

Local Lives, Communities Benefit From \$100K Grants to Literacy Network, Operation Fresh Start

Local Nonprofits Celebrate \$100K Grants, Benefits to Madison Community!

MADISON, WI, USA, September 28, 2022 /EINPresswire.com/ -- A pair of area nonprofits are being recognized for their contributions to the Madison community. Literacy Network and Operation Fresh Start (OFS) both received \$100,000 Good Neighbor Grants from fellow Madison nonprofit Ascendium.



Ascendium Education Group Logo

Adults working toward literacy and young people ages 16-24 stand to benefit most from the awards, which are given annually to nonprofit organizations committed to increasing education and workforce training outcomes for learners from low-income backgrounds. In addition to these organizations, five other Madison nonprofits and three others in communities where Ascendium employees live, and work are being recognized with Good Neighbor Grants for a total of \$1 million in awards.

Now in its 48th year, Literacy Network provides adult literacy education that leads to long-term improvements in the lives of learners from low-income backgrounds and their families. More than 55,000 adults in Dane County struggle with low literacy, which is shown to be closely linked with poverty. To meet the growing demand for its services, Literacy Network will use Good Neighbor Grant funds to expand its Student Services department. Student Services enrolls learners and provides essential wraparound support, offering mentorship and assistance in overcoming participation barriers, including transportation, childcare, and housing. This support allows learners to persist in Literacy Network's programs and reach their goals.

The Good Neighbor Grant will benefit learners like Hussein Alshammari, who arrived in the U.S. from Iraq as a refugee in 2020. After two years of studying with Literacy Network, he was able to improve his English and earn his High School Equivalency Diploma. He began working as a Student Services coordinator with Literacy Network this fall so that other learners can have the same opportunities he had.

Literacy Network Executive Director Jeff Burkhart says the \$100,000 grant will help more students like Hussein gain the skills needed to feel confident in opening a business, getting a new job, getting a promotion, and helping their children with schoolwork. The grant is being awarded during [National Literacy Month](#), which makes the recognition even sweeter.

“The support of the Ascendium Good Neighbor Grant means that Literacy Network will be able to help more adults from low-income households reach their education and career goals,” Burkhart said. “More students than ever have signed up for classes this year, and Ascendium will expand our Student Services department to get more students enrolled, offer mentorship, and help in overcoming barriers to participation.”

OFS is an eastside nonprofit that empowers young people ages 16-24 on a path to self-sufficiency through education, mentoring, and employment training. OFS programs help young adults overcome barriers, earn a high school diploma and driver's license and achieve living-wage, career-track employment. Across Dane County, OFS participants have built more than 250 affordable homes and improved nearly every park, and green space residents enjoy today.

Among the 218 young people, OFS served last year was Caden Lincicum. When Caden started with OFS, he was a quiet, reserved 18-year-old who wasn't sure what career he wanted to pursue. After earning his high school diploma and driver's license through OFS's Legacy program and helping build two homes in Sun Prairie, Wisconsin, he's now a confident adult and a carpenter's apprentice with JP Cullen.

The Good Neighbor Grant is just one way Ascendium has fostered a relationship with OFS. Ascendium employees recently helped OFS members harvest seeds as part of [Volunteer Time Off](#), and [an earlier grant](#) allowed OFS to launch its Conservation Grad Crew program to address a growing need for diverse young adults in that field, which began in 2021.

“This grant from Ascendium will provide us with greater opportunities to provide education and work readiness training to emerging adults in our community,” Greg Markle, executive director of OFS, said. “I am extremely grateful to Ascendium for targeting resources toward the transformational work being done at Operation Fresh Start.”

Good Neighbor Grants are funded by Ascendium, which is on a mission to make education and training beyond high school a reality for more people. The funding initiative is part of the organization's employee giving program, Ascendium Cares. Throughout the year, Ascendium employees participate in initiatives that allow them to meet the needs of students and their families, as well as contribute to organizations that share Ascendium's goal of elevating opportunity. Good Neighbor Grants are unique in that employees nominate and vote for the recipients, which must use the funding in service of increasing education and workforce training outcomes for learners from low-income backgrounds.

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