

BC3 funds to aid ESL classes in New Castle

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(New Castle, PA) Butler County Community College will fund English as a Second Language courses through Adult Literacy Lawrence County in response to what the agency's executive director says is an increase in Spanish-speaking native Puerto Ricans displaced by Hurricane Maria a year ago.

Up to 15 students at least 16 years of age who are not required to be enrolled in secondary school can participate in the free 12-week program, said Gillian Maule, adding that the first course begins Sept. 11 at the Lawrence County Learning Center within the Pennsylvania CareerLink office, 102 Margaret St. A second 72-hour course will begin Feb. 12.

Adult Literacy Lawrence County and The Grove City Education Center for Adults, which provide adult basic education services in Lawrence and Mercer counties, were sub-grantees of a \$639,188 adult education award BC3 received from the state Department of Education in June, about the time Maule realized the need for ESL courses in Lawrence County through a discussion with Gayle Young, the executive director of the United Way of Lawrence County.

"That was a very initial meeting based on the fact that a number of social service agencies and individuals had become aware that there was a community of Puerto Rican families who had relocated to New Castle," Maule said. "It wasn't just one or two. It would be larger than that."

Adult Literacy Lawrence County received \$7,000 in funding for the ESL courses, scheduled to be held from 12:30 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. Tuesdays through Thursdays.

Maule said she anticipates that a majority of the students in the ESL classes will be Spanish-speaking.

"The Puerto Rican families," she said, "prompted us to take action."

"It was necessary to hold ESL classes," BC3 official says

Because of the influx of the Puerto Rican population, "We decided it was necessary to hold ESL classes," said Barb Gade, grant director of BC3's adult literacy program.

BC3's adult literacy program instructed 206 students in Butler County and 30 in Mercer County in the 2017-18 fiscal year, Gade said. Sixteen students enrolled in ESL classes in Butler County during that time period.

The goal for adult literacy program students is that their educational functioning level will increase as required by the National Reporting System, which has six tiers, Gade said. The levels

are beginning adult basic education literacy, beginning basic education, low intermediate basic education, high intermediate basic education, low adult secondary education and high adult secondary education.

“Whatever level they come in at, the expectation is that by the end of the year, they will have gone up at least one educational functioning level,” Gade said.

Adult Literacy Lawrence County hadn’t conducted an ESL course for at least six years “as there had not been the demand,” Maule said, adding that the BC3-funded courses aim to offer “a very practical support for students to help them access the services and assistance that are available to be able to secure good employment.

“I understand that many students have skills and credentials,” Maule said, “but their barrier is the language.”

Funds from BC3 to help expansion in Lawrence, Mercer

A top priority for instruction, she said, will be to “assist students to learn the language skills and develop the vocabulary, first off, to be safe. That would be a priority. And for them to be able to understand the locality, where they live.”

Hurricane Maria struck Puerto Rico on Sept. 20 as a category 4 hurricane with maximum sustained winds of 155 mph, according to the National Weather Service. At least 4,600 people were killed during the storm or its aftermath, according to the New England Journal of Medicine.

“With the families being displaced because of the situation in Puerto Rico,” Maule said, “I am sure they are looking for some place safe.”

As part of the adult basic education grant funds received via BC3, Adult Literacy Lawrence County this fall will also offer other adult literacy courses in Lawrence County at BC3 @ Lawrence Crossing, New Castle; and at the Lawrence County Learning Center.

The Grove City Education Center for Adults this fall will also expand adult literacy courses in Mercer County at its site, and at BC3 @ LindenPointe, Hermitage; at the Pennsylvania CareerLink, Sharon; at Prince of Peace Center, Farrell; at Hempfield Elementary School, Greenville; and at the Mercer County Jail, Mercer.