



Literacy Volunteers of Illinois Jump Start Program

An
Intergenerational Tutoring and Mentoring Program
For At-Risk-Youth
At the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice,
Illinois Youth Centers School District #428

Sponsored by:
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Program Period
July 2016 – June 2026

Summary of Impact

In July 2016, Literacy Volunteers of Illinois received a 10-year contract renewal from the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice (IDJJ). The following section provides a summary of the impact LVI has had on youth residing within the Illinois Youth Centers (IYC) throughout the duration of the partnership.

I. Mission

Literacy Volunteers of Illinois (LVI) is a statewide organization committed to developing and supporting literacy programs that help families, adults, and out-of-school teens increase their literacy skills. Literacy Volunteers of Illinois began as LVA-Illinois in 1979, serving four programs, and today has staff carrying out activities in the areas of LVI Network, Resource and Referral, National AmeriCorps Service, Correctional Education, and Advocacy and New Reader Leadership.

The goal of Literacy Volunteers of Illinois in continuing the Jump Start program was to develop a continuum of service that utilizes volunteers, particularly older volunteers, to work with at-risk youth in correctional settings. In 2022, studies by the U.S. Department of Education indicated that detained youth frequently have reading levels two or more years behind their peers. Moreover, research indicated that there is a high prevalence of learning disabilities among aggressive and delinquent youth, coupled with hyperactivity. Despite differences in labeling (“slow,” “class dummy,” “delinquent,” or “bad boy”), the stigma persists, and some youth may choose to be seen as “cool” rather than risk being labeled as unintelligent.

Jump Start aims to recruit, train, and support a steady stream of volunteers to assist at-risk detained and probation youth, especially those with academic and other literacy-related deficits. The overall goal of the Jump Start program is to boost the skill levels and decrease antisocial behavior among this population.

II. 10 Year Summary of Tutoring

Total served 2016 - 2026

Youth Served: 2,603

Tutors: 287

Hours Tutored: 23, 922

Staff: 19

AmeriCorps: 25

Between 2016 and 2026, the Jump Start Program served **2,603 youth** across **23,922 hours**. A total of **287 tutors** served at six facilities—Chicago: Thurgood Marshall Alternative School, Warrenville: Maya Angelou Alternative School, St. Charles: P.E.A.C.E Center, Harrisburg: Booker T. Washington Alternative School, Kewanee, and Pere Marquette: Glenciffe Academy. Of those tutors, **25** were **AmeriCorps members**. During this time, LVI employed **19 staff** members. Below is a year-by-year breakdown of the Jump Start Program’s impact:

Literacy Volunteers of Illinois Jump Start Program Impact FY 2016 - FY 2026	Youth Served	Tutors	Hours Tutored	Staff	AmeriCorps
FY 2016	312	29	2655	5	7
FY 2017	315	33	2475	4	3
FY 2018	363	36	2668	5	5
FY 2019	373	48	3486	5	3
FY 2020	239	45	2618	5	2
FY 2021	182	15	1523	5	1
FY 2022	169	15	1373	4	0
FY 2023	215	17	1757	7	0
FY 2024	191	22	2639	5	1
FY 2025	109	15	1843	3	2
FY 2026	138	12	885	4	1

III. Goals and Program Activities

The goal of the Jump Start Program is to boost levels of literacy, with “illiteracy” being defined as a lack of skills to function effectively in one’s community, workplace, family, or educational setting, and to decrease the levels of antisocial behavior among the detained and probation youth at IYC-Chicago and IYC-Warrenville. LVI proposes that the Jump Start program will continue to accomplish the following objectives:

1. Recruit and maintain a sufficient number of volunteers to provide one-on-one tutoring and other educational enrichment activities to Center residents.
2. Identify juveniles for participation in the Jump Start program.
3. Sustain a system of support to assist tutor/student retention and prevent tutor burnout.

Jump Start Program Activities

- **2016:** Supported IDJJ staff through numerous monthly writing contests designed to encourage youth expression, literacy development, and creative engagement.
 - Also in 2016, LVI spearheaded the program The Unbound: College Bound with Dr. Danielle Johnson as the lead. The Unbound: College Bound program catered only to youth in the IYCs in Illinois. With a focus on education, this program was designed to prepare young men and women for college upon release. The program focused on life-skill training, financial literacy, ACT and SAT prep, completion of the FAFSA, and completion of college applications. This program lasted until the end of the 2022 fiscal year.
- **2017:** Facilitated small-group enrichment sessions, including book club, art club, conflict management workshops, and writing workshops to strengthen literacy, communication, and social-emotional skills.
- **2018:** Continued support for monthly writing contests, coordinated therapy dog visits alongside tutors to promote positive engagement, and collaborated with youth to develop a youth-oriented newsletter.
- **2019:** Facilitated six-week book clubs, continued monthly writing contests, and launched Spoken Word sessions at IYC-Chicago to provide youth with creative outlets for self-expression.
- **2020:** Established holiday activity packets to keep youth engaged during breaks, sponsored the *Literacy for Life* initiative, launched a pen-pal project connecting youth with tutors, and continued monthly essay and poetry contests.
- **2021:** Organized an essay contest, distributed holiday activity packets, and coordinated donations of Christmas gifts to support and encourage youth participation and morale.
- **2022:** Developed and distributed holiday packets focused on supporting social-emotional learning (SEL) within the youth centers.
- **2023:** Continued providing holiday packets designed to reinforce SEL strategies and positive engagement for youth at the centers.
- **2024:** Expanded ongoing SEL-focused holiday packet initiatives to support youth reflection, creativity, and emotional wellness.
- **2025:** Facilitated a book club at IYC-Warrenville to encourage reading engagement, discussion, and critical thinking among youth participants.
- **2026:** Introduced *Anchor & Flow Poetry*, a scaffolded poetry activity designed to support creative writing and student voices, and in the process of planning a Reading Workshop at IYC-Warrenville.

Tutor Support and Engagement

LVI has also supported tutors through quarterly training opportunities focused on youth engagement, literacy strategies, and volunteer development, which include a 12-hour ProLiteracy

training and the annual *On the Road to Literacy Conference*, held in April, sponsored by Literacy Volunteers of Illinois. Volunteer appreciation gatherings, including outings such as the *Kane County Cougars* baseball game, have helped strengthen community and volunteer retention. Additionally, the *EYE on IYC* Newsletter is distributed quarterly to provide updates, highlight volunteer contributions, and share news from the youth centers.

Over the years, LVI staff have participated in professional development and networking opportunities through conferences such as the annual *Illinois Adult and Continuing Education Association* (IACEA) Conference held each March and the *National Elementary and Secondary Education Association Conference* (ESEA), held in February. LVI staff have also participated in School District #428 Teacher Retreats to strengthen collaboration and foster relationships with School District #428 educators.

IV. Program Evaluation and Next Steps

Over the past 10 years, the Jump Start program has provided consistent literacy and enrichment services across all six Illinois juvenile detention centers: IYC Harrisburg – Booker T. Washington Alternative School; IYC Pere Marquette – Glencliffe Academy; IYC Warrenville – Maya Angelou Alternative School; IYC Chicago – Thurgood Marshall Alternative School; IYC St. Charles (P.E.A.C.E. Center) and IYC Kewanee. Despite ongoing changes within the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice, Literacy Volunteers of Illinois has remained steadfast in its commitment to supporting incarcerated youth through tutoring, literacy programming, and relationship-centered engagement. As of late 2024, the program continues to operate at IYC-Chicago and IYC-Warrenville (currently housed at IYC–St. Charles), demonstrating the program’s adaptability, resilience, and long-term sustainability in serving youth within evolving correctional environments.

Moving forward, Literacy Volunteers of Illinois seeks to strengthen collaboration and communication with IDJJ staff to ensure programming remains responsive to the educational and developmental needs of youth in custody. Continued partnership with facility staff will support program evaluation, enhance service delivery, and help identify opportunities to expand literacy, social-emotional, and creative learning initiatives that positively impact youth engagement, academic growth, and personal development.

Literacy Volunteers of Illinois also looks forward to expanding discussions regarding future programming opportunities for graduated youth at IYC St. Charles (P.E.A.C.E. Center) and youth at IYC Lincoln (MONARCH Academy), to extend literacy, educational, and supportive services to additional youth populations throughout the IDJJ system.