

## 4.8 Civics in Action Strengthens the Community

During the spring 2012 session, Prince William County Schools Adult English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Program offered a unique learning opportunity called Civics in Action (CiA). CiA was made possible through funding from the 2012 English Literacy and Civics grant awarded to the ESOL program by the Virginia Department of Education. The objective of CiA was to provide students with additional instructional hours and access to technology in support of ESOL program goals. CiA was designed as an extracurricular class comprised of intermediate- and advanced-level ESOL students who were recommended by their home classroom teachers. These students were offered the opportunity to practice English while working on a community project. The CiA class required students to collaborate, communicate, and use critical thinking skills in the course of their work. In addition, the CiA class was required to complete a digital literacy project.



**CiA getting started at the Adult Learning Center in Manassas**

The CiA class was designed to function as a community of practice with students taking charge of their learning and the teacher serving in the role of facilitator. Students were empowered to make group decisions and set goals in order to complete a project of their choosing. The CiA class met regularly on Saturday afternoons in the technology lab at the Adult Learning Center in Manassas. In the interest of time, and in order to give the CiA students

a starting point, the class was encouraged to partner with the Prince William Area Free Clinic (PWAFC) for their community project.

The PWAFC serves uninsured, low income residents of Prince William County by providing basic medical services at no cost. The CiA class visited the free clinic, met with the executive director, and learned about the clinic's operations and needs. The students learned that the PWAFC also operates a small food pantry and is always in need of non-perishable food items. On a



**Students visit the Prince William Area Free Clinic (PWAFC) to learn about its operations and needs.**



**Students learn about an upcoming event at the clinic.**

limited basis, the clinic accepts donations of winter coats and cold weather items. More information about the [PWAFC](#) can be found on their website.

After learning about the PWAFC, the CiA class decided to organize a donation on behalf of the entire Prince William County adult ESOL student body. In the technology lab, students created a flyer to advertise

the donation project and provide details about the clinic. The students then created a schedule to visit approximately twenty adult ESOL classes around Prince William County to talk about the PWAFC and solicit donations. The students recruited volunteers to help collect the donated items and have them delivered to the Adult Learning Center; they set a deadline for accepting donations; and they planned time to inventory and organize the donation before delivering it to the free clinic. Finally, on April 16, 2012, CiA students delivered four van loads of non-perishable food, winter coats, and cleaning supplies to the PWAFC. The clinic's executive director, medical director, and other volunteers were on-site to meet the students and unload the large donation. The PWAFC awarded the CiA students and the ESOL program a certificate of appreciation for their hard work.



**CiA students met in the technology lab at the Adult Learning Center in Manassas.**



**CiA students speak to ESOL classes about the PWAFC project.**

The CiA class held a final meeting to celebrate their success and reflect on their learning experiences. The students had completed a meaningful, civic-minded project of their choosing with minimal direction from the teacher. Students used collaboration, communication, and critical thinking skills to reach their goal. In addition, students had been given access to technology and used technology skills to create a digital project. The CiA



class met the objectives of the 2012 English Literacy and Civics grant and the goal of the ESOL program of providing additional instructional hours and access to technology for students.

In conclusion, the CiA class was an example of how adult English language learners are productive members of the community. When learning came out of the classroom and into an authentic setting, the experience benefited the PWAFC and its many patrons, the ESOL program, and the students. CiA was a model of how English literacy and civics work to strengthen the community. CiA maximized the use of grant monies because, in addition to meeting learner objectives, it forged a partnership between the PWAFC and the Prince William County Schools Adult ESOL program.



**Unloading the donation at the PWAFC**



**Thanking some of the CiA students at the end-of-session meeting (above); CiA students and PWAFC staff on delivery day (below)**

The 2012 English Literacy and Civics grant provides funding for CiA to be held again in the fall session. For more information, please contact the Prince William County Schools Adult ESOL Program at 703-791-7357 or via the Internet at [www.pwcs.edu/AdultESOL](http://www.pwcs.edu/AdultESOL).

*This article was written by Susan Watson, adult education ESOL instructor at Prince William County Schools.*

