



## MESSAGE FROM MK

MARCH 2005 – THE HUMAN FACES  
BEHIND THE FEDERAL BUDGET

*An update from Mary Katherine Moen, State Director of Adult Education  
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Teri Zutter, Director of the ABE/ESL program at Western Nevada Community College, wrote the following article, which was published in Carson City's *Nevada Appeal* on March 2, 2005. The article is honest, heartwarming, and especially appropriate during this federal budgeting "season."

President Bush proposes a 66 percent budget cut in Adult Basic Education funding. The press release attached to his budget touts "FY 2006 Focuses Resources on Students Who Need Them the Most." That headline refers to children. But it's wrong. Children may not be the neediest group.

In fact, adult students who qualify for Adult Basic Education funds are most desperate for educational services — and have the highest odds stacked against them.

Federal funding for Adult Basic Education allows provision of adult basic skills classes, English as a Second Language classes, and GED (High School Equivalency) preparation classes for adults age 17 or older. If funds for these programs are drastically cut, the reverberations will be felt not only on every educational level, but in our own families, neighborhoods and communities.



*Terri Zutter*

Let me put a face on those in our own community who will be affected by President Bush's short-sighted budget cuts:

- A thirty-three year old father of nine suffers a back injury and loses his job of nine years. While recuperating, he attends basic skills classes to learn to read. After three years of school, he takes and fails the GED on the first attempt. It takes him half a year to face the classroom again. But the next year he and his wife, a high-school dropout, both obtain their GEDs. He is now 37. He's hired at a state agency working a desk job and proudly helps his children with their homework every night.
- A high school drop-out is employed in the retail industry until she leaves her abusive husband. Her ex-husband is in jail and provides no support. Her income can cover child care for her three children, but nothing else, so she leaves her job to care for her children herself. After attaining the GED, she slowly extricates herself from the social service system, earns a bachelor's degree and moves from part-time work to a profession. Now, her W-4 prints a significant five-digit income.
- For three years, an immigrant holds down two low-paying full-time jobs and attends classes to learn English. He shows his class photos of his wife and two children who wait in Mexico to join him. When he is ready to apply for citizenship to the United States, his teacher says he should type the application – so he walks five miles to class carrying an ancient, heavy typewriter. He passes the immigration tests, proudly swears

allegiance to become a U.S. citizen, is reunited with his wife and children, and obtains employment that allows him to work only one job. He is promoted and purchases a home. Now he coaches his kids' soccer team and boasts when his children do well in school.

- A girl with a learning disability drops out of high school, marries and has two beautiful daughters. She wants to be a good example to her children, but her secret shame at being a drop-out eats at her. She cannot even tell her husband. She takes her kids to daycare and tells her husband she is working part-time, but in reality she is studying very hard. It takes three attempts before she passes the math portion of the GED. She is free of her secret and decides to return to school. For the first time in her life, she is excited about doing homework at the kitchen table with her girls.
- A young man, whose mother was 14 when she gave birth to him, escapes the gangs of Los Angeles. He re-enters school and obtains his GED. Now he works full-time and attends community college part-time, working toward an associate's degree in applied science, specializing in automotive mechanics. A few years ago, his cousins in L.A. gave him a hard time; he left the pack and had the audacity to improve himself. Last year, two of his younger cousins called to ask his advice. They want to follow in his footsteps.

Nevada's portion of the federal FY 04 Adult Education budget came to just under \$4.2 million to educate over 8700 people at \$476 each.

It's a cheap price to pay to keep people out of prison, and get them off welfare. It's a cheap price to pay for supporting family values. It's a cheap price to pay to help people become tax-paying citizens who take care of their families, read to their children at night, and tell them stories about America, where anyone who works hard can achieve their dreams.

Call me naïve, but with every fiber of my being I believe in that dream for each and every one. In fact, I am sure of it. One of those stories above is my own.