

Reading group helps adults seek literacy

By PATRICK TOUHEY

Ray Harkowitz (not his real name) has a well-guarded secret. The 40-year-old father of two holds down a job, drives a car, provides for his family and deals with all the every day complications that everyone else does.

From all outward appearances, he's just another guy on the street. But Harkowitz can't read. His children don't know it. His friends don't. And his employer certainly doesn't know.

Outside of his wife and his reading tutor, no one knows. "If someone reaches adulthood without knowing how to read, they are pretty professional about hiding," said Carolyn Burns, reading coordinator for the Good Hope Literacy Council. "They have to have a pretty good system worked out for giving people the impression they know how to read. It's just too embarrassing for them to admit."

Mrs. Burns manages a team of Laubach reading tutors in the Plymouth and Canton communities. Her organization offers one-to-one literacy tutoring to people 14 years of age and older.

THE LAUBACH READING method was first developed by Dr. Frank Laubach, a Methodist missionary. Although Mrs. Burns operates her tutoring through the Lutheran Church Women's Program, she points out that the program and the method is non-denominational.

The tutors volunteer their time and come from all walks of life. The only requirement is that they be willing to spend an hour a week for a year with their student.

"At the end of the year, the student should be reading at the fifth-grade level. But really each person is able to progress at his own speed," Mrs. Burns said.

While the Laubach program offers help to high school students as well as adults, Mrs. Burns said, the most difficult to reach and work with are the older illiterates.

"It's kind of like the Alcoholics Anonymous. The first step for the adult who can't read is to admit it to himself. By the time a person gets to me, he has already come to terms with the problem."

But before that first step can be taken, something has to happen to make the individual want to learn to read.

"For one of my students it was his three-year old daughter. He would make mistakes while reading children's stories to her and she would correct him."

Usually, though, the illiterate adult has a well-honed defense system to keep his secret from becoming known.

Mrs. Burns told of one 30-year-old man who had to keep turning down job promotions because he was terrified his boss would find out he couldn't read if he took on new responsibilities.

"IT'S AMAZING how well people can keep the charade up. Most of the time a spouse will front for them if they have to sign contracts or fill out applications."

Because illiteracy is such a sensitive issue, Mrs. Burns said, she and her tutors have to guarantee confidentiality. Only the individual, the tutor and Mrs. Burns know the person's identity.

"Privacy is absolutely essential. The man I'm working with would be very upset if his children knew he couldn't read," she said.

Contrary to what might be a popular stereotype, Mrs. Burns said, not all illiterates are school dropouts. She mentioned one man who had a high school diploma.

"It turns out that his teachers gave him all his tests orally. But he had his diploma, and it looked the same as everyone else's."

However, Mrs. Burns said she does not want to jump on the bandwagon and "point fingers" at the schools.

"I look at it simply. A person comes

to me who can't read. I'm not interested in why. Frankly, I don't care. I have a recipe to help. That's all I need to worry about."

The course Mrs. Burns teaches uses three workbooks which the student can purchase for \$10.

By the time the student finishes the third book, he has gone through basic reading skills and worked on script-writing.

People interested in securing the services of a tutor or those who wish to become tutors can contact Mrs. Burns at 459-9629.



Adults who cannot read or write often develop a sophisticated defense system to hide their disability, according to Carolyn Burns, reading coordinator for the Good Hope Literacy Council. (Staff photo by Gary Caskey)

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C'Ville board picks officers

The Clarenceville school board elected officers for the 1978-79 school year at a meeting Thursday.

Named president was Dr. Samuel Prisk, who has held the post five times in his 20 years on the board. He replaces Richard Wood.

Continuing as vice-president is Raymond Chalkin, who is serving his 20th year and fifth term as vice-president.

Secretary is Barry Sherman, now in his second year. He replaces Robert Erickson, who has retired from the board. Named treasurer for a second term is Daniel Morrison, who is starting his fifth year as a board member.

The board also voted to continue holding its meetings the second and fourth Thursdays of each month. The only exception is June, when the meetings will be held the first and fourth Thursdays so as not to conflict with graduation.