists to health care practitioners and from gender activists to teachers.

Our campaign is a rallying cry. And we’re thrilled that so many people have answered the call. We’re now working with some of the best organizations around the globe to tackle illiteracy. Together we’re making a real difference in the lives of children, parents, and families, empowering them through literacy so that they can participate more actively in society.

Project Literacy exists to bring the power of words to everyone. We invite you to join the Project Literacy movement.

www.projectliteracy.com

From our partners

“It's so exciting to see collaboration across borders and industries driving awareness, understanding, and action. To partner with Project Literacy on this effort is an honor for GOOD.”
Ben Goldhirsh, Co-Founder & CEO, GOOD

“Project Literacy has given Room to Read the opportunity to take action, innovate, and collaborate in the interest of global literacy. As a result, we are finding new partners, furthering our agenda of scale, and executing innovative research that will help shape the field for a long time to come.”
Dr. Geetha Murali, Chief Development and Communications Officer, Room to Read

“That is how to capture the public’s imagination and create a call to action. The ‘Alphabet of Illiteracy’ is a sobering wake-up call. By showing how reading and writing can solve the world's biggest problems, it proves why tackling illiteracy needs to be more firmly on the agenda of governments across the globe.”
Borhene Chakroun, Chief of Section, Youth, Literacy and Skills Development, UNESCO

“It has been great to partner with Pearson and the other organizations of Project Literacy to shine a light on how literacy can truly change lives and communities. Through the partnership, we have been able to highlight and build greater awareness of our work to improve and increase writing skills in students aged 6 - 18. Being part of such a global effort has had positive effects on our work.”
Gerald Richards, CEO, 826 National

“Thanks to our partnership with Project Literacy and Pearson, tens of thousands of parents in India are now reading with their young children in the Read to Kids program. This moonshot – combining mobile technology, behavior change campaigns, and community-based organizations – is only possible thanks to Project Literacy’s commitment to social innovation. I’m proud of what we have accomplished together and look forward to sharing our results and building on our success to get millions reading everywhere.”
David Risher, Co-Founder & CEO, Worldreader
Help us make illiteracy a thing of the past

To find out more about the work of Project Literacy and our partners, please visit our website at projectliteracy.com