

## Community Impact

### Ron Improves Literacy Skills, Gains Confidence

Ron, a father of three and superintendent of a construction company, had a reading level slightly less than 6th grade despite graduating from a Columbia-area high school. Wanting to serve at his church and help his children with their schoolwork, Ron contacted the Greater Columbia Literacy Council for help improving his reading skills.

South Carolina has the highest drop out rate in the nation, yet only 10% of adults in need are enrolled in a program of any kind designed to improve reading skills in Richland County according to the SC Department of Education. Interviews with Midlands employers also emphasize that even many high school graduates are poorly prepared and unable to advance to better jobs that pay a livable wage and benefits.

To combat these problems, United Way of the Midlands funds the Greater Columbia Literacy Council to provide professional training and oversight of volunteers. The council's continued success in adult literacy recently helped them receive a three-year Community Impact grant to address problems of adult basic education in reading.

After contacting the Literacy Council, Ron was matched with a volunteer tutor, a local doctor who wanted to give back to the community. After working with his tutor for over 60 hours of study, Ron's reading skills improved significantly.

"The main benefit has been an improvement in his self-esteem and confidence. He is now better equipped to help his young children with homework that involves reading and understanding written material," said his tutor. "His improved reading has opened doors to occupational opportunities that he probably would not have attempted before. He can negotiate contracts for sales or purchases and is better qualified to serve on his church and community committees."

Since 1968 the Greater Columbia Literacy Council has made individual literacy instruction available for adults seven days a week at all hours of the day and evening in locations where learners have ready access. In the 2004-2005 fiscal year, the Council served over 500 adults in Richland and Lexington Counties where the council is the only provider of adult one-on-one tutoring.

Contributions made to United Way of the Midlands ensure that volunteer tutors are properly trained so that the Greater Columbia Literacy Council can continue to improve the lives of Midlands' citizens.

*United Way of the Midlands is donors, partners and volunteers discovering and responding to the crucial needs of our community—then finding resources to address those needs and following up to make sure the work gets done.*