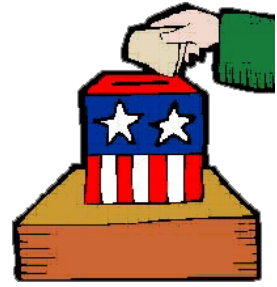


VERA 2008 Results

New England **V**oter **E**ducation, **R**egistration and **A**ction campaign



Highlights in Numbers

- ⇒ 17,634 adult learners participated across the six states.
- ⇒ 80% of adult learners eligible to vote voted.*
- ⇒ Over 40% registered to vote and voted for the first time.*
- ⇒ 8,300 adults participated even though they were not eligible to vote.

* based on 38% of the programs reporting

Highlights from VERA Programs

The students visited the local Democratic and Republican headquarters, invited many candidates to come to class, hosted a building-level mock election, prepared for voting through researching candidates' positions, creating posters, a bulletin board, and charts showing various candidates' positions. They contacted 22 former students to encourage them to vote, and encouraged 10 spouses/significant others to vote. Our teacher was a passionate and creative leader and her efforts directly resulted in people voting for the first time and convincing others of the importance of voting. Some of our adult students, rather apathetic at the outset, spoke to young people in the alternative high school in the same building who also voiced apathetic comments. The culminating event was to watch Obama's acceptance speech on a large screen TV together, with a pizza lunch. (Keene Community Education, NH)

Mock Elections: On October 30, approximately 250 new immigrants from four continents along with US-born Adult High School Equivalency students at Dorcas Place cast votes for President in a mock election. Students spent two months researching candidates and their running mates and studying the issues of human rights, immigration, safety and security, gun control, education, right to life and health care. Classes were assigned various responsibilities such as, setting up voting booths, overseeing the polling process and tabulating results. Posters and informational displays decorated the building. Students all participated in a "scavenger hunt" in which they needed to locate certain information that could be found in the displays. Students visited other classes to campaign for "their" candidate. (Dorcas Place Adult & Family Learning Center, RI)

Candidates' Wall and Forum: Our program held a Candidates' Forum for NH State Representative and State Senate candidates. Students prepared and asked questions. It was a public event that was televised on local cable TV. English and social studies classes discussed issues. Candidate Walls (for state, local & federal) were created in our center's main hallway with specific information about candidates, voter registration (forms, steps and polling locations). Most classes visited the wall and had follow up discussions. (Exeter Adult Education, NH)

History of Voting: The most lively lesson used VERA materials, the history of voting and who is a voter. Students were interested in who could and couldn't vote throughout the country's history. (Brook Street Family Literacy Center, VT)

Electoral College: Most informative for the students was the electoral college article in The Change Agent. New voters were unaware of the electoral vote. (Wallingford Adult Education, CT)

Taxes: All students used The Change Agent as a work book that they were able to keep and take home for homework. It was one of the few books we could afford to allow them to keep and work in. Teachers liked the lessons that had extension activities on the web site and they like the activities that related to practical topics such as taxes and math. (Bristol Community College Attleboro Literacy Program, MA)

Guest Speakers: Students read newspapers, watched public television political programs. The NH booklet "Pick Your Candidates" was also used in several classes. Students studied the platform that the various candidates stood for and held classroom debates and discussions. Guest speakers were invited in. The City Clerk came in to talk with students about the voting process. (Laconia Adult Education, NH)

Help with Voter Registration: We had the registrar of voters from our town come in and register new voters and show new voters the ballot. Leading up to it, students researched party platforms using the internet, periodicals, etc. This went very well; students accessed many sites and after doing their research the students discussed their findings. (Wallingford Adult Education, CT)

Events Outside of Class: Three of our higher level classes went to Faneuil Hall for a voter education event and most reported that it was interesting and informative. (International Institute of Boston, MA)

UTUBE: Utube videos were a favorite with the young voters. (Claremont Adult Learning Center, NH)

Infomercial: Students created, wrote and filmed an infomercial on why it is important to vote. Creating the infomercial became a series of lessons over two weeks that culminated in a film shoot with the local access cable company. The students learned a lot about how to create a script, doing all the research and working with our Language Arts and Civics teacher. The

infomercial aired for several weeks leading up to the elections. (Bristol Community College, Attleboro, MA)

Student Projects and Presentations: Students learned about the local and national political systems and developed information binders that they presented to other classes and in the community. This information included the origin and function of the electoral college, the top issues in each candidate's platform, the results of polls the students had conducted among the offices and classrooms throughout their building, and the procedures for last minute voter registration at City Hall. The binders proved to be so successful and informative that teachers from vocational training classes requested binders for over fifty of their own students to view. (Rhode Island Regional Adult Learning, RI)

Research Papers: All students were required to write a three-page paper and cite references. Many of the students had no prior experience writing an academic paper and this project was a good introduction into the expectations of college – level work. Additionally, students had to learn how to speak in front of a group of people and present their ideas clearly and logically using note cards and referencing their visual displays. (Bristol Community College, Attleboro, MA)

Visits with Legislators: For the March 2008 Adult Education and Literacy Awareness Day, all USES daytime students and staff went to the State House to meet with State Rep. Byron Rushing. To prepare, the GED day and evening students wrote advocacy letters in support of increased ABE funding. Students handed these letters to Rep. Rushing, along with a booklet containing their stories. The State House visit was a high point for many students. They noted the grandeur of the building, in which they were welcomed as active, vocal citizens. They engaged with a government representative, who told them that their views and their life stories are important. They learned that they have access to government, and that they have opportunities to actively participate. (United South End Settlements, MA)

Highlights from Adult Learners

"Before I started this Election Day project, I didn't think about voting. I hated history, but look at me right now. I'm proud. I come to school every day, motivated. If I drop, I get up again and my kids see it. My son smiles at me and is so proud of me and it feels so good. I can tell him one day that I was a part of history." - Yesenia Hernand, student at Rhode Island Regional Adult Learning (RIRAL)

"I had never been in a voting booth and never seen a ballot until today, but this campaign has made me think hard and learn a lot. I had to think about who to vote for and why. There is so much suffering going on in our country right now. We have to choose a President who will work for all of us. I did a lot of reflecting and asked a lot of questions. I watched the candidates closely on TV." - Marsha Johnson, student at Rhode Island Regional Adult Learning (RIRAL) who researched and presented topics related to voting and the November elections.

"I never thought about voting before. I had bigger problems in life, but I look around here and I see so many people having so many problems. In my class, we studied the pros and cons of different issues to help us form our opinions. My top issues are housing and homelessness, and a woman's right to choose." - Karen Lynch, Julie's Family Learning Program, Boston, MA

The Literacy Center in Attleboro MA had four naturalized citizens vote for the first time in the November election. They came from different countries with different perspectives on the election but they had one thing in common, and that was to make their voice heard on November 4th. Lien Lam and her sister Phuong Lam became US citizens 2 1/2 years ago and they had been waiting for the day they could exercise one of their new right as citizens. They found their first voting experience to be pleasant, organized and efficient. Phoung was quick to point out the process of preparing and participating in the statewide ABE Mock Election was very helpful because it was like a rehearsal for the real thing. She credits her teachers with her success because they did so many useful civics lessons and "we all practiced for the election together."

A long time ABE student, Judy, who also works with a tutor, Jack. Judy is 64 and had never voted before. She does not like to do anything new and can often be rather cranky. Her ABE teacher and her tutor did voter education work with her for weeks. I gave her a voter registration form, sample ballot and "talked her through the process" the week before the election. The polls were right in our school, and Judy was meeting with her tutor on Nov. 4. I had shown Jack exactly where the polls were. When I voted and saw there wasn't much of a line, I informed Jack & Judy that "now was a good time to go and vote". Judy consented to go so we would all "get off her back". So we all went together. The registration & voting process went pretty smoothly because she took her completed sample ballot into the booth. She expressed no joy or accomplishment after she put her ballot in the machine. But, she went back to the tutoring room, picked up the phone and called her husband and said, "I just voted, now you have to do it; get over here and I'll show you what to do". So 15 minutes later her husband (who was sick) showed up, and Judy took him down the hall, got him registered and he voted too. (Exeter Adult Education, NH)