

PREFACE

The Center for the Book in the Library of Congress is pleased to make this study, *Even Anchors Need Lifelines: Public Libraries in Adult Literacy*, available to a wide public.

The Center for the Book was established by law in 1977 to stimulate public interest in books, reading, and libraries. A small, catalytic office that depends on funds from outside the Library of Congress for its programs and publications, it is pleased to acknowledge support for this project from the National Institute for Literacy, Harold W. McGraw, r., McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc., and the American Library Association. For advice and support, thanks also go to members of the Center's reading promotion network of affiliated state centers and national educational and civic organizations.

Even Anchors Need Lifelines is an important study. The Center for the Book looks forward to continuing the discussions it will provoke.

John V. Cole
Director

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The research underlying *Even Anchors Need Lifelines* makes one fact crystal clear: Though too little recognized and appreciated, public library adult literacy services are a vital part of the national adult literacy system, serving hundreds of thousands of adult Americans in thousands of programs across the country.

It also underscores a bizarre irony: Just as they have become an established force in literacy, public library literacy programs find themselves poised at the edge of a financial precipice. Earmarked federal funding for them has been cut. And there are very grave doubts that they will be able to compete for education or literacy funds provided through state block grants.

This report thus begins and ends on an uncertain note. It can turn out to be the postmortem for a major part of the public library adult literacy field. Or it can be the spark that ignites the imagination and action so urgently needed to preserve that field and lay a base for developing its future role. Which it will be depends on what state librarians, public libraries and library associations, adult literacy groups, public and private funding agencies, and political leaders decide to do about the main findings and recommendations. In particular, it depends on what they are prepared to do *immediately* about the funding crisis that confronts the public libraries.

This report is organized into seven sections, each focused on a single area of research, and an eighth section (beginning on page 116) which contains the main conclusions and 19 priority recommendations.

Two recommendations in Section 8 address the most urgent funding need. One calls for the prompt restoration of earmarked funding for library literacy programming—at the federal level, in state block grants, or both. The other challenges the philanthropic community to help meet the short-term funding need so that professionals and programs in the field can maintain their balance while planning for the future.

Gail Spangenberg