

Fight's on to restore literacy funding

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Crawford County adult literacy advocates are reading the riot act to state and federal legislators.

Government funding cuts have closed the book on some Crawford County Read Program services and they could edit others. Staff, students and employers will provide chapter and verse on those services — and how they benefit the community — during a legislative luncheon at the Allegheny College Campus Center on May 18.

Federal and state legislators from eight northwest Pennsylvania counties have been invited.

"It's getting to be too much," Read Program Executive Director Lisa Schmalzried said of declining dollars for literacy programs. "We won't be able to continue to offer quality programs."

For the fourth consecutive year, President George Bush proposed eliminating federal funds for the Even Start family literacy program. Originally budgeted at \$220 million, the program is back in the fiscal year 2008 federal budget at \$90 million.

"Now they want to cut that," Schmalzried said.

Federal cuts put more pressure on state adult literacy funding, which this year reduced Crawford County appropriations by about \$15,000, on top of \$23,000 last year. A family summer reading program was eliminated because of a dwindling budget, Schmalzried said.

"What we do is important," she said. "And we can't do it with continuing cuts."

The Crawford County Read Program served 434 Crawford County residents in 2006.

Among them is 26-year-old single mom Lucy Young of Cochranon. Young worked a variety of jobs as far away as Fairview and Corry before landing a temporary position at Meadville's Tech Tool & Mold last year. But the company requires a ninth-grade reading level for press operators, and Young's reading tested on a par with sixth-graders.

"My teachers never cared that I didn't know how to read, they just put me in a little classroom by myself," Young said. "Here, they really help you. They help you understand the words and look them up in a dictionary."

Three months into the literacy program, Young tested at the ninth-grade level needed for her job.

A year into the program, she's nearly at 11th-grade proficiency and is reading on her own for fun.

"I like true stories and mysteries and love stories and

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