Success and Opportunity at Reading (SOAR!) once again plans to spearhead the Dictionary Project in Washington County. Part of a nationwide program (www.dictionaryproject.org), the local initiative will put dictionaries in the hands of every third grader in all three county schools.

SOAR! is an adult and family literacy program. The organization offers free one-on-one reading and English tutoring for adults in Washington County. SOAR! also has a family literacy component which includes Put Your Nose In A Book and The Dictionary Project. All programs are designed to increase and promote literacy in Washington County. Last year SOAR! distributed over 340 dictionaries to students at West Washington, Salem, and East Washington elementary schools. The project is funded by contributions from local organizations and individuals. Right now, SOAR! plans to give the dictionaries in October, provided sufficient sponsorship has come in. Marji Morris, Washington County Coordinator, explained, “We go into the classrooms and pass out the dictionaries. Then we do a short dictionary lesson that shows the students some of the special features of this particular dictionary. A favorite last year was the multiplication tables and the longest word in the English language—which none of us could pronounce! The kids loved exploring the dictionaries.”

Morris and volunteers also included some instruction on using guide words so students could use the dictionaries more effectively. Students will be encouraged to take their dictionaries home and share them with their families. Morris noted that the adult students in the SOAR! Literacy Program often mention that their parents didn’t spend time cultivating an interest in reading or their progress at school. Many believe those are part of the reason for their underdeveloped literacy skills.

“We want children to go to school knowing that their families value reading and learning,” Morris said. “The dictionaries can provide a focus for parents who don’t always know how to initiate a conversation with their children beyond ‘How was school today?’ The students last year were so excited about their dictionaries that they couldn’t wait to go home and show their parents. Parents who take time to look at the dictionaries with their children will hear a lot from the students.”

Statewide, the illiteracy rate ranges from 14-18%, according to a study done several years ago by the Lilly Foundation. In southern Indiana, it’s believed to be much higher. Fortunately, Washington County has enjoyed community support for its reading programs. According to Morris, many local organizations, businesses, schools, and parents themselves help make reading a priority for children at an early age. Many have supported SOAR! in the past by sponsoring the Dictionary Project and Put Your Nose in A Book, as well as donating to the general fund.

Anyone wishing to support the dictionary project or make a contribution to the SOAR! program can call Marji Morris, Washington County Coordinator, at 896-1515, or mail the contribution directly to SOAR! 1707 N. Shelby St, Suite 107, Salem, IN 47167.