PARTNERS in Literacy

Essays and Reflections from Literacy Volunteers Students
“Envision a future in which the power of literacy enables all adults to thrive in their communities.”
To All Friends of Literacy Volunteers:

Once again, I am pleased to present our 2021 edition of Hear Our Voices, the annual writing project for adult students tutored by Literacy Volunteers of Greater New Haven, The Valley, Meriden and Wallingford. We are so happy to share our students’ thoughts, stories and accomplishments, all of which represent empowerment through improved literacy and true testimony of the impact this has had on their lives.

As a way of hearing the voices of all of our partners, this year’s edition includes essays from not only students but also ours tutors, staff and community partners. Congratulations to all of these courageous authors during a most challenging year for so many people world-wide!

The world has changed immeasurably since the coronavirus pandemic began in March 2020. For Literacy Volunteers, this meant reimagining its mission to transform lives through the power of literacy which indeed is a matter of survival. Literacy Volunteers moved to a remote tutoring approach and reached out to several funding sources to effectively meet this goal on a regional basis.

We carried out extensive Zoom training workshops for all tutors, staff and students. We were successful in acquiring grants to purchase necessary resources for remote tutoring to bring distance learning out into our communities impacted by this devastating pandemic. We have been able to secure funding to acquire Lexia and Burlington English software to use remotely, chrome books for students without technology as well as enough curriculum workbooks for all students to use in their homes.

Unfortunately, the pandemic has had a significant impact on the number of students reaching out to meet their literacy needs remotely along with tutors who are reluctant to continue any type of in-person tutoring, which they prefer, and hesitant to use the very challenging remote approach. We look forward to a “new” year that will continue to follow CDC guidelines but also provide a hybrid tutoring approach bringing back in-person tutoring along with continuing many of our remote classes.

This year’s “Hear Our Voices” is dedicated to the many partners who have enabled LV to carry out its mission. It is indeed my great privilege to work with our “Partners in Literacy” in all the towns we service fostering partnerships with adult learners, tutors, and communities to enable individuals and families to achieve educational, career, and quality of life goals.

Vital support from donors and the wider community will only bring Literacy Volunteers closer to our goal where we “envision a future in which the power of literacy enables all adults to thrive in their communities”. We are committed more than ever to our mission, with a broader outlook and appreciation for our many community “Partners In Literacy.”

Again, please enjoy all of our wonderful literary contributions!

Sincerely,

Louis D. Perno, MSW
Executive Director
These essays and reflections were written by adult students who attended Literacy classes in Greater New Haven, Meriden, Wallingford and the Valley in 2020-2021. Special thanks go to the dedicated volunteer tutors who worked with their students to create this collection of personal stories. Students lead us through cultural and personal experiences, sharing with us their struggles, their achievements, and the richness of their lives. We are grateful to all the students who have worked hard to communicate their unique perspectives through their writing.

This is Literacy Class and Life by Michael3 .......................................................... p. 3
My Literacy Class by Nicole .................................................................................. p. 3
The People of Ecuador by Angela ......................................................................... p. 4
Finding a Job by Christopher .............................................................................. p. 4
What Does it Take to Be Happy? by Anna Gutswa .............................................. p. 5
Literacy Volunteers Progress by Ghada .............................................................. p. 5
I Miss My Classroom by Linda Liu ......................................................................... p. 6
What I Discovered from the Pandemic by Rumi Taniguchi................................. p. 7
Progress & Support: Learning Together by Grace Moore ................................... p. 8
The Reason I Learned to Make Kimchi in the U.S. by Leehae Oh ...................... p. 8
Nailing a Challenge at Top Nails by Grace ............................................................. p. 9
Customs in South Korea and the U.S. by Hae (Matina) Sook Lee ......................... p. 10
Experiences In the U.S. by Kalpana Thapa .......................................................... p. 11
How the Pandemic Changed My Life by Chorok Green Lee .................................. p. 11
My Changed Life During the Pandemic by Youjung Barn .................................... p. 12
Life In America by Alsu Ramazanova .................................................................... p. 13
Emigrating from Your Country by Elena Cruz Bedoya ......................................... p. 14
Experiences Today by Louvine ............................................................................... p. 14
Book Of Life by Magda Berdecia .......................................................................... p. 15
This is a Little History about my Life by Silvia Schmutz ....................................... p. 15
My New Life in USA! by Laye Camara .................................................................. p. 16
Iranian New Year (Nowruz) by Molavi ................................................................. p. 16
My New Life Away from my Island by Linda Figueroa ....................................... p. 17
My History by Monica Encalada .............................................................................. p. 17
How to Survive in a Country that is not Yours by Magda Berdecia ....................... p. 18
Similarities and Differences by Leila .................................................................... p. 19
Malak’s Story by Malak .......................................................................................... p. 20
The Story of My Life by Maria ................................................................................ p. 20
My Favorite Fable by Hanbing (Alan) Cao ............................................................ p. 21
My New Life in the United States by Maria .......................................................... p. 22
My Angel by Rebecca Mohr .................................................................................. p. 22
Mona’s Story by Mona ............................................................................................ p. 23
Struggling by Charles Mitchell ............................................................................. p. 23
How I Spent the Summer by Olesya ..................................................................... p. 24
The Culture of Ecuador by Monika ....................................................................... p. 25
I Am Saadia ElBanani by Saadia ........................................................................... p. 25
Samantha: The Mystical Unicorn by Samantha ................................................... p. 26
My Story by Ching Mei Peng .................................................................................. p. 26
My Experience with Covid-19 by Stephen W. Jones, Sr. ....................................... p. 27
The Year 2020 by Jia’an Yin ..................................................................................... p. 27
The Spring Breeze, Soojin by Youjung ................................................................... p. 28
Changes In School During Covid-19 by Michael ................................................ p. 29
Most Difficult Year: 2020 by Valbina Vasquez ..................................................... p. 30
We all have a dream, and mine is by Juan Carlos Rodriguez ............................... p. 31
My “Why” ................................................................................................................ p. 32-42
In Memory of Jan Elizabeth Simmons .................................................................. p. 43
List of Tutors and Volunteers .............................................................................. p. 44
“This is Literacy Class and Life”
I learned a lot while attending class at Literacy Volunteers. My comprehension of words has grown. I use LinkedIn and other work based websites better now for job searching. My work has improved because I am able to read the tickets faster. I understand the bigger words that people use when they are talking to me. My dream of the future is to work better at my job and keep learning for new life possibilities that come up.

I use a computer program, Lexia Literacy Power Up, that helped me with grammar, spelling and reading. Lexia was recommended by one of my teachers at Literacy Volunteers. I think if you keep reading and you work hard, your reading will improve.

My life has changed since I started taking classes with Literacy Volunteers. My work is more productive. I help the customers even better now that I am reading more at my job. Day to day activities are easier because reading is easier.

The Pandemic changed my life in different ways. I do not see as many people now. I am always worried about getting sick. I do not talk to people without social distancing anymore. It is safer now to use the computer and the phone to communicate.

Literacy also offered a math class during which I learned a lot too. I feel much more confident and look forward to seeing the customers. Using mathematics in life experiences when it is needed is helpful in other parts of my life: such as grocery shopping, working on my car and at work.

The Literacy teachers helped me the most with math and reading. I have met many nice people over several years at the program. I was pleased to meet them all. The Literacy Volunteers are people with great knowledge which they bring to the table that is always useful for the pupils they teach. I am glad that I am still participating in my classes and I wish to learn more from all the nice teachers there.

Student: Michael
Country: USA
Tutors: Kerry Sheldon, Fran Jakubiak
Site: 14 West Main St. Meriden and Remote

“My Literacy Class”
My CCC teacher told me about the Literacy program. She suggested it would help me to read more, write down words, and have conversations with my coworkers.

This program helped me a lot with my reading and writing well and I learned new, real-life words (for example hospital, computers). It also helped me with spelling and with speaking or have conversations with my classmates.

Student: Nicole
Country: USA
Tutor: Nora Vasilescu
Site: Meriden Remote
The People of Ecuador

Ecuador’s culture is a mixture of different traditions. Spanish is the official language of Ecuador. Some indigenous communities speak Quechua and Shuar. Ecuador has an abundant wealth of natural resources. We are exporters of cocoa, bananas, flowers and shrimp. It has cultural diversity. The country has 4 regions: Sierra, Orient, Coast and Insular. In the Sierra the mountains predominate and cold weather, their landscapes are beautiful. In the Orient we fell in love with the beautiful Amazon rainforest with a great diversity of species. Coast has warm weather and wonderful beaches. Its gastronomy is very recognized worldwide. The Insular, known as the enchanted Galapagos Islands, is the world’s heritage.

Most people in Ecuador are friendly. A typical phrase of the Ecuadorians is, “where you eat they eat ten”, this means that if you share food you will never miss it. We are very hard-working, creative and responsible. Our slogan is “necessity is the mother of creativity”. Unemployment has generated entrepreneurship. People sell everything food, clothes, flowers, dessert, chocolates, etc.

Ecuadorians love football and parties, like to speak and dance. We always have something to celebrate. Family always get together to eat, dance and drink. We are very happy. We have a lot of variety of food but we eat white rice all the time for breakfast, lunch and dinner. We have many typical dishes based on the banana, seafood and pig. One of the most requested dishes is the Encebollado, a fish soup with yucca, onions and spices.

A few years ago, the political and economic situation deteriorated. This generated a lot of unemployment, crime and social insecurity. Problems have caused many of us to have to emigrate in search of better opportunities. Ecuadorians who have migrated are recognized because we are very hard-working and honest.

Student: Angela
Country: Ecuador
Tutor: Keith French
Site: 14 West Main St., Meriden

Finding a Job

I went online to walmart.com. There was a special page where I filled out an application. It went to all Walmarts, not just Hamden. In about 2-3 days I got a call from the Branford branch. They said if I needed a job, they had vacancies and I sent my application to them.

A woman organized an interview. She asked me if I had warehouse experience. I said I worked at several warehouses in Jamaica. I said I could work from 1 to 10 pm. I got the job right away. My two days off are Tuesdays and Wednesdays. I work in receiving, offloading trucks. I also stock shelves.

I am happy with this job. I have health insurance and 401K. I hope to stay. It’s good.

Student: Christopher
Country: Jamaica
Tutors: Rosemary Benivegna, Jan Simmons
Site: Literacy Resource Center, 5 Science Park, New Haven
What Does it Take to Be Happy?

As the pandemic surges and impeachment is going on, happiness is not on many people’s minds. To find happiness requires us to make choices, some of which may be very difficult. Still, freedom to make life choices is very important in achieving happiness. If we choose to follow someone unquestionably, we are not free. According to Aristotle, happiness is possible while maintaining balance between “excess” and “deficiency,” which means having not too much of anything. He continues that having a good balance in life will bring peace and happiness to a person.

Happiness will be different for different people, like playing sports versus just watching a game online. For me happiness means doing something meaningful and having a purpose in life.

My happiness is like a quiet happiness, creating a nice atmosphere at home where I can curl up on the couch, read a book, and listen to good music. My happiness is also being generous with my family, doing something with other people, and, most importantly, living in a country with a decent government which includes everyone.

I feel positive about the near future. The pandemic is about to be defeated with vaccines, and impeachment will fade away like a bad dream. And, I hope, happiness again will be on many people’s minds. (Sorry, it sounds a little like utopia, doesn’t it?)

Student: Anna Gutswa
Country: Poland
Tutors: Jerry Delamater and Desh Sharma
Site: Yale Health Center

Student: Ghada
Country: Syria
Tutors: Gene Kirsten, Catherine Miller
Site: Literacy Resource Center, 5 Science Park, New Haven
I Miss My Classroom

Time goes fast. I cannot believe that I have been studying with the literacy volunteer program for about eight years. Every week, I went to the classroom and met my tutors and other students in person. We read and spoke English together. Besides that, we often played some games such as spelling bee, word puzzles, and situational dialogs, to practice English in a fun way.

The students in my class come from different countries and we all have our own native languages. But we are encouraged to speak English as much as we can in the classroom. By doing this, we can understand each other better and exchange our thoughts, opinions, and some useful information to help us navigate life in the United States. I have learned a lot of interesting things from other cultures and enjoyed a lot of homemade cuisines from other countries when we had special events.

I cherished the time I spent in the classroom because I do not have too many chances to speak English in my everyday life. I went to class every Friday and enjoyed the experience. Although sometimes I felt tired and did not want to go, I forced myself to leave home and join the class because I realized that I always felt great after the class.

However, since last March 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic changed everyone’s life and my routine changed dramatically. I couldn’t go to class due to the shutdown of non-essential activities in Connecticut. I was very sad at first. But, thankfully, after a very short period, my lovely tutors decided to adopt the Zoom method in order to continue meeting with us once a week.

My original class was divided into three small groups and meet on Zoom separately with one of the tutors. Tutors have made every effort to make sure everyone is able to attend a class and has a quality experience. For example, each smaller group meets at different times since the Covid-19 changed everyone’s schedule. The class size is reduced so everyone has more chances to speak English during each Zoom session. However, I now only see members of my small group.

Fortunately, the tutors decided to occasionally meet with all of us together at a Zoom “social hour” and I have a chance to see the rest of the class members. When I see all my former classmates and new students show up at “social hour,” I realize that I have not seen some of them for a long time. When I see and talk with them, I feel that we are in the same classroom despite the fact that we are only small images on my screen. As we are talking, a strong emotion comes to me. I miss my classmates. I miss our classroom. I hope we can go back to the classroom soon. Even though I started using Zoom just a year ago, I feel I have been using it for a lifetime!

Student: Linda Liu
Country: China
Tutors: Charlotte Luzzi; Virginia Stevens; Eleanor Weseloh
Site: Keefe Center
What I Discovered from the Pandemic

The Covid-19 Pandemic changed our lives dramatically. Many people lost precious family members, friends or both. Many people lost their jobs. Children couldn’t attend school although it is so important for young children to communicate with their friends in-person and to learn social skills. We were advised not to meet with friends or family who don’t live with us. We can’t travel freely, as well, and still cannot go out without masks. But, for me, there were some positive things that happened as a result of the pandemic restrictions.

My children and I studied English together when I was helping them to learn at home. When schools closed last Spring, there was no live-stream instruction, just video instructions. Naturally, children can’t stay motivated to learn without their friends or teachers. So, I had to be their teacher although I am an English learner also! I taught them how to write in English with the occasional help of the internet. When they had trouble understanding the instructions, we listened to them repeatedly together and this helped my English listening skills. Of course, it was hard for me to help two children at the same time and sometimes I was about to explode.

Because we all had to stay home and spend more time with each other, I appreciated the value of my family more. My children play and talk happily and they do silly things at times. I never get bored watching them in my monotonous daily life restricted by the pandemic. Although sometimes I feel tired because of their quarreling! I’m grateful to my husband as well. Now, he helps me do housework more. The change caused by “staying home” is amazing!

Last, I have learned how comforting it is to spend time with nature. I lived in Tokyo, Japan, where there are more recreational complexes, stylish retail stores and restaurants with delicious foods, but less nature, like New York City. Because of the pandemic restrictions, my family and I have spent more time outside and I appreciate that there is so much nature and vast amounts of land here where we can hike, swim, play sports, etc. The pandemic taught me to appreciate the benefits of living in a place surrounded by nature.

I know it’s because I haven’t experienced unbearable things that I can think about the positives. But I’d like to remember the good things that were experienced during the Pandemic. And I sincerely hope everyone’s life will return to normal as soon as possible.

Student: Rumi Taniguchi
Country: Japan
Tutors: Charlotte Luzzi; Virginia Stevens; Eleanor Weseloh
Site: Keefe Center
Progress & Support: Learning Together

My goal this year is to continue with Literacy Volunteers and pass my Connecticut driving exam. I also want to improve my reading and understanding of English. I took the driving test several times and was not successful. I would not get far with the questions. I would get to question #3 and the computer would kick me off. The last time I tried was before Covid-19. I felt more confident reading and understanding what the question is asking. I got to #20. I did not pass, but I see that getting to #20 was a great improvement for me. I never got that far before.

I am happy with my progress and with using Core 5 online program this year. I want to continue here because it helps me a lot in my life. Now I can recognize more sight words. I can read from textbooks a little easier. In the past, I threw newspapers or coupons in the trash. Now I look through the newspaper and try to read some stories.

Before I started at Literacy Volunteers, my self-esteem was so low. I kept to myself when I was around people and didn’t talk much because I didn’t want to say the wrong thing. But now I see my confidence has grown. I feel more comfortable talking to people. I can sing from the hymnbook at church. I can also read some verses from the Bible at home. One of the biggest changes is I can help my younger son with words I recognize when he is reading. Before, I could not do that! Now, whenever he doesn’t recognize words, he asks me, and I am happy I can help him with schoolwork. He said to me one day, “Mommy I am so proud of you.”

I would tell others who struggle with reading to “have patience and do not give up.” My tutor Vanessa has helped motivate me. My husband is also supportive. He and my son have seen a difference in my reading. My husband sees me in the living room, and he comes in, sits down and listens to what I am reading. One day he said, “Continue, you are doing a great job!” He also said, “It is never too late to learn to read!”

Student: Grace Moore  
Country: Liberia  
Tutor: Charlene Vanessa Clarke  
Site: University of New Haven Library (West Haven)

The Diary

My diary says  
To write sorrowful stories  
Is not what it loves  

Student: Crystal  
Country: China  
Tutor: Charlotte Luzzi, Virginia Stevens, Eleanor Weseloh  
Site: Keefe Center, Hamden
Nailing a Challenge at Top Nails
In February 2015, I faced a big challenge at a nail salon in Cheshire. Through the referral of my friend Ping, I got this nail artist position at Top Nails. I remember the boss interviewed me that afternoon. I was very worried about this interview because I never had a job like that nor did I have any experience with nail care. Even so, the boss urged me to give it a try. She gave me a chance to learn. I was happy and nervous to hear that. On the first day of work, I began to watch my colleagues and understood how the process works. My colleagues were nice. They taught me how to identify each tool and nail polish. At first, I felt this job was very hard and I was not sure I could continue. After three days of boot-camp, my boss asked how I felt. I told her the truth so she gave me more time to learn again. She said she will let me service customers as soon as I was qualified. Since then I told myself “I shouldn’t be discouraged. I must be qualified.” After three weeks of hard work, I was finally working on someone else’s hands other than my own. Then I did a customer’s nails who felt very satisfied. I was so excited that I was actually doing it. After practicing for a period of time, I served more customers and I got more experience. I learned from this challenge that we can do everything well if we put our heart into it.

Student: Grace
Country: China
Tutors: Bud Sielaff
Site: 14 West Main Street

The Reason I Learned to Make Kimchi in the U.S.
I grew up in Korea and I love kimchi. There are many great markets in Korea selling kimchi and I didn’t need to make it myself. However, when I moved to the U.S. I couldn’t buy delicious kimchi. I started to miss the great food in my native country.
Making kimchi takes a long time and is complicated. But there was no way other than making it myself. At the same time, I was interested in food ingredients and tastes from other countries. I was able to better understand the quality of Korean food, comparing it to each country. After all, the seasoning used when making kimchi are the root of all Korean food.
I taught myself how to make kimchi and now I am happy I did it.

Student: Leehae Oh
Country: South Korea
Tutor: Cora Perrone
Site: Miller Library
Customs in South Korea and the U.S

When I compare my native country, South Korea, with the U.S., I find we have many different customs. One of them is how we celebrate Christmas.

I arrived in the U.S. three days before Christmas. On Christmas Eve, an American family invited us to their home for a turkey dinner. I had never seen such a large bird on the table! I was surprised. Afterwards, it felt strange when we drove around the town. It was very quiet and dark. All the stores and restaurants were closed. I expected traffic congestion, but I saw only a few cars driving on the quiet streets. I loved seeing all the Christmas lights on the houses. Since then, every Christmas, I drive around my neighborhood to enjoy seeing them again.

In Korea, most restaurants and other businesses stay open for 24 hours on Christmas Eve. Cinemas and bars are full of young people. Many of them also consider Christmas Day to be another day for having fun and drinking. They jam the busy streets. Most stores compete for which one has the best neon lights. The electric companies worry about people using too much electricity during this season. Firefighters and police officers stand ready for an emergency situation.

Since I have been in America I have experienced many holidays and other celebrations. Looking back, I feel embarrassed that I made so many mistakes because I didn’t know about the customs. Early on, I decorated our Christmas tree and put Hanukkah electric candles in the living room windows. Later, I learned that Hanukkah is a Jewish holiday, so I removed them.

Once, my son was invited to a Bar Mitzvah. I had no idea about the significance of the event. I wrapped a gift, and my son wore casual clothes, as he did to other parties. But when I dropped him off at the country club, I realized that something was wrong. All the other children were wearing suits or dresses. I was embarrassed, but my son joined the party anyway.

Looking back – my children, my relatives and others around me gave me chance to learn about the new and interesting culture in the U.S.

Student: Hae (Matina) Sook Lee
Country: South Korea
Tutors: Charlotte Luzzi, Virginia Stevens, Eleanor Weseloh
Site: Keefe Center, Hamden
My name is Kalpana Thapa. I came to America from my country Nepal. Now that I am here, I speak English as my second language, but it is still difficult for me. I like the language and it is international. Nowadays I can study about America and practice writing. People from many countries live, work, and study here. It is better here than in many other countries. We can get water, light, medicine, food and housing. Also many benefits come from American science and technology such as computers or radios. American people have good humanity, and are nice with other countries.

This new country, the United States of America, has many things to offer, such as two oceans, Atlantic and Pacific and many islands. Everywhere things are good: roads, lighting, bridges, airports, and busses. For hundreds of years, all people who have lived here have helped to make the land a better place. All these people are faithful, bold, clever, wise and smart. The United States quickly became a new beautiful place with new ideas from many people. Good minded and faithful people did this. We have a country with many interesting cultures to make this new land that I love.

Thank you

Student: Kalpana Thapa
Country: Nepal
Tutors: La Casa
Site: Don Desmond

How the Pandemic Changed My Life

As you know, the pandemic has changed many things.

First, I have to wear a mask all the time except in my house. When I go to the laundry room in my apartment building, I have to wear a mask. If I forget my mask, I’m scared of meeting people.

Second, many classes open in Zoom like this class. I’m so sad we can’t meet in person.

Third, people don’t trust each other because they are afraid of the Covid-19 virus. It causes “Asian hate crimes” these days. I’m totally sad. I’m not sure I’m safe, either, because I’m Asian. I hope that the Covid-19 virus goes away as soon as possible and we have peace in our minds.

Student: Chorok Green Lee
Country: Korea
Tutors: Enid Sherry and Stephanie FitzGerald
Site: LV Gateway
My Changed Life During the Pandemic

Last year, we all stayed at home and felt so gloomy due to Covid-19. Many things around us were changed by this pandemic. At the beginning of last year, I just thought that I lost my year and couldn’t do anything. Like most people, I was so depressed and frustrated. But I realized that human beings are the animals of adaptation as the time went by.

Before the pandemic, I used to go outside with my family and friends every weekend. I really liked to visit many museums, famous cities and shopping malls. Every week, I attended ESL classes and many programs at Keefe, Hamden libraries and even Yale OISS. When I had nothing special planned, I used to meet friends outside or invite them to my place. I was always excited, busy, enthusiastic with many things around me. It meant that I just focused on something, except myself. I didn’t have time to look back inside me.

Since the pandemic, many things around me have dramatically changed as many people felt. I just stayed at home with so much anxiety and worries at the beginning of the pandemic. The longer I stayed at home, the more I got depressed with nothing special to do. I started to attend Zoom classes to continue to learn English and slowly adapted to virtual classes and programs for both my kids and me. Besides, I started to look back inside myself and ask myself these questions: “What could I do at home? How can I spend my time with joyfulness? How could I play with my kids? What did I need for myself?”.

I started to find hobbies that I could do at home such as baking, cooking, watching movies and reading books. Also, I spent my time with just my family and myself with calmness. Although many things I found were not more exciting and funnier than previous activities outside, I could feel calm, joyful and even meaningful for my family and myself. In addition, we started to go camping! That made me both excited and calm during the stay in nature.

I realized the importance of my family, close friends, my home country and our normal life before the pandemic. Even though I hope this hard time with social distancing and masks will end as soon as possible, I will remember my lessons learned from this tough time.

Student: Youjung Barn
Country: South Korea
Tutor: Cora Perrone
Site: Miller Library
My name is Alsu. I have been in the USA for 8 months. I never thought I would live abroad. But life is so unpredictable. I had to move to New Haven because my husband got a great opportunity to work at Yale. Moving to the USA was a very difficult decision for me. I miss my parents and brother, I miss my friends and colleagues, I miss my job.

I faced a language barrier and hesitated to talk to people. I should’ve started learning English many years ago and I regret that I didn’t. Later, I realized that my MD diploma and license are not accepted here. I must restudy to be able to return to the medical field. That made me upset. Could you imagine how hard it is to leave a gastroenterologist career I was in for almost 9 years in Russia, and start to learn English from scratch, and to become a housewife? However, I am a mom of two pretty daughters and that encourages me to do my best and not be depressed!

I have enrolled in an excellent program, “Literacy Volunteers” in Gateway Community College, and have gotten a lot of benefit from that! I really enjoy every class with my tutors! I have started by learning English. I wish to become able to talk to people grammatically correctly and fluently. That will help me a lot. I will do my best step by step to achieve success in new country. I discovered that people in America are so open minded and fantastically friendly! I love it! In spite of the pandemic I am able to make friendships with my neighbors and my husband’s colleagues, and with my classmates on zoom class. I enjoy it a lot!

I love and enjoy knowing American culture and meeting new people! I am so grateful to Literacy Volunteers in Gateway Community College, especially to Jan Clarke and Andrew! Thank you very much for providing such a wonderful opportunity to study at home by the laptop screen!

Student: Alsu Ramazanova
Country: Russia
Tutors: Jan Clarke and Andrew McLaren
Site: LV Gateway
**Emigrating from Your Country**

People emigrate to different countries most of the time in search of a better future for themselves and their families, sometimes at very high costs because it is common to see parents leave their children or children leave their parents perhaps with great needs, but he leaves with a single dream in mind - “a better future”.

There are advantages and disadvantages to immigrating to a foreign country. Some disadvantages become strengths along the way, others are not overcome but tolerated.

One of the biggest disadvantages that can later become your strength is the language. Arriving in a new country where you do not understand and where no one understands you is one of the greatest frustrations that you can go through is feeling illiterate but when you start learning this new language it is very satisfying for yourself and it can also become one of your strengths in this new country. If you are not young, learning is difficult, but it is worth it not to stop trying, maybe you will not achieve it perfectly but understanding and being understood fills you with great satisfaction and why not say it? your self-esteem grows. To learn a new language can open great doors for you, it is a great step for that future that you came to seek.

There are many advantages, among them the job opportunities are not as limited as in some of our countries, people can find better safe places to live and educate their children and also educate themselves and it is also a great opportunity to meet new cultures.

Nothing is worse than leaving the land where you were born but most of the time people do not have any other choices. But sometimes people will find adventures - that they travel not because they need to, but because they want to learn something new and they ended up liking it more than their own countries.

**Student: Elena Cruz Bedoya**  
**Country: Colombia**  
**Tutors: Todd Stone & Cathy Buchanan**  
**Site: LV Gateway**

These are trying times for me and my family. During the past year, members of my family came down with the COVID-19 virus. This resulted in my caring for some of my family. I have also dealt with physical problems myself. Fortunately, I haven’t come down with the virus.

In LV, I have begun using Lexia PowerUp online program again. I have also been working on Journey to Success 5 book. In addition, I have passed my Learner’s Permit, and I am in the process of getting my regular Driver’s License. In the future, I would like to get my GED diploma. I’m also wanting to continue to help people.

**Student: Louvine**  
**Country: USA**  
**Tutor: Gene Kirsten**  
**Site: Literacy Resource Center, 5 Science Park, New Haven**
**Book of Life**

I don’t have much to say but for me they have been the kindest people I am sharing with. They have been an inspiration to me. My life since I came to this state has not been easy, some have discriminated against me. And they laugh because a person who has a Bachelor’s Degree in Education and spent 30 years serving in the schools of Puerto Rico has not been able to get a decent job, or a place that she can fully live. In the United States I am a lonely wanderer rather than struggling to survive. The people who live in places where there are so many sick people also reach a catatonic state because we allow ourselves to be carried away into a lifestyle, talking to the walls and dreaming of an uncertain future. I left them there because otherwise I would have to write a book of my life and I would have to write too much. God Bless you for appearing in my life.

**Student:** Magda Berdecia  
**Country:** Puerto Rico  
**Site:** LV Gateway  
**Tutors:** Norma Barash & Desh Sharma

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**This is a Little History about my Life**

My name is Silvia Leonor and I came to the US a few years ago from Buenos Aires, Argentina. I came here in search of new opportunities as in economic, healthcare, education, housing, and safety. I had a lot of problems in my first years. I did not speak English and people didn’t understand my language. When I had a doctor appointment, I could not explain my symptoms. Now I speak a little more English and I can understand it better. I work as a babysitter and care for my granddaughter. She is two years old, her name is Jade Everleigh. I work from Monday to Friday. My job is very nice and enjoyable. In the future, I want to buy a big house and I want to be the owner of my own Bakery.

My life has changed since I have started taking classes with Literacy Volunteers; I feel more comfortable and confident in situations when I have to speak English. For example, when I go to visit my doctor, I can speak to him about my symptoms without a translator. Also, it’s easier to go to the bank, post office, and grocery stores alone. I like attending class using my phone because I don’t have to lose time traveling to class since I can take it at home.

**Student:** Silvia Schmutz  
**Country:** Argentina  
**Site:** LV Gateway  
**Tutors:** Enid Sherry and Stephanie FitzGerald
My New Life in USA!

1. My life has changed a lot since my arrival in this country. Working for 12 hours a day, this is where I got to know why it is the most prosperous country in the world. It is here that I realized that the car is the second bedroom, because people are always busy.

2. My dream for the future is to become an agricultural entrepreneur.

3. The key to success is literacy.

4. I started reading well, it was thanks to the help of the Literacy Volunteers and I would always be grateful to them.

5. The pandemic has brought out the important role of technique and technology, taking lessons, working while staying at home is eloquent proof.

6. I was helped by Habitat Humanity – with this organization I had a new home in 2020.

7. I have helped women who have small children, I did daycare, pick up children from school.

8. I found it really cool to stay using the phone and computer for distance learning.

9. In the culture of my country, the foreigner is better treated than the native!

Student: Laye Camara  
Country: Guinea Conakry  
Site: LV Gateway  
Tutors: Norma Barash and Desh Sharma

Iranian New Year (Nowruz)

This holiday begins on the first day of spring (March 20) and lasts for thirteen days. On the Wednesday before the New Year, people build bonfires and jump over them. By doing this, they are asking Nature to keep illness away from them.

On the New Year’s Eve, the family gets together around a table that has seven items on it. The items all start with the letter “S” (in Persian: Haft-seen) and they symbolize different things.

Some examples are apple, garlic, coin, flower etc. For example, flower and garlic symbolize re-birth and medicine respectively.

On the New Years Day, people call or visit family or friends and wish them a healthy and happy long life.

The last day of the holidays (thirteenth day) is called Nature’s Day, and people usually go to a park for a picnic and enjoy the beautiful spring.

Happy Nowruz, and I wish you a happy and healthy long life.

Student: Molavi  
Country: Iran  
Site: La Casa  
Tutors: Don Desmond
My new life away from my island

My name is Linda Figueroa. I was born in San Juan, PR. I have two daughters and three grandkids. My oldest daughter lives in Kansas and the younger daughter lives in PR. PR is a tropical island with beautiful beaches and landscapes. In 2017 hurricane Maria destroyed my island, and many needed water, food and some place to live. Nothing was like before on my island. The island does not recover. The lifestyle was hard and dangerous. To recover my emotional health, I decided to go to the USA, even if my family stayed on the island. I came to Connecticut because I have a niece here. She helped me to find an apartment and all the resources that I needed to start a new life for me. I made all my goals that I proposed, my apartment, a car, a part-time job and my emotional and physical health has improved a lot. But everything is different here, the culture, traditions, the holidays especially the Three Kings days. However most people are nice and they like to help. There are a lot latin people. I like that the state system is very organized and fast. Junta is the best, all kinds of help to latin people. At Junta I take English class and I learn every day. I like the English class and the professors are excellent. Now the class is on the computer. I liked it as a different way to learn. My goal is to understand what the people tell me and speak the language well.

Student: Linda Figueroa  
Country: Puerto Rico  
Site: LV Gateway  
Tutors: Norma Barash and Desh Sharma

My History

I’m Monica, I moved to the United States six years ago because I needed peace in my life. In my country I was a judge and I had to endure the government corruption.

I can’t practice my profession here, but I feel safe and happy because my children are getting a good education. I love living in the United States because there is independence at every government level, legislative, judicial and executive.

I miss seeing my friends and family from Ecuador but it makes me happy to know they are doing ok. My dream is that one day my children can be proud of me.

Since I started taking English classes with Literacy Volunteers I have met many people and I enjoy it. In my job, I am surrounded by a lot of young people every day and I would like to have a full conversation in English with them.

Student: Monica Encalada  
Country: Ecuador  
Tutors: Enid Sherry & Stephanie FitzGerald  
Site: LV Gateway
How to Survive in a Country that is not Yours

You have probably heard the typical phrase “How brave you are” a thousand times. “I wish I had the courage that you have to go to another country to live.”

One is silent and thinking - I had to leave for family reasons, also I am scared. You know that in our humble opinion, the courage in this matter is secondary, since what really plays the important role are the desire to improve your life and help the one who needs you the most - “a son”. If the desires are higher than the difficulties to immigrate to another country, this fear will not be an obstacle.

You will arrive and you will face situations and moments that you have never lived before, you will know new cultures of which you will realize that you knew very little, you will know different lifestyles from yours and those of your Country. You will have a lot of friends of different Nationalities. All these stimuli will really open your mind in search of more to know, to find the answers to questions that you have never asked yourself before. You will understand many more things, the why of many aspects that surround you and from that moment you will much more appreciate values such as tolerance, humility and respect. It is like learning English in my case. Immersing yourself in the daily life of a country that speaks it is the fastest way to internalize it, because you listen to it all the time, you read it and you are forced to speak it and finally your brain has to adapt to thinking in English.

Everything you learn in class you can put into practice immediately and therefore retention of knowledge will be greater.

I thank these beautiful people who have been teaching me to speak a little of what I can in English. Thank you, Literacy Volunteers, and my teachers and the Principal for her great care in teaching us.

Student: Magda Berdecia
Country: Puerto Rico
Site: LV Gateway
Tutors: Norma Barash & Desh Sharma
Similarities and Differences

There are many similarities and differences in presidential power between the Republic of Iran and the United States of America. These two nations used to have good foreign and economic treaties before the Iranian revolution happened. People of each country could easily travel and had a great time in either place. Lots of businesses and constructions like roads, buildings and bridges went on in those days.

One way to compare the countries currently is to look at each president’s duties and powers to see if there are any similarities. Amazingly I came up with many of them. Like the US president, the president of Iran is not above the law. He cannot change the law alone. In addition, if he does something illegal he might be impeached. Neither president can declare a war. Both the president of the US and the president of Iran hold office for a 4-year term. Both presidents strongly desire peace and a relationship that benefits both countries.

However, there are more differences than similarities in their duties and powers. Unlike the president of the US, the Iranian president cannot appoint judges. Another difference is that the president of Iran is not the commander-in-chief of armed forces. Those powers are vested in the Supreme Leader, who is responsible for almost 99% of policies and decisions in the country. Meanwhile the president of the USA is seen as leading the world while the Iranian president cannot do so. While in the US the president moves to the White House after the election, in Iran the president doesn’t need to leave his own house. He just goes to the presidential palace to work. Still, there are lots of differences. For example, “separation of religion and the state” is not part of the Iranian constitution. If this were adopted in Iran many of our problems would be solved in the blink of an eye and the president would have more power to do their real job.

In conclusion, both countries’ presidents’ duties and powers share some surprising similarities. I imagine these similarities would shock both Americans and Iranians. I hope in the near future both countries come to an agreement that benefits innocent people.

Student: Leila
Country: Iran
Tutors: Bud Sielaff
Site: 14 West Main Street
Malak’s Story

My name is Malak Abudalqawi. I was born in Yemen. I came to America when I was 26, with my four children and my husband. We came to America because my husband had a job there.

My children went to school. I also went to school to learn English. I want to talk to doctors, friends and teachers. One of my children didn’t go to school because she was too young. When I was 28, I had another baby.

We love to live in America, it is a nice place to live. We have freedom here. Thanks to everyone who has helped me.

Student: Malak
Country: Yemen
Tutors: Donna Maronde
Site: Meriden Public Library

The Story Of My Life

I am a person who thanks God for letting me live so many years. I’m already 85.

I have gone through very hard and sad moments.

My first sad experience when I left Cuba in 1962 with my husband and my two-month old daughter.

For several years we had very little money. Sometimes we didn’t have enough food.

I had two children more and life continued, but my ex-husband was not very responsible and I got divorced.

I spent more than four years alone and I fell in love again. I got married and had another son.

My new husband had his own business.

My hardest experience was when my husband died and a month and eight days later, my second son, Jorge, died of a heart attack.

I thought that I was dying too. It was a strong pain in my soul.

And finally I moved to the U.S.

Now I live with my daughter, but I have moments when I feel sad.

Student: Maria
Country: Cuba
Tutor: Keith French
Site: 14 West Main
**My Favorite Fable**

A fable is usually a short story, typically with animals as characters, conveying a moral. The reason I love fables so much is that they use simple stories to express complicated knowledge. Telling fables is an excellent method for parents to educate their children. I have learned a great deal from fables, and one of my favorites is “A Pony Crossing the River.”

The brief story is easily summarized. A pony and his mother are living near a beautiful river. One day, the mother wants the pony to deliver something across the river. When the pony arrives at the river, he does not know how to get across. At that point, a cow tells him that the river is so shallow that he can just walk through it. A squirrel, however, tells him that the river is extremely deep, and he will drown. After some hesitation, the pony plucks up his courage and bravely strides into the river. In fact, the river had its own reality. It does not like the cow calling it too shallow, and also did not like the squirrel calling it too deep. Finally, the pony safely walks across the river, and this is one of the most important experiences in his life.

Same for me. The main thing that I learned from this fable is to be brave. I am often too timid to directly face problems. I am also rather naive and think that if I do not care about problems, they will not disturb me anymore. I even hope that problems will solve themselves. Yet it is not always true. Indeed, if I do not solve problems on time, they will be like cancer cells—a small problem will grow and become a big problem. I realized that hesitation wastes time. What I need to do is act like the pony and never hesitate to start.

Before starting anything important, I sometimes struggle with whether I have a perfect plan. In fact, through practice and experience, the plan will be adjusted and improved. My abilities will be strengthened through the process. When I face the same problems again, I will solve them easier and faster. I think that is called growing up. When I am older, I will tell this fable to my children and look forward to seeing what kinds of wonderful legacies it will create.

**Student: Hanbing (Alan) Cao**  
**Country: China**  
**Tutors: Jerry Delameter and Desh Sharma**  
**Site: Yale Health Center**
My New Life in the United States

This is a short story about following a dream. Almost 9 years ago, I came to the USA from Ecuador with my two daughters. Everything was different. Everything was unknown. Everything was new. I was scared. Even so, I decided to continue forward.

I was walking a lot. I walked from my house to church, to Metro PCS, to McDonald’s. Now, I walk for exercise. But then, I walked for everything.

The first time I was going to SCOW (the Spanish Community of Wallingford), I got lost. Now I realize I was only 3 blocks away. But then, I was nervous because it was a new place for me. I went to a store and a woman told me where SCOW was. She walked with me and showed me where to go. I call her my guardian angel.

Now I think how difficult this time was for me and for my family. The truth is if guardian angels and organizations like SCOW didn’t exist, things would be different. Because of SCOW

- I got my first job.
- I got my second job.
- I got a job at McDonald’s and worked there for 6 years.
- I got my job as a nanny.
- My daughters got jobs through SCOW.
- I went to English classes.
- I took computer classes.
- I went to dancing class.
- I made friends. I’m not afraid because they speak Spanish.

Everything I have is because of SCOW. I think SCOW is the best place they have in Wallingford. I think I’ll never disconnect from SCOW.

Student: Maria
Country: Ecuador
Tutor: Stephanie Upadhyay
Site: Spanish Community of Wallingford (SCOW)

My Angel

There is a special angel who comes into my life named Nana. She spreads joy and happiness and wisdom of life. She is in Heaven looking down on me and guiding me.

Student: Rebecca Mohr
Country: USA
Tutor: Jill London
Site: Guilford Free Library
Mona’s Story

My name is Mona Abdullah. I am from Yemen. I live in the United States right now. I live in Meriden. I have 6 children. I live with my husband and children. I am learning to speak and write English. I am doing zoom classes from home and my children do online classes too!

My family and I came from Yemen. My husband drove us from Yafa to Aden. We stayed in Aden for 3 days. We went in a boat to Djibouti. When we arrived in Djibouti, we stayed in an apartment for 3 months, until we received our passport. After receiving the passport we went on a plane to Dubai, then from Dubai to the United States. My husband’s friend was waiting for us outside the airport. He took us to an apartment. At the time we were living in Bronx, New York. We stayed in New York for 6 months, then we moved to Connecticut because my husband works in Connecticut.

My children like the United States because it is safe. I speak with my friend at the doctor’s. Sometimes I go shopping by myself or with my husband. I like my new home.

Student: Mona
Country: Yemen
Tutors: Donna Maronde
Site: Meriden Public Library

Struggling

Read, and never give up, because when you give up you fail yourself. First don’t read just your assignment book, read the newspaper and magazines. Sometimes life is a struggle, but we move on. Become a member of a library. Make sure you get to know your librarian. Librarians provide instruction on how to find books on certain subjects. Librarians recommend materials and help individuals find the information that they need. So don’t be afraid or ashamed to ask questions, because that’s what they are there for, to help people. That’s part of their job, helping people help themselves. Your three main ingredients to reading are Reading, Writing and Arithmetic. Those are three ingredients in your basic part of learning.

The pandemic ain’t no joke, it effects people in different ways, by making them depressed and not wanting to do anything especially when they live by themselves. As far as I’m concerned, it took all the motivation out of me. But I shall prevail.

Student: Charles Mitchell
Country: USA
Tutor: Nina Ruckes
Site: West Haven Public Library
How I spent the Summer

Summer is over. Autumn came last summer and it was one of the most difficult times in my life because our family decided to change their place of residence. We moved to America.

Any move is always associated with some difficulties. Moving to another country is especially stressful. Of course, we decided to move because we hoped that with time our lives will get better. Moving to another country is not only a change of scenery, it is new people, a different language, and learning to live again! It’s difficult to communicate with people, how to pay bills and drive a car. It’s hard especially when you’re 45.

What good happened this summer? I met new people who are always ready to help. We met you and I think we were lucky, because we had the opportunity to learn English with the help of people who have spoken it since birth. I became better acquainted with the American way of life. I think that luck will help us to adapt to a new life faster.

It was my first summer in America. It was very hot. Several time a we went with friends to the ocean. I didn’t like the beaches in Connecticut very much. The beaches in Turkey are better. But it was interesting to watch the tides here, while in Turkey this does not happen. There are very beautiful parks in Connecticut. Nature, as if untouched, seems like people only recently settled here. I saw a lot of animals. I’ve only seen eagles and fish on TV before. I saw deer that do not fear people. For animal lovers Connecticut is a holiday, every day. This side of life in America I really like. Here even the friendly frogs are not fearfull.

These are my impressions of the past summer. There were many experiences and many new impressions.

Student: Olesya
Country: Russia
Tutors: Laurie and Brian Gray
Site: Wallingford Library
The Culture of Ecuador

The culture of Ecuador is a mixture of different traditions that originate in the Andes Mountains. Approximately 40 percent of the population are mestizo, a mixture of indigenous and Spanish Ancestry. The Ecuadorian population lives in eastern Ecuador while Quechua and Shuar constitute two main languages and cultures. Quechua and Shuar constitute two main indigenous languages and cultures. Quechua can still be heard throughout the highland regions. On the coast there is a greater concentration of Afro-Ecuadorians and small Chinese communities too. Ecuador is a home to a great variety of cultures. The variety helps to improve the conditions of these groups that have been oppressed through the history.

When many people think of culture, they think of the local food. The gastronomy of Ecuador is characterized by different ways to prepare foods and drinks. We can find 4 main regions: Coast, Mountains, Orient and Insular region Galapagos with respective customs and traditions. The “typical food” we find rice, eggs, potatoes, avocados, beef, pork. Because Ecuador has a wide Coastline, marine products are abundant. The Ecuadorian foods on the coast are more recognized dishes. We find ceviche (shrimp cocktail), fanesca (Easter soup), sancocho (meats guiso), chicken, fish, etc. On the other hand, the tropical zone of Ecuador is very rich in different varieties of fruit, naranjilla (lulo), guanabana (fruit soursop), granadilla (passion fruit), pitahaya (dragon fruit), etc. All these products are distributed in different regions. That is why the best dishes are found in Ecuador.

Student: Monika
Country: Ecuador
Tutors: Bud Sielaff
Site: 14 West Main Street

I Am Saadia ElBanani

I came here to help my daughter. She had twins, a boy and a girl. I stayed with her. I took care of the twins when she went to work. After she had another baby girl. When they grew up I went to Adult Education and I studied English Citizenship. I began to study English at night. Two days a week. Now the school is closed for one year because of Covid-19.

I am happy. I love to study English, and talk with people in English. I am also Moroccan.

I love America. I am American now.

Thank you.

Student: Saadia
Country: Morocco
Tutors: Will Minter and Martha Colaresi
Site: Wallingford Library
Samantha: The Mystical Unicorn

I wanted to better my future and show my children that even at 32, you could always reinvent yourself, recreate yourself, and you could always learn more. I am of gypsy descent and in my culture, my people, we do home schooling. They’re not interested in education. A woman, she just stays home, makes babies, cooks, cleans. What does she need an education for? My grandmother taught me how to read and write and she didn’t do a great job. Now my children—age 5 and 6—they think it’s amazing mommy is also going to school, like they are.

Things I’ve always heard of and now I could actually pick up a book and learn about them. I’ve always been interested in history and presidents. Always heard about certain books and Shakespeare but I could never read them. Now I could, instead of watching TV documentaries. I feel so brave. Now I’ll be able to get and maintain a job and it will bring so many opportunities to me.

People sometimes feel because of my circumstances, where I come from, I can’t relearn or can’t start over and that’s not true. I would love to teach my children, it doesn’t matter how much you’re struggling or when life knocks you down, you always get back up. Just because people disappointed you in your past, you still control your present and you can decide how you want to spend your life. I’m articulate. You’re not stupid because you don’t know how to read. You’re smart for wanting to better yourself. It takes a lot and we’re always moving forward.

I came up with Mystical Unicorn because I can walk into a roomful of people and they will say: “Samantha, I’ve never met anybody like you, who sees the world the way you do, who’s had your life experiences. Even though you’ve had many downfalls, you’ve always risen to the occasion, proven you’re a survivor, you’re strong, a capable woman.” I keep meeting people who say, “You’ve never seen a classroom, but when you speak, nobody would ever know. Samantha, if you didn’t tell me, I would never guess you are a woman with no education.” So that’s why I call myself a Mystical Unicorn.

Student: Samantha
Country: USA
Tutor: John Schwing
Site: Fair Haven Library
**My Story**

In the year 1996, as a tourist, I went to Hawaii, California and Toronto on vacation. The trips were enjoyable, and I was very happy.

In the year 1999, I visited America to see my son and family. It was the first time I came to strange places, and I had lots of problems. I couldn’t speak the English language, and it was very difficult for me. But I did use communication with a taxi driver, and I was able to get to my house address.

I finally came to live in the United States twenty years ago, and I enjoy the government and the many benefits of living here. My life is comfortable, and I have nice opportunities. I can enjoy education and studying the English language.

Thank you so much America. I love America which has many good leaders. It continues strong in the world.

**Student: Ching Mei Peng**  
**Country: Taiwan**  
**Tutors: Don Desmond**  
**Site: La Casa**

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**My Experience with Covid-19**

Around the first week in March I thought I had a cold. After more than a week, my cold got worse and I began to have diarrhea, had no appetite, couldn’t eat, a lot of phlegm and coughing. My sister and I got the Covid test, but a day after the test, I felt so bad that my family told me to go to the emergency room. It took me an hour to get dressed before I called 911. I was very weak and couldn’t breathe well. When I got to the hospital by ambulance, they told me that the test I took showed that I had the infection. I was nervous. I was put in a high level oxygen tent and got medications and intravenous fluids. After each day the level of oxygen was lowered as I got better. I had my cell phone and could communicate with friends and relatives.

After a week I came off oxygen and was released. I have been taking over-the-counter meds every day. I am getting help at home. A nurse comes two times a week and I get physical therapy at home. The nurse tells me that my heart races when I exert my breathing. This is supposed to get better in time. The physical therapist is helping me to improve my strength. My appetite is back. I am gaining back the 20 pounds I lost.

It seems that I got the infection from my church where I attend. There were 19 people from the church who were infected. I am thankful to God for being there for me. If I did not follow the advice of my family to go the hospital I could have died at home. I advise people to get vaccinated. Before I got Covid-19, I did not intend getting the vaccine. In 2 months I can get it and I will.

**Student: Stephen W. Jones, Sr.**  
**Country: USA**  
**Tutor: Rosemary Benivegna**  
**Site: Literacy Resource Center, 5 Science Park, New Haven**
The Year 2020

2020 was an excruciating year. It opened with a pandemic which is still raging over the world and ended with an ironic election. During the year, there were economic fluctuations, social conflicts and political games.

In order to suppress the spread of Covid-19, many countries limited international travel and encouraged people to isolate, so the global economy sharply shrank. In the beginning of 2020, the stock market fell four times in a relatively short period, which had rarely happened before. A lot of famous retail companies encountered bankruptcy, for instance, Neiman Marcus, Brooks Brothers and GNC. The rising unemployment rate led more people to become homeless.

After the initial outbreak of Covid-19, former President Trump’s rebuke of China seemed to trigger violence against Asian people. He was accused of igniting ethnic hatred and escalating social conflicts. After George Floyd was killed by the police officer, Derek Chauvin, the social conflict reached its culmination, protest after protest, and the slogan “Black Lives Matter” was everywhere. However, there were also a few bad apples who robbed stores and attacked innocent people.

Then, in the last few months of the year, the torturous election provided the hottest topic for the mainstream media and Americans. The two political parties exploited all their power to appeal to their voters as well as to denigrate their opponents. As a result, we experienced crowded campaign rallies from Trump regardless of the social distance rule. We also experienced a great deal of astonishing news, such as Hunter Biden accused of bribery, and Trump impeached for abusing the power of the presidency.

Nevertheless, 2020 has passed. It was definitely a historic year, and all the sorrow, pain, heroism, and hard work will be remembered. Time is still going on, and so does life. Though life is harsh, we can seek joy amidst sorrow.

Student: Jia’an Yin
Country: China
Tutor: Jerry Delameter and Desh Sharma
Site: Yale Health Center
My Spring Breeze, Soojin

I grew up in South Korea. In 2013, my husband and I moved to Germany where he began his Ph.D. studies. We lived there for 5 years. I attended German language classes and spent time with many international friends, and also with a few Korean families. We met almost every day. It was like a real family.

Five years later, we came to the U.S. for my husband’s post-doctoral studies. I thought I would make friends easily here, too. But I couldn’t. Although I heard that many Koreans lived nearby, I didn’t see anyone anywhere. For these reasons, I felt very lonely and gloomy during that first winter in Connecticut.

Eventually, the lonely winter went away and spring came. Soojin came to me along with the spring breezes. She is the wife of Hunki, my husband’s colleague and friend. Soon, we all became friends. They were so lovely, kind and outgoing. Whenever I met them, I felt their optimistic energy. They introduced us to many things that brought joy to our life: day trips to New York City; classes for international students; and Sally’s and Pepe’s!

Of course, Soojin had a good influence on me. During the winter of 2019, before I met her, I was so discouraged and lonely. After spending time with her, my negative and insecure behavior became more positive and confident.

What I am most grateful for, is that Soojin and Hunki really liked my kids, and they played a lot with them, like a real aunt and uncle. At that time, my son was so lonely and had much stress at school because he couldn’t speak English well. They always soothed and encouraged him.

Last year, Soojin and Hunki moved to Massachusetts. We thought that we could easily meet, but that thought was wrong. Because of the Covid-19 travel advisory, we couldn’t go to their home. Soojin and I missed each other so much. She had become lonely after she moved to a new place, just like me at the beginning.

Another spring came and the travel ban was lifted. We were finally able to meet them. The spring breezes brought Soojin and me together again. Always - I thank, I miss, I love you, my lovely friend, Soojin.

Student: Youjung
Country: South Korea
Tutor: Charlotte Luzzi, Virginia Stevens, Eleanor Weseloh
Site: Keefe Center, Hamden
Hello my name is Valbina, I am from Ecuador. Today I will talk about 2020 the most difficult year that the whole world had to go through. Despite being far from my country, I have felt the pain of many people who lost their families there. They lost them without being able to say goodbye to those people who are no longer with us today. People were hungry because they couldn’t go out to look for their daily bread out of fear to get infected and infect their loved ones. This 2020 we were at war with an enemy that we could not see or touch. It ended the lives of many. My family and I thank God for having us healthy and alive. We hope that this nightmare will end very soon and we can continue living. I also hope that we all learn a great lesson and can be better people, to better care for each other and the planet.

Student: Valbina Vasquez
Country: Ecuador
Site: LV Gateway
Tutors: Enid Sherry and Stephanie FitzGerald
We all have a dream, And mine is.
We all have a dream, some can become true, some we hope one day they do!
Some are personal dreams, that we have deep in our hearts, for you, for your love ones.
Some dreams are too big, that our eyes can’t see.
Those are the ones, we all share.
We all dream about a better world, a more united and less violent world.
A world where every single person, can live with something so simple for a lot of us like water, bed and food.
A world where politics are real, and when i say real I mean transparent to the people, Where we get know the real facts behind them and not the cover up.
A world where politicians are more worried on how do we help those families, than how do we get the votes from those families.
A world where we all understand that we won’t live forever, That we are not here to stay and accumulate as much as we can.
A world that understands that life goes beyond that, beyond any possession we can acquire through-out our lifes.
A world that understands, we are all in this race, why not help each other enjoy it and get to the end safe?

Student: Juan Carlos Rodriguez
Country: Colombia
Site: LV gateway
Tutors: Allyson Freeland & Ali Baldenebro
Our tutors thoughts on their “Why”, what motivates them in their work with Literacy Volunteers of Greater New Haven.

**How long have you been with LV?** Three weeks

**What do you do for LV?** I tutor two clients who want to learn how to improve their reading and writing skills.

**Why do you do it?** I was very fortunate in being able to attend college and develop my skill in English literature. I love to read and I love to write! I am now happy to share my knowledge with others and help them become more proficient in reading and writing.

*Tutor: Cathy Jennings Parent
*Site: 14 West Main, Meriden

I have been a volunteer tutor with Literacy Volunteers for the past seven years. I believe that improving literacy among individuals who do not have equal opportunities due to socioeconomic disparities can bring about more equity in our society. From a basic level, “literacy is truly survival” for many individuals who struggle daily to read and understand English in their day-to-day interactions with others. I feel honored to be a part of Literacy Volunteers’ mission. Being a part of this amazing organization gives me the opportunity to help others who want to change their lives for the better by achieving their individual goals.

Literacy Volunteers gave me the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of adults who struggle with reading and other literacy skills. I feel honored I can meet so many different individuals and listen to and understand their experiences. Being a tutor means I am embarking on a journey that involves building trust, having patience, and being flexible and creative in your teaching style to help that student reach their personal literacy goals. It is rewarding to a student’s self-confidence to grow as they gain mastery of reading and conversational English skills.

*Tutor: Charlene Vanessa Clarke
*Also: Literacy Volunteers Board Member
*Site: University of New Haven Library (West Haven)

**Name:** Fran Jakubiak, Tutor

**Site:** 14 West Main, Meriden

**How long have you been with LV?** 9 years

**What do you do for LV?** Teach Math – basic skills through Algebra II.

**Why do you do it?** I love math and I love teaching. It’s fun to be with students who want to learn.
There are many ways to master concepts – in sports, in academia, in society, and in music. Of those many ways, I am beginning to realize that the best way to master concepts is by teaching them. Teaching is one of those practices that provides great rewards to both the instructors and the students. Even as a high school student, I experienced the personal benefits and satisfaction of teaching and coaching others. As a college student who has actually studied how to teach, I am eager to work as a tutor with Literacy Volunteers. I decided to join Literacy Volunteers this year because I am excited to work with others and help them acquire the important skill of reading. Through the tutoring process, I hope to help students improve their knowledge about the world. Also, I am genuinely interested in hearing their stories. I am incredibly proud to do my 2021 summer internship with Literacy Volunteers.

Tutor: Chris Duffy  (new tutor; completed training in May 2021)
Site: West Haven Public Library

I have been a tutor with LV for 3½ years. I tutor in both math and reading. I have also helped some individuals with getting recertified in certain areas as well as having a class to help those who are interested in getting their learner’s driving permit. I look upon myself as the messenger and not the message. I feel that since I’ve retired in 2017 I want to give back to the community. I strongly believe that the ability to communicate with each other is a means to pursue a fairer economic system as well as make it a more equitable world. My hat is off to everyone who is in pursuit of these goals.

Tutor: Gene Kirsten (3 ½ years)
Site: Literacy Resource Center, 5 Science Park, New Haven and Workforce Alliance, New Haven

How long have you been with LV?  about 10 years
What do you do for LV?  Tutor English Language Learners in two classes (Survival Level and Beginner Level at Junta but now on Zoom during COVID.)
Why do you do it?  I feel that learning English is a gateway skill in the United States to engaging in one’s community, accessing resources, communicating with neighbors and service providers for adults and children, increasing school and career opportunities, and knowing one’s rights. I feel that I am making a difference in working with the students as they learn and improve their English language communication skills. In addition to teaching English, the students in our classes become a resource to each other. We learn about each others culture, our common concerns and our differences. It is very rewarding as a tutor to see the commitment, progress, and increased pride of each student.

Tutor: Sophie Tworkowski
Site: Junta
For me, it was all about my retirement. When I left the world of paid work I didn’t want to just retire to the couch and the TV remote – I needed to stay active and busy. OK – so more time on the golf course and on my bicycle – that was assumed. But I wanted to find a way to give back to a world that had been so good to me.

So, I started thinking – what does the community need? What skills did I have? Well – throughout my career, I recognized the value – actually the need– for effective communications. I had travelled quite a bit internationally and found that language differences were a big obstacle to effective communication. I learned how to work through language differences – trying to say things in different ways, slowing down and having the patience. I also tried to learn just a bit of the language from the many places I travelled. That showed me how hard learning a new language can be.

Then I thought about the USA and our local community. We are a very diverse nation with people coming from all over the world. How can people come here and thrive if they struggle with day-to-day communication? For new arrivals in the US, English struggles are the first and biggest obstacle – hardest to overcome – and most important. That was it – my way to give back.

In addition to helping students, I have found that working with Literacy Volunteers has helped me to personally learn and grow. My students become friends and I learn so much by speaking with them about their native countries and cultures. Some may think we only work with students whose native language is Spanish – and indeed many are. But I have also had students whose native language was Mandarin, Korean, Farsi, Italian, Portuguese, Arabic – and probably some others I may have forgotten. My current four students each come from a different language background. Learning about their native countries – their stories – is fascinating. And I’ve watched them grow and become more and more comfortable reading and speaking in English.

So – highly recommended for anyone who wants to give back – and at the same time have a wonderful experience for themselves.

**Tutor: Bud Sielaff**
**Sites: 14 West Main Street; Wallingford Public Library**

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**Name:** Nora Vasilescu, Tutor  
**Site:** 14 West Main, Meriden & Zoom  
**How long have you been with LV?** Almost two years  
**What do you do for LV?** Reading, writing, grammar classes  
**Why do you do it?** I am an immigrant – it’s about giving back, no matter how little.
I’ve been with LV for three years.
I tutor in both Basic Literacy and ESL. Before the pandemic I taught mostly at the Science Park location, occasionally filling in at Junta. For the last year it’s been Zoom classes for ESL and shared reading and discussion over the phone for Basic Literacy.

I enjoy working with anyone looking for help with English. The students who come to Literacy Volunteers understand how important their study is for every aspect of life, from employment and personal relationships to travel and basic safety. They’re motivated, and with motivated students it’s easy to keep things fun and interesting. The challenge for a tutor is to find or create lively methods and materials that are effective with individuals and in groups. I learn a lot myself, both from lesson-planning and in class with students.

Tutor: Doug Logan

How long have you been with LV? Since fall 2010.
What do you do for LV? I tutor “survival-level” English language learners. Most are referred through Junta for Progressive Action and are Spanish speakers.
Why do you do it? I enjoy the interaction with the students and seeing them gain confidence and competence in English. They give me a window into the lives of immigrants and other cultures that I would not otherwise have. Their motivation is an inspiration!

For me it’s fun to develop a lesson plan and think of ways to make a class interesting. I have always co-tutored with other LV volunteers and I appreciate the connection with them. During the pandemic adapting classes from in-person to a Zoom format was a special challenge, but together we did it!

Tutor: Nancy Brown
Site: Junta

I took the tutor training sessions last fall. I have been working with my first student during the past few months. I am a strong believer in “paying it forward.” I am fortunate to have had a wide open path to education. Literacy Volunteers is giving me the opportunity to “pay it forward” – through teaching, guiding, and establishing a learning environment with LV students.

Tutor: Neil Zack (6 months@ LV)
Site: New Haven Remote
The best time is when everything goes wrong

There’s always a certain tension in the air for a tutor (at least this one) with Zoom. You have activities lined up, you and your students are all trying hard to make the technology work, but anything can happen—so it’s hard to relax. And of course the best learning happens when everyone is relaxed. So what do you do?

I have the answer! By mistake, you press a button that triggers a software update on your computer just before the class and the computer crashes completely—so you have only your phone to start the class and no access to all the great things you have prepared. All you can do is make something (anything!) up and see what happens.

This is how my class began a couple of weeks ago. I told the students what had happened and said we would start with each of us asking the others about everything we’d always wanted to know about each other. For forty minutes there was not a moment of silence. The students talked and talked. If practice makes perfect, perfection was getting closer!

Tutor: Andrew McLaren
Site: LV Gateway

Before “Pass it forward” became a popular phrase, I, a senior citizen, experienced it many times in my life. I was, and still am, a recipient of love and support that comes in a variety of ways from family, friends, and sometimes from people I’ve never met. I’ve benefited from a hug, a word of encouragement, financial assistance, a prayer and more.

Literacy Volunteers has provided me the opportunity to “Pass it forward”, to give my time and use the skills I have to help another. The thing is, in the process, I too have benefitted in immeasurable ways.

Tutor: F. Kay Twyman - (1 year @ LV)
Site: Literacy Resource Center, 5 Science Park, New Haven

I had always been interested in doing work in the community to help others who are trying to improve their lives. In giving, we receive.

Tutor: Rosemary Benivegna (3-4 years @ LV)
Site: Literacy Resource Center, New Haven
I became a volunteer because my mother’s tutoring experiences were so important to her that I included Literacy Volunteers in her obituary. She had been a librarian during and after college, and always made sure there was a Bookmobile available for her kids. When we did our homework with friends, we’d sometimes wind up helping them with reading. One of my friends couldn’t figure out the word “once” until I said, “Once upon a time...”. She didn’t need tutoring after that because she figured out on her own how to put hard words into context.

LV assigned me to tutor at New Haven Adult Education in a night class taught by an awesome teacher, Jim. First, I worked with an older lady whose education had ended around middle school. She started night school when people at her religious center, people she’d thought were her friends, actually bullied her for not having a high school diploma.

Another student had come from a country where education was a privilege beyond his mother’s grasp. He tried hard to get to class but often couldn’t because he worked nights, so progress was slow. I showed him how my mom had shown me to sound out words. Next time he came to class, he was exuberant and had tears in his eyes. It had clicked. He had been practicing, sounding out words in advertisements on buses and billboards.

If I never do anything right for the rest of my life, I’ll feel that my life had purpose because I taught a man to read. That sounds melodramatic – but from time to time over the years, he would call to thank me again. Every call made my heart race with joy. It was one of the best “natural highs” I have ever experienced. When you’ve helped someone else read, you’ve made a difference.

Tutor: Rebekah Carolla (7 yrs @ LV)
Site: New Haven Adult & Continuing Education Center

I think the following attributes are needed to be a good volunteer: I have tried to bring those attributes to my work with any of my volunteer efforts.

Generosity: A willingness to give of your time and talent to others.
Understanding: Because their lives might be very different from yours.
Empathy: An ability to put yourself in someone else’s shoes and feel what they must feel.
Compassion: To truly care about making someone else’s life better.
Patience: Because the process doesn’t always go as smoothly as we would like.
Dedication: To stick with the student and see it through no matter what.

Tutor: Janie Holmes (5 years @ LV)
Site: Literacy Resource Center, 5 Science Park, New Haven
Why do you do it? What initially prompted me to volunteer to tutor ESL students was a combination of my background in education, my interest in languages and culture, and my desire to engage in meaningful volunteer work during my retirement. What keeps me continuing to volunteer is the students. I often feel that I learn so much more from them than they do from me. It’s their “attitude of gratitude”, never failing to thank me at the end of every class. It’s the respect, kindness and encouragement that they always show one another, no matter the differences and/or disagreements that might exist among their native countries. It’s their enthusiasm for learning English and the (sometimes confusing) ways of American life, and their pride in sharing their own culture with all of us. It’s their cheerfulness, no matter what challenges they face, and despite the cultural mishaps or frustrations they experience. In short, my students help me to always appreciate the goodness found in people everywhere.

Tutor: Eleanor Weseloh (10 years)
Site: ESL Tutor, Keefe Center

Two years ago, when I first met my new literacy student, I suggested we share a bit about ourselves and I asked her if she wanted to begin or if she wanted me to. She asked me to go first. I shared my family history and that I attended high school and college. Following college, I became a teacher, then went into business. However, I told her as a student, I had problems comprehending information visually and that as a result, I read more slowly and with less comprehension than other students.

I had to “translate” all of my written work via a recording (audio) or learn by taking notes (kinesthetic). This was hard work and took much time. I did well in college and graduated with a degree in teaching. I was asked to teach a class to children who had problems learning in one or more modalities. I was “perfect” for this teaching assignment because I knew what it was like and could adapt.

After my introduction on that first day, my student seemed so relaxed and very happy. During her long introduction, she willingly told me all about herself and the problems she has had; both personally and educationally. She said she did not realize that there was more than one way to learn something.

From that very first literacy session in May of 2019, we knew we would make a great team by providing each other with encouragement, positivity, humor and creativity. We both learned that the most important first step in learning is to make peace with your vulnerable qualities because there is almost always a way to compensate or work around them.

What could be more rewarding than helping one more student jump over that wall of self doubt to see the recurring promises brought on by lifelong learning?

Tutor: Karen Arata
Site: Wallingford Public Library/Remote
As a tutor, my Literacy Volunteers experience has been gratifying both intellectually and emotionally. I started tutoring in 2013 after I had helped a neighbor’s sister with English. Her sister felt too shy and embarrassed to attend classes. The goal was to get a job at a local clothing store so we would read though advertisements from the store and practice the vocabulary. She did eventually get a job and felt more confident. I signed up at Literacy Volunteers because I enjoyed helping and I have been tutoring ever since.

I admire the people I meet, who are brave enough to come to another country and learn a new language. Each person has their own challenges that they have faced. Each student is unique, with his or her own story and has his or her unique needs, goals, and dreams. Even though I am a native English speaker, teaching can be challenging because things that we know implicitly, sometimes need to be explained explicitly to English learners. This experience has led me to a new direction, and I am currently enrolled at Southern CT State University in their graduate TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) program.

The surprising thing is that I have learned so much from my students. They have shared not only their lives and cultures, but I have learned about art, cooking, Latin American literature, interesting movies, and world politics from varying viewpoints. I now look at the world through a broadened lens.

**Tutor: Cora**  
**Site: Miller Library**

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I’ve been a tutor 2-3 years. I’ve always been involved in reading efforts, from Recording for the Blind when that was in New Haven, to Jewish Coalition for Literacy for K-4 children, to LV.

**This is why I do it:**

Understanding blooms.  
Watching knowledge grow by tests,  
Teaching helps me too.  
Confidence blossoms  
With reading and aceing tests.  
Covid set us back.

**Tutor: Nina Ruckes (2-3 years @ LV)**  
**Site: West Haven Public Library**
Our staff and volunteers thoughts on their “Why”, what motivates them in their work with Literacy Volunteers of Greater New Haven.

**Name: Rosemary Pilch**
**How long have you been with LV?** 9 years
**What do you do for LV?** Program Manager
**Why do you do it?**
It is personally gratifying to help tutors teach students basic literacy skills. I cannot imagine my life without the ability to read or to write well. I believe helping adults improve these basic life skills, especially in America, creates a profound, positive change in their lives.

**Name: Val Kilmartin**
I’ve been a Basic Literacy tutor for 8 years. Working with Literacy Volunteers was always my “retirement plan.” I began on the Monday following my Friday professional retirement. On May 27, 2021 I attended the Gateway Community College graduation of a student I’ve been tutoring since 2013. That was one of the proudest and most thrilling experiences of my life. What more can I say about this experience?

**Name: Barbara Hedberg**
**How long have you been with LV?** 1 year
**What do you do for LV?** I serve on the board. I attend meetings, serve on the development committee and support fund raising activities.
**Why do you do it?**
I believe in the importance of literacy for everyone and believe Literacy Volunteers makes literacy available to people who would not have access to learning without the program.
Name: Betty Brumberg
How long have you been with LV? Board of Directors
Why do you do it?
This cause means a lot to me because of our mission, which is to give our students the proper language skills to live their most fulfilling lives possible. I remember my grandmother sending me to the store for her when I was little (8 or 9 years old) because she didn’t speak English well. I remember my own parents, who were partially raised in an orphanage during the Depression, getting their GEDs when I was in high school. How proud they were! Those memories hit home when I think of people who struggle with the English language.

Name: Ife Michelle Gardin
How long have you been with LV? 2 years
What do you do for LV? I am a Literacy Volunteer and a Board member
Why do you do it?
I became a volunteer because I am passionate about empowering people through Literacy. I truly believe in the mission of the organization to empower adults through Literacy. I believe literacy is the key to having a productive life.

Name: Erica Hoffman
How long have you been with LV? 2 years
What do you do for LV? ESOL Program Manager for New Haven
Why do you do it?
I work for Literacy Volunteers because I have always been interested in helping others and nothing is more empowering than being able to speak, read, and write in the language of the country that you live in. I see how much satisfaction our volunteer tutors receive from helping with their students. The students are grateful to Literacy Volunteers and their tutors for the opportunity to have free English classes.
Name: Amy Myers
How long have you been with LV? 7 months
What do you do for LV? I was hired to fill a new position at LVGNH. I am the Operations Manager and I work closely with the Executive Director, Program Managers, and the Board of Directors to help make sure programs and committees are running smoothly and have the support they require.
Why do you do it?
As a child, I can remember Saturday mornings with my mom and grandmother sitting at the dining room table. Every week like clockwork, my mother would read every letter and bill my grandmother had received in the mail that week. My grandmother spoke English well, but never learned to read it. She was born in Hungary and came over as a teenager, got a job working as a domestic and eventually worked in a factory. Reading was never a skill she “needed” as a woman. She made sure, however, that her daughter learned to read and instilled a love of learning in her – so much so, she became a children’s librarian where she taught so many other children the love of reading!
I couldn’t imagine not being able to read the paper in front of me or feeling like I didn’t “need” to learn to read because I am a woman. I have been blessed with a wonderful life filled with opportunities and I wanted to share that with others. I was so thrilled to be given an opportunity to work with Literacy Volunteers. I am such a small part of the big wheel that is turning here promoting and teaching adult literacy, but I could not be happier to be a part of it.
My earliest memories of my mom are of us reading together. What began as part of a bedtime ritual quickly became one of my favorite pastimes, and a cornerstone of our relationship that helps keep me grounded to this day. Throughout my childhood, my mom introduced me to a range of children’s literature, comic books, magazines of all kinds, novels and memoirs to spur my imagination. Those stories inspired me so much that, one day, I announced to her that I wanted to be a writer. She told me: “If you really want to learn to write well, you have to read everything you can get your hands on, and write every day.” Everyday? I asked. “Yep, every day.” She handed me a pencil and a composition notebook and I happily accepted the challenge.

That moment set me on a path, and my mom was an able accomplice in my pursuit of the written word. She encouraged me every step of the way as I crawled, walked, stumbled and ran in a world filled with language and words, stories and books. She invested in journals, typewriters, laptops and countless books, sought out writing internships, and showed me that reading and writing are ways of engaging more fully with the world.

Only now am I beginning to appreciate the gift she gave me. Reading and writing are a kind of passport that has allowed me to travel, explore other languages, places and cultures, to reimagine the world around me, and work with others to make it a better place. So whenever I open up a new book or turn to my keyboard to write, I remember it was my mom who first read to me, who gave me permission to imagine worlds beyond my own, and to follow my curiosity wherever it might lead.

- Sean Greene
Meriden Wallingford Tutors & Volunteers

Karen Arata  Brian Gray  Mary Lombardi  Cathy Parent  Stephanie Upadhyay
Barbara Belejack  Laurie Gray  David Longworth  Ishani Patel  Nora Vasilescu
Paul D’Andrea  Kelly Grimshaw  Leslie Mahler  Paul Scollan  Kerry Sheldon
Jodi Dutchyshyn  Fran Jakubiak  Donna Maronde  Will Minter  Bud Sielaff
Keith French  Patty Koniuta

New Haven Tutors & Volunteers

Ian Alsgaard  Chris Duffy  Valerie Kilmarin  Elizabeth O’Neill  Jan Simmons
Julie Ann  Douglas Dupuis  Gene Kirsten  Cynthia Ostroff  Randy States Robinson
Kris Arnold  Stephanie FitzGerald  Gladys LeGrand  Michele Penn  Virginia Stevens
Leslie Arthur  Allyson Freeland  Dhana Llivichuzhca  Cora Perrone  Kimberly Stewart
Norma Barash  Bini Freeman  Beth Lofquist  Miriam Puterman  Todd Stone
Rosemary Benivegna  Becky Friedkin  Doug Logan  Charlene Raube  Rebekah Sue
Cathy Buchanan  Mary Fulton  Douglas Logan  Paula Resch  Yaritza Torres
Grace Cannon  Brian Garland  Jill London  Karen Reyes-Benzi  Snow Turner
Melinda Charles  Fernando Giannella Carolla  Charlotte Luzzi  Sandra Rivera  Sophie Tworkowski
C. Vanessa Clarke  Robert Glen  Andrew McLaren  Carol Roberts  Kay Twyman
Jan Clarke  Cecilia Hadley  Andrew McLaren  Nina Ruckes  Sonya Valentine
Lynn Corner  Susan Hathaway  Christina McLaughlin  Hana Rudnick  Eleanor Weseloh
Debbie Cook  Aziza Hill  Tammi Means  Joanne Sacchi  Donna Wesolowski
Brian Cookson  Janie Holmes  Paula Messina  Andrea Schieckel  Kayla Whitcomb
Frank Corrigan  Merle Hornstein  Ife Michelle  Peter Schwartz  Edmond White
Amy Crowell  Thanh Huntington Gardin  Catherine Miller  John Schwing  Daniela Wolin
Alizzandra Danker  Donald Iddings  Bonnie Morehead  Desh Sharma  Liz Wrynn
Jerry Delamater  Ramoya James  Bill Murray  Enid Sherry  Nina Yuen
Don Desmond  Geoffrey Johnson  Emily Nguyen  Joshua Shroder  
Julia Ding  Dennis Kay  Conor O’Keefe  Debbie Siegel

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