To All Friends of Literacy:

Please enjoy our 2022 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. This edition also includes essays from our tutors and staff. Congratulations to all these courageous authors as we work toward a sense of normalcy in what continues to be a challenging time world-wide.

This year LV continued to carry out its mission to assist adults needing to learn English along with strengthening their reading skills as well as grow and expand our impact in the communities we serve. Our focus continues to be:

OUTREACH: LV added to our staff outreach coordinators to engage organizations to promote our Free Literacy Services and connect with new and returning students and tutors. Our Valley Literacy Program has been expanded with the addition of a full time Valley Regional Literacy Coordinator to increase student and tutor enrollment and engage more effectively with Valley social, educational, religious organizations and for-profit businesses.

ACCESS: LV has invested in a variety of strategies for our staff, tutors, and students to access our services more effectively through technology expansion, acquiring new curriculum and software, tutor manuals and take-home workbooks for students.

EQUITY: LV continues to be committed to partnering with all people to meet their personal learning goals, access resources to meet their basic needs, and advance their own and their families’ goals. Low-literacy people are at the most risk for job loss, housing loss and health problems. LV has launched an Equity Taskforce which organized equity trainings on dimensions of diversity microaggressions for board, staff, and tutors as well as a Diversity, Inclusion and Equity assessment.

Thank you to all our partners who have made this edition of HOV possible, our wonderful and dedicated tutors, staff and of course our students who have shared their stories and accomplishments. All of this represents empowerment through improved literacy and true testimony of the impact this has had on their lives.

Vital support from 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 and truly appreciate our many community “Partners in Literacy”!

Again, please enjoy all 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 2021-2022.

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.

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**Challenges In The New Life**

Immigrating to a new country is challenging, especially when the new place is very different from one’s home country. I had to make the decision to immigrate to the United States with my family in 2015 leaving behind relatives and all memories. Immigration for a single person is hard, but being responsible for a family adds to the challenge. Some of the first obstacles that I faced were the language barrier, culture shock, and finding a job to provide for my family. The idea of losing one’s job any day because the factory might go bankrupt or close at any moment is scary for a father of four children. However, after a few trials, I was lucky to find the factory that I have now been working at for almost six years. My wife and I both studied agricultural engineering in Iraq. We could not use our degree to work in the US, however, without certification. My wife and I aspire to provide a better life for our kids, and our main priority is their education. With the language barrier, it has not been easy to help our kids with their school at home. However, we try our best. One of the events that was rewarding for us as parents was that our oldest daughter studied at the University of Pennsylvania and will be attending Stanford University School of Medicine next year. As a father, I will continue to work hard with the hope that my younger three children will continue to receive their education and achieve their dreams in the future.

**Student: Aamel Alrashid**  
**Country: Iraq**  
**Tutor: Robert Glen**  
**Site: La Casa**

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**Perseverance**

Li Bai, one of the most famous Chinese poets in the Tang dynasty, was talented when he was young, but he did not like to study. One day while he was having fun near a river, he saw an old lady who was filing a thick iron bar. He was curious and asked her: “What are you doing, madam?”

The old lady wiped the sweat from her face and said: “I want this iron bar to become a sewing needle.” Li Bai replied: “In which year will you be done? It seems impossible.” The old lady told him, “Young man, if I keep doing this, I will have a needle someday.” He was shocked and inspired by the amazing perseverance of that old lady. Afterwards, he studied hard and finally became a great poet.

I have benefited a great deal from this story. The main lesson is that perseverance is a key to success. By doing one thing for a long period of time, I can accumulate experiences and possibly become an expert in one field. I have, for example, been writing essays for several months. At first, I had no idea about how to write an English essay. I definitely knew how to write it in Chinese--my native language. Yet I did not know how to clearly express my thinking in English. I have been learning English for many years--a tough process! I frequently struggled and wanted to give up many times.

I was inspired by Li Bai’s story, however, and encouraged myself to keep working just as the old lady did. I extended my vocabulary by writing down idioms learned from English classes. I also read and took notes of product instructions in my home to learn new words daily. I motivated myself to share more interesting Chinese fables and traditional customs with my friends. Because of these efforts, I make fewer grammatical mistakes and have strengthened my English.

**Student: Hanbing Cao**  
**Tutors: Jerry Delamater and Desh Sharma**  
**Country: China**  
**Site: Yale Health Center**
The history of Poland extends over a thousand years. Medieval tribes developed into Christian Poland in 966 under Prince Mieszko I. This royal line ruled until the 14th century when a new queen who came from Hungary was crowned in 1384. She became the greatest queen in Polish history. Her marriage to a Grand Duke of Lithuania led to a union between the two nations, a Commonwealth, which lasted from 1386 to 1795.

Between the beginning of the 16th century and the first part of the 17th century was the Polish Golden Age. During this time Poland was considered an early democratic monarchy becoming one of the first multicultural states in history. The Commonwealth was one of the most influential in Europe, both culturally and politically. In the mid-17th century, the country started to weaken. A sudden rise of the Tsardom of Russia, the Kingdoms of Prussia and Sweden, as well as the Ukrainian Cossack’s pursuit of independence, resulted in the Commonwealth’s territory and political significance shrinking. Conflicts between nobles destabilized and exacerbated the country’s vulnerability. The Commonwealth declined, and was partitioned by Austria, Prussia, and Russia. In 1795 Poland ceased to exist.

Poland regained independence in 1918. The interwar period, 1918-1939, was devoted to the process of rebuilding and reuniting the devastated and divided country. It celebrated theater, cinema, and music. Hitler’s invasion in September of 1939, combined with Stalin’s army from the East, erased Poland from the map in just 27 days. After the Second World War Poland was re-established but as a communist state under the influence of the Soviet Union. Economic stagnation, shortages of basic goods, a lack of political freedom, and no free media caused great social unrest and protests. In the 1980’s the Solidarity movement led to the peaceful revolution that freed Poland from Soviet dominance. Poland commenced fundamental reforms, including switching from a state-controlled to a free-market economy. Poland joined NATO in 1999 and the European Union in 2004.

Growing up in Darfur
I grew up in Darfur, in a small village. There was only one school, which was quite far from my house. Also, girls were not allowed to go to school. I never went to school, so I never learned to read.

There was a war in Darfur in 2003, and my family needed to leave for a safer place. I traveled alone to Egypt where I got married and lived in a refugee center for 9 years. We had three children there and realized that life in Egypt was difficult. We knew that our children would have a better future in America.

We came to America in 2014, speaking no English. We came through IRIS, where I went to English class 4 days a week. I learned how to speak English quickly, but reading was a big problem since I didn’t learn any alphabet as a child. Learning to read as an adult has been challenging.

I have received help from so many kind people, including my friends Elaine and Chris, who helped me with my driver’s license and my citizenship test. They are helping me now with the classes I take at Literacy Volunteers. Havenly Treats told me about Literacy Volunteers and I am so grateful to everyone there for their support. My teachers are very kind and easy to talk to. Note: Badria dictated this to me as I wrote. (Elaine)
Facts about Toxins and Poisons

This semester I’m taking two classes at Gateway College. One of them is Western Civilization, which is very interesting and goes hand in hand with the art history course I took a while ago, but its focus is more political. The other class is Toxicology, the study of poisons. Learning about the different toxins and what body parts they affect is an eye-opener. It makes me realize how many mistakes I have made in the past because I didn’t know how some foods and drinks are bad for my body.

Here are some lessons from the class. Many people don’t know that there may be poisons such as arsenic in medicine. They can be helpful but are often misused. The Borgias in Italy were experts in using arsenic to poison people who were in their way. That lead in water is hazardous is a well-known fact. The Flint, Michigan, crisis was in the news for years, but even dried herbs and spices can carry lead, arsenic, and cadmium. Another poison is benzine. Sunblock sprays and deodorants are just some of the products that contain benzene. The public needs to be more educated about this.

One fascinating article we read is about eagles. After the government banned DDT, the eagle population rebounded, but a study found that nearly half of them have lead poisoning. They feed on the carcasses containing spent ammunition. Hunters who are environmentalists feel bad about the situation and want to help to stop it. Switching to copper bullets is an alternative, but copper bullets are more expensive.

Venomous animals, like some snakes, produce poison in a highly developed gland and deliver it by biting or stinging. In contrast, there are some animals that become poisonous by ingesting toxins, which is new to me. Even the beautiful monarch butterfly is poisonous. There is poison in the milkweed that caterpillars eat, which then poisons the butterfly, but butterflies are not dangerous to humans.

I enjoy the toxicology class. It educates me and helps me to understand the basics of toxins.

Student: Barbara Gunn  
Country: Germany  
Tutor: Jerry Delameter and Desh Sharma  
Site: Yale Health Center

Important Education

In 2002, I started taking English classes at the New Haven Adult Education School. My life was busy. In the morning, at 8:00 a.m., I was on a bus going to school. The class started at 8:45 and ended at 10:45. I then rushed to catch a bus to go to work at the restaurant in Orange on the Post Road.

When I arrived at the restaurant kitchen, the chef was laughing at me. He said, “Are you a senior woman who still likes studying? Do you think next time you will marry the President?” I didn’t react. I just kept going ahead practicing my English.

Right now, I have my driver’s license and citizenship. I’m a good citizen. I can also receive government benefits. Because I have a driver’s license, I can go to market shopping. I don’t need my son’s help.

I trust myself.

My teacher says, “All the people need to continue to study new information to insure nice lives.”

Student: Ching Mei Peng  
Country: Taiwan  
Tutor: Don Desmond  
Site: La Casa
**Advice for Students Who are Struggling with Reading**

Struggling with reading is a very serious situation. I enjoy reading because it's a form of silent communication. Without knowing how to read, you will be lost in this huge world. There is more to reading than just reading! There's comprehension, which is understanding what you're reading. And there's context reading. That means getting the meaning of a word from the words around it. So don't give up on reading. Because when you give up, you let yourself down as well as the people that care about you.

Reading is very important. When you get your lab work back in the mail, you have to know what the lab work is saying. Reading is also good for shopping. Reading is also good for understanding labels. I wish I could get in the habit of writing more, like someday writing my autobiography. Without knowing how to read, people can take advantage of you. I would like to keep up with the literacy training because there is no end to reading.

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**Student: Charles Mitchell**  
**Country: USA**  
**Tutor: Nina Ruckes**  
**Site: West Haven Public Library**

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**My New Life in America**

My name is Carolina Hernandez. I was born in Medellin, Colombia. I arrived in the United States 6 months ago full of dreams and hopes. I always wanted to live an experience in another country, with different traditions, language, and people. It took a long time to organize.

There were many changes during the first month - family away from me, different food, traditions and customs, plus a new language. English became my first challenge. I knew a little English but I couldn't understand when people talked to me. My second problem was being alone. The people in my household work hard every day, all day, all week, and sometimes I've felt alone.

During the third month or so, everything started to get easier, classes started and I could see how being in a school not only helped me grow intellectually, but also helped me relate better, make friends and spend quality time in different spaces.

Since I started this new lifestyle, 6 months have passed. I will soon be starting my seventh month in the United States and I can feel like my level of English has improved thanks to the classes with Literacy Volunteers. My friends have increased and now I can feel much more comfortable with my new life.

I definitely have a lot to learn, but I am receiving the support and the help to achieve it easily and safely.

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**Student: Carolina Hernandez**  
**Country: Colombia**  
**Tutors: Enid Sherry and Swarupa Madhaven**  
**Site: LV Gateway**
**When I was a Child**

I lived in Medellin Colombia in a neighborhood that called Los Alpes. It was a small neighborhood in that time. The road ended up in a stream and now does not have a bridge. The only car that frequented our neighborhood was my father’s car, so my brothers, my friends and I played in the road. We jumped rope, and my mother taught my friends and us to ride a bicycle. We played baseball and soccer in August and in September my mother made kites. In December she made tissue paper globes and fly them.

On Saturdays my parents would invite some of our friends for a ride and we would go in my dad’s truck somewhere outside the city. They always looked for a place where we could run safely and close to a small river where we could swim. My dad used to make lunch (sancocho) soup with meat, potatoes, yucas, carrots, corn because he didn’t know how to swim so my mom who was a good swimmer took care of us.

Today I remember my father laughing all the time happy to see us be happy and my mother playing with us.

Student: Cruz Bedoya  
Country: Colombia  
Tutors: Barb Levine and Todd Stone  
Site: LV Gateway

**Season of Change**

My name is Daniel Vines. I was referred to LV by the agency I am with--the American Job Center. I needed help in both reading and math. I have passed the reading test. Currently I am studying with tutor Gene Kirsten to pass the math test.

I am hoping to get into a bookkeeper training program. I have been involved with Chapel Haven for 19 years. I have learned life skills such as cooking, budgeting, doing chores such as cleaning the apartment and doing laundry, as well as shopping for groceries, and social and communication skills with my peers. I have also learned how to do a job search.

Since the beginning of the year, I have lost 10 pounds by exercising and eating healthier. This has changed my lifestyle where I feel better both emotionally and physically. I feel that I have come a long ways in the past 40 years where I have overcome my disabilities. This has given me more confidence in myself, and I have lived on my own for the past 17 years.

Student: Daniel Vines  
Country: USA  
Tutor: Gene Kirsten  
Site: Literacy Resource Center
My Great Adventure

My name is Eduardo Vazquez Cano. I am 28 years old. I am from the Mexico state of Morelos.

I have lived 6 months in New Haven now. Moving here has been a great adventure. I came here to be with my girlfriend. She is from California and came to Connecticut to study Law at Yale. For both of us it has been an adventure. We moved to a place unknown to us, living this stage is amazing. This is totally new. The country and people are very different, living 28 years in one country and seeing differences it is very interesting. I learn something new every day. It is my first time experiencing winter. Where I am from it’s always hot. Because of that, I like winter. My favorite part of moving to the US is trying all the different foods of other countries.

Student: Eduardo Vazquez Cano
Country: Mexico
Tutors: Marrisa Latsavanh and Susan Hackett
Site: LV Gateway

Where to Go and How to Get There

I really appreciate all of you. You're the reason I was able to accomplish what needed to be accomplished, and for that I thank you honestly. Thanks for everything. When you're determined to get somewhere in life there are some obstacles that come out of nowhere. At that point, you must reach them and then crush them and learn from it.

Along your journey to your goals, it's certain people that stroll into your life to help you achieve that goal and/or place you're determined to get to, and the tutors and staff at Literacy Volunteers are some of those people. I was someone trying to get somewhere but didn't know how or have the right tools. But after finding Literacy Volunteers things changed as far as me seeing where to go, and I appreciate them 100% because they helped me continue my journey to where I wanted to be and what I wanted to do. I was trying to pass my ASVAB test to enlist in the Army. I wanted to have a certain score in order to have a variety of job options. With their help, I was able to not only pass, but to pass with 15 points more than I was expecting and for that I am thankful.

Student: Gerno Allen
Country: USA
Tutor: Joshua Greenberg
Site: Literacy Resource Center
I Help, You Help

This year I have had a number of obstacles. My mother-in-law passed away in October. Some members of my family and I all came down with Covid. My mother came over from Syria and had several health problems. Right now I am celebrating Ramadan where I fast all day. I have been appreciative of the help I have received from my tutors Catherine and Gene. I love to help people. I have helped my fellow Syrians and other members in the community. I feel that my goal of getting my GED has been put on hold. I am determined to put more time and effort in so that I will get my GED, and I look forward to a training program to further help people.

Student: Ghada Chater
Country: Syria
Tutor: Gene Kirsten, Catherine Miller
Site: Literacy Resource Center

My Hometown-Xinjiang

Xinjiang, in the northwest of China, is my hometown. Its name, however, is in the news, not for its stunning scenery or multiculturalism but because of so called “racial tensions.” As a Xinjiang native, I am sad to watch news that makes accusations against Xinjiang. So, I would like to share my own story about growing up in this multi-ethnic region.

Like my father, I was born and raised in Xinjiang, which is officially known as the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region and is inhabited by more than 40 different ethnic groups, the largest of which are the Uyghurs and the Han. Other minority groups include Hui, Mongolians, Khalkha, Kazakhs, Uzbeks, Sibos, Tajiks, Tatars, Russians, and Tahurs.

I am Han Chinese, but a significant number of my classmates and friends were minorities, mostly Muslims. Like kids all over the world, we studied, played, laughed together, and celebrated special days like birthdays and holidays. It was our tradition to visit their homes and celebrate Corban Festival with them. We met their families, wished them “Eid Mubarak,” and enjoyed their traditional cuisine. We looked forward to the Muslim holidays as much as they did. I noticed the differences between me and my minority friends when I was a child. We looked different, spoke different language at home, and celebrated different holidays.

But these differences didn’t affect our friendship at all in daily life. We met every day, ate in the same Halal restaurants, and danced together to the same popular Uyghur and Kazakh music. Speaking of music, on my own wedding day, the dance music included folk songs from the Uyghur, Kazakh, Tajik, and Russian ethnic minority groups. People in our region firmly believe folk songs and Xinjiang folk dance are vital parts of a wedding, even though they are Han Chinese. It’s a tradition like using Mendelssohn’s Wedding March at a wedding ceremony in the United States.

Now I am in the US, reading claims that minorities are being persecuted in China, which is opposite of my experience, I feel the importance of sharing my story.

Student: Haijuan Liu
Country: China
Tutor: Jerry Delamater and Desh Sharma
Site: Yale Health Center
Hawaye’s Story
My name is Hawaye Ali. I was born in Sudan. I came to the United States when I was 31 years old with my three children and my husband. In 2015 I had a fourth child here. We came here because my country was not safe and we were the chosen one to come to America. In 2015 everything was hard for me. I didn’t speak English. I went to IRIS class so they helped me with speaking and writing.
America is safe for us right now because there still so much wars in Sudan.

Student: Hawaye Ali  
Country: Sudan  
Tutors: Enid Sherry and Swarupa Madhaven  
Site: LV Gateway

Never Stop Learning and Trying
It has been almost 4 years since I started to take English as a Second Language classes with my tutors at Literacy Volunteers. Although I knew basic English when I came to the U.S. in the summer of 2017, for some reason, I was afraid of doing many things, such as asking for help from store associates, making phone calls, giving my opinions at English classes. Because of language and other cultural barriers, some of which I created for myself, I would find excuses for not doing these things and avoided having conversations with others. I was very nervous when I had to communicate in English with people I encountered.
Now, I’m more confident, relaxed and I even enjoy speaking with others in English, largely because I’m now more comfortable with American culture and have improved my English skills. These changes could not have happened without the people who supported me. I appreciate my ESL tutors and classmates, the friends I have met from different parts of the world, my family and neighbors. Some of these people were in a similar situation to mine, and others had very different backgrounds. They all encouraged me and were a positive influence as I worked on improving my English and trying to be more confident when speaking. All of these people have been very supportive and respectful.
Also, it was very important to me that my ESL classes continued by Zoom during the very difficult Covid pandemic because it helped me continue to learn and practice my English skills. Also, class was very important because it allowed me to connect with more people during the lockdown period and I was able to continue receiving support for my English-speaking goals.
When I would think about what I have accomplished in these last four years, at first, I couldn’t find many achievements. But, as I thought more, I realized that there have been many changes and achievements. I have continued my English studying and improved my English skills, gained more confidence, and made many precious friends. I’m not sure about where I will live or be doing 5 years from now, but I would like to promise myself that I will never stop learning and trying.

Student: Hiroko Tatsuno  
Country: Japan  
Tutors: Charlotte Luzzi; Virginia Stevens; Eleanor Weseloh  
Site: Keefe Center
**Asylum**

Hello! I am Jean-Pierre from DRC. This is my first time to be in USA.

Before I moved to Connecticut, I was a human rights activist. I faced bad treatment by police of my country. Then, due to that bad treatment, I was forced to flee my country to Brasil. From Brasil I moved forward until USA, to seek asylum. But it’s not easy to get it here in USA.

**Student: Jean-Pierre**  
**Country: Democratic Republic of Congo**  
**Tutors: Marrisa Latsavanh and Susan Hackett**  
**Site: LV Gateway**

**Origin of the Chinese New Year**

When talking about the Chinese New Year, we shouldn’t neglect the lunar calendar, which is based on the monthly cycles of the Moon’s phases and has been used in China since 1,600 BCE. This calendar is a guide to the agricultural process. The first day of a new year in the lunar calendar is called the Chinese New Year or the Spring Festival. Though the first day of a new year varied in different dynasties (the lunar calendar evolved over a long period of time), the celebration is always spectacular and lasts for fifteen days until the Lantern Festival.

There are several legends about the origin of the Chinese New Year. The most famous one is about expelling a monster called Nian. It says that in ancient times, there was a kind of fierce monster that lived deep in the mountains and forests, would go to human communities every New Year’s Eve to eat livestock and even human beings, and would leave before dawn. Having been through this tragedy many times, our ancestors figured out that these monsters were afraid of the color red, loud noises, and bright light, so they developed a series of approaches to keep the monsters away. People would post red couplets on doors and wear red clothes, set off firecrackers, and keep the light on all night on New Year’s Eve. Furthermore, they would prepare a rich dinner for the whole family (because of the uncertain fortune), and before dinner, they would worship ancestors and pray for safety. After dinner, families would get together, chatting, cheering, and staying awake until dawn; they would celebrate for the new life. In terms of the legend, Chinese people call New Year’s Eve Guo Nian, which means stay safe through the night.

The legend about the origin of the Chinese New Year seems logical, because even after thousands of years, we still celebrate this way. However, no one would believe the monster Nian exists. In fact, the celebration of the Spring Festival is a way to wish happiness and wealth in the new year. All the customs developed serve this concept. For instance, the color red and firecrackers symbolize happiness and flourishing business, and the traditional dumpling symbolizes family reunion.

**Student: Jia’an Yin**  
**Country: China**  
**Tutors: Jerry Delamater and Desh Sharma**  
**Site: Yale Health Center**
I Prefer In-Person

I prefer ESL classes in person because I have the opportunity to socialize and meet new people since this is not my country and I don’t have a friend foundation like in my country. In my country I had friends from the neighborhood, college, high school, soccer, music, family friends, work, etc.

Student: Jimmy Allison
Country: Peru
Tutors: Ruth Bryan and Nancy Ferraro
Site: LV Gateway

Nepal Temples and Holidays

My name is Kalpana Thapa, and I came to America from my country, Nepal. I speak English as a second language. It is still difficult for me. I like English, an international language. I believe all American people are good. Nowadays, I can study about America and practice writing. This is my new country, the United States of America. Everywhere there are beautiful places, and all things are good. So, I love to be here.

My country, Nepal has its own Hindu Nepali culture and traditions and also many tribes. Nepal has many very old temples, monuments and shrines to different Gods. Buddha, Siva, Sita, Kali and Gadesh are some of these Gods. All Nepali temples and monuments are registered with international heritage organizations. For example, UNESCO has an office there.

Festivals to these Gods are very important. A very great festival is called Dashi. All Nepali people like this God festival. Hindu people pray and worship in temples. Nepali people pray outside along rivers, in the sun, under the moon, or under a special Pipal tree. During this festival, Nepali people wear new clothes and anything new. At this time, people eat very good food, and the government gives a fifteen day holiday. People are very happy and meet other families. Distant families come to visit and stay together. They share food, clothes and many things. Nepal also has other short time festivals when both rich and poor people can enjoy themselves and be happy.

I like my country Nepal very much. The climate is very good and the people are also good.

Student: Kalpana Thapa
Country: Nepal
Tutor: Don Desmond
Site: La Casa
**Attending Class Online**

Attending English classes online has made my English better, it has improved a lot since the start. Online classes are also very convenient for me, coming home from work and being able to just turn on my computer is very helpful. Not having to put the effort and money for driving has saved my time, energy, and money for better things in life. Before online classes I was not able to attend these types of classes in person because of the activities my children would have, that interfered with our schedules. My kids would have sport practices where the drives would be long and I would not have made it in time for these classes. Being able just to relax, put on comfortable clothes and manage my time easier made me have a better learning experience. Another thing, being in a safe environment with Covid going around has made me feel safe and to be more open. Our safety is the most important thing, safety is always first before anything. With gas polluting the air, we are also able to make Earth a more safe and less polluted environment. Overall, my experience has been great with online classes, I could not have wished for anything else to come out of this. I would like to thank all my teachers for enabling me to learn English in a safe and comfortable environment.

**Student:** Jolanta Skonieczna  
**Country:** Poland  
**Tutors:** Charlene Raube and Daniela Wolin  
**Site:** LV Gateway

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**“My Life”**

My new life in this country has been different in many aspects, starting with how it looks and how people live and eat here. Every day goes fast, and mostly you always have a routine to follow, such as work or study. There is not much time left in your life because of the distances between the places where you also spend a lot of time driving to get to any location, at least in the state I live (Connecticut). I like it here because there is a lot of nature and the people are friendly. I love my work and the people around me.

I’m from Colombia, a beautiful country full of joy, diversity, nature, good food, and music; best known for its friendly people and excellent coffee. Besides the fantastic combination of traditions and places, my country has incredible tourist destinations of all kinds: beaches, mountains, rivers, deserts, snowy mountains, and many more. On the other hand, we have an immense variety of typical food dishes from every country region, which probably anyone would love.

My biggest dream is to become a travel nurse. For this big dream, I have to finish college, work hard and improve my English because my goal is to become a nurse either here or in Canada; also, in my personals dream, I yearn to have a family to share my dreams with.

English can be challenging, but once you pursue learning, it can become effortless, so my best advice will be to surround yourself with English in your daily life by listening to music in English, watching series or movies in English, practicing online with native English speakers.

**Student:** Laura Marin Ortiz  
**Country:** Colombia  
**Tutor:** Chavon Holman  
**Site:** Derby Neck Library
Getting Lost at Night in New Haven

My name is Linda Figueroa. I came from Puerto Rico about 3 years ago. I was living with my niece. She took me to Junta to find all the necessary aids to establish myself in this state.

I moved by bus to get to my appointments and to follow the different ads to find my apartment.

One day I took the bus and I missed the bus stop. It was in the night. Everything was dark and the temperature was 30 degrees. I was using the GPS of Google maps. I didn’t understand it well. Then I started walking following the instructions of the GPS. I was lost about one hour.

Finally got home. I was freezing and tired. That was a worst experience coming to New Haven.

What is Your Life Like in a New Country and Culture?

When I decided to come to the United States, I had a lot fear, I did not have anybody that I know, but my luggage was full of dreams. I arrived here on 5 August 2021, from the first all was perfect, I am here because I am Au pair, it is a cultural exchange program where you have to choose a family and the family has choose you because you have to take after their children. The family that I chose was perfect is composed of the father, he is from Perú, the mother, she is from United States and the only child, this is the family perfect, I have created a connection very strong with her. They made me feel comfortable in this country.

In my 5 short months, I have been enjoying everything, I love meeting new people, I enjoy knowing new place, I like being on the beach, I love eating all food, American, Mexican, Korean, China food. I have had the opportunity of taste all the food. Trying new foods brings us closer together.

Every day I wake up to struggling to learn more and more English, it is my main reason why I am here. The possibility of speak another language is my fondest dream but I have to acknowledge that learning another language is a process. However, sometimes I feel frustrated because I cannot say like I am feeling or I thinking in that moment, sometimes I wish I could speak more fluently.

I haven’t been living here for much time but I can say that it is a process with many changes and challenge. The changes we are not prepared to experience but if you are willing, can became true your dreams. I will be here until I speak English very well.

Student: Lisseth Pinto
Country: Colombia
Tutors: Ruth Bryan, Nancy Ferraro, Desh Sharma
Site: LV Gateway
Why I Stayed in Belarus While My Husband Emigrated

In 2004, my husband immigrated to the US. However, almost everyone who knew me wondered why I stayed with my son in Belarus. Now, having the benefit of hindsight, and knowing all the intricacies of immigration and reunification, I understand why I could not leave Belarus at that time.

The most decisive factor for my remaining in Belarus was lack of money. When we looked for ways to obtain funds to leave, my brain just exploded. There were no opportunities for additional work or part-time jobs in Belarus. If we choose to leave for the US as a family, we would run into debt because we did not have any savings. This scared me very much. And so, we chose the safest way - my son and I would remain in Belarus. At the time, we thought it was the best solution. However, none of us suspected how long and difficult it would be for all of us. It took 7 long and painful years for my son and me to obtain Green Cards. I thought it would never end. During all of that time, I cried many burning tears, and regretted that I had given up the chance to leave together.

Another factor was that my son had a serious eye disorder, and could see almost nothing with his right eye. His surgery was scheduled for February 2005 in Belarus, 13 months after my husband left. Later we learned that if all this had happened 1 or 2 months earlier, we could have filed an appeal for health reasons and try to get visas for us. I felt everything was lost. Now, from my own experience, I know and understand that I could live with a child and survive in the USA. But in Belarus, my child was treated as a hopeless invalid. I was very scared.

Due to our lack of money, we were afraid that my husband would be denied a visa. But, we got lucky. He began corresponding with a former colleague who had already immigrated to the United States. He agreed to provide a document of financial support for my husband, and to have my husband stay with him and his family. While my husband was busy trying to get settled, looking for work and adapting to American life, my son and I, in Belarus, lived full of hope and the expectation of a speedy reunion.

Student: Liubou Kuftsina  
Country: Belarus  
Tutors: Charlotte Luzzi; Virginia Stevens; Eleanor Weseloh  
Site: Keefe Center

Giving Back

This year to say the least has been challenging for me. Myself and some members of my family came down with the Covid virus.

I loved that my granddaughter and great grandson lived with me for a month. I was able to treat them as guests and it gave me something to do. I still intend to get my GED in the next year or two. After that I am planning to get involved in helping people. This way I feel I’m giving back to the community.

Student: Louvine Spears  
Country: USA  
Tutor: Gene Kirsten  
Site: Literacy Resource Center
I Have a Dream…

I’m Marcela, I’m from Colombia, today I want to tell you about a little part of my life that I call “my new present” or “My dream.”

First, I have been an elementary teacher for 20 years, and I love this part of my life, but the Covid 19 pandemic made me think about what I want in my life.

I realized that I was a teacher for many years doing things very well and with my heart but my heart was not feeling very happy so I decided to start looking for something that would make me happy.

Then I decided to find the power in my heart and discovered coffee, yes coffee! It is a millennial beverage that has the power to make friends when you are drinking and give energy during the day. Then I decided to research coffee and discovered that a barista is a person who prepares beverages using coffee and I decided to join a barista class, this world is amazing. Each day I’m falling in love with the coffee and, with the passing of time I have discovered my dream.

My dream is to have a coffee shop where people come to enjoy Colombian coffee and other specialty coffees from around the world, making friends, and have a fun time discovering places in Colombia and around the world through a cup of coffee. So that to drink of cup of coffee will be a great experience. Also in my coffee shop there are classes about the coffee culture, tasting coffee and barista classes. This is a great opportunity to join together my two passions be a teacher and coffee. What do you think about my dream?

Student: Marcela Cajamarca
Country: Colombia
Tutors: Barbara Levine and Todd Stone
Site: LV Gateway

This is My Prayer

I Pray that you realize God’s love is infinite.
When you give God your heart God will protect you from evil and that is definite.
God even protects you even when you are an infant.
God is so magnificent.
I will not be maleficent.
God is so significant.
God made us unique and different.
God helps us not be inconsiderate.
I will study God’s word and not be ignorant.
God loves everyone he does not discriminate.
I will not be defiant with God I am confident.
That I will not join an evil covenant.

Student: Michael Taylor
Country: USA
Tutor: Alan Solomon
Site: Derby Public Library
My Daughter and Son

My daughter and son live in Las Vegas. They work at their jobs. My son is living with their grandmother and my daughter has her own apartment. My son’s name is Chris. He is 28. My daughter’s name is Jannete. Jannete is 24. She is a social worker. She works with children.

I visit them in Las Vegas, sometimes in summer. Sometimes I go in winter. Chris came in April to visit. He stayed for two weeks. We went out to eat and spent time doing things together.

Jannete is coming to visit in June. We will be going to Hershey Pennsylvania.

I’m happy when my children come to visit me.

Student: Mika Sato
Country: Japan
Tutors: Desh Sharma and Ruth Bryan
Site: LV Gateway

Japanese Flower Arrangement “ikebana”

Hello, my name is Mika Sato. I moved to the US from Japan last winter. Today, I would like to introduce Japanese flower arrangement “ikebana” as a part of Japanese culture.

First of all, let me tell you why I chose this topic. I believe that “ikebana” is the best way to convey the charm of Japanese culture. One of the aesthetics that symbolize Japanese culture is “Wabi-Sabi”. This word means the beauty of something profound and rich that can be felt naturally in a quiet environment. By learning “ikebana”, we can all become aware of the beauty of “Wabi-Sabi”

Next, I will tell you what “ikebana” is, by discussing the two major differences between it and the normal flower arrangement.

The first is that it does not use a vase, a needle-like object called a “kenzan” is placed on a floral plate and the flowers are inserted into it. This allows the flowers to be arranged more freely, and allows the individuality of the flowers to shine through.

The second is that we do not use too many kinds of flowers. Rather than using a lot of flowers, we can create a work of art that respects the space, so that the beauty of each individual flower is brought to life.

The attached photo shows a work that I have created in the past in the above manner.

Finally, let me tell you about my introduction to “ikebana.” It was through a friend at a company where I worked in Japan. I started casually at first, but quickly became fascinated with it, as I realized that the time I spent interacting with the flowers made me forget all of my daily worries, and the things to do, it made me feel clean and refreshed. Since then, I have obtained various certifications in “ikebana”, and this past April, I was an instructor at an event in New Haven, to introduce the charm of “ikebana.” It was my pleasure that about 30 participants enjoyed the time.

Are you busy with work, household chores, and other things that need to be done every day? At such times, “ikebana” will soothe your soul and add color to your life.

Student: Mika Sato
Country: Japan
Tutors: Desh Sharma and Ruth Bryan
Site: LV Gateway
My Dreams for the Future

My dreams for the future are to see my children grow up healthy and happy and that they become trusted professionals. I hope that my children find the loves of their lives and form stable homes. I hope to have four grandchildren and see them grow up and enjoy them a lot. I would like to grow old together with my husband and enjoy his company until the last day of our lives.

One of my big dreams is that my brothers can come to this country to be with my parents and me. I want to enjoy the Christmas holidays with them again and I would like to see my nephews grow up. I have the opportunity to share again on Sunday afternoons. I dream that my parents have a long and healthy life and enjoy with them the simple things in life like having a cup of coffee or watching a movie or taking a walk in the park.

I wish with all my heart to learn English to be able to write, speak and understand it. I would like tostudy to be able to pursue my professional career in this country and get a good job to save money and buy a house. I would like to contribute to the development of the Meriden community by giving computer classes or some subject that I know and can help more people.

I would love to be able to travel with my husband and children and get to know Greece. I hope one day to return to my country Ecuador to meet again with my family and friends and eat again the rich dishes of typical food and walk its streets and beautiful tourist places. There are so many things that I would love to learn, such as baking, balloon decoration, painting and salsa dancing.

I dream of giving back to each person who helped me on my way and being able to give them back their time, tips, love, friendship and all the good things that have contributed to the growth and development of my life so far. I wish that all my dreams come true and that the dreams of all the people in the world come true too.

Student: Angela Andrade  
Country: Ecuador  
Tutor: Keith French  
Site: Meriden office

Which is more important, freedom or health?

My family plans to come to the United States on New Year’s day in 2020 but COVID-19 suddenly happen, the flight was interrupted and my plan was disrupted. The Chinese government strictly required everyone to wear masks, and covid-19 soon disappeared. However, other countries in the world have disputes about wearing masks, so the impact of the virus has always existed. The flight did not return to normal. Now, most people have been vaccinated and flights have slowly returned to normal. So we came to the United States in December 2021.

Before I was in China, everyone complied with the requirements of the government, everyone wore masks when going out, and everyone volunteered to get vaccinated. But there is a disadvantage, we can not travel to other provinces.

When I came to the United States, I found that many people don’t want to listen to health professionals. They require individuals to have free choice. Some of them think the health experts are wrong and that the vaccine is a new virus.

It’s really hard for me to understand. Maybe this is American culture? The United States is a free country. Freedom should be above all else, more important than health?

Student: Xing Lou  
Country: China  
Tutors: Barb Levine and Todd Stone  
Site: LV Gateway
Do you like attending class using a computer?

When I had to think about it, to attend the class on Zoom, it was a tricky question for me, but as you have asked me then, I think it has pros and cons when I compare it to in-person. If I must consider which is the method I like most I was becoming confused. I am mixed up, and I think this must be very difficult for me to decide.

Firstly, I chose the topic of how I will use the computer, which is the easiest way for me to do small things. Electronic devices make my work more effective and intelligent. When I am attending the class on the computer compared to the traditional method, which is taking a course in person, going to college is less for me because I think that method usually needs more attention. When I take a class on the computer mostly my attention diverts. I will mostly do more than one work simultaneously; I should not focus only on my technique. I have used to do other stuff in my hand and mind, which is the most annoying thing for both my tutor and me, so it is hard for me. I thought that attending class in zoom is easy for the student because its app is available everywhere, and any student can learn doing at home.

I like to take class on zoom because I believe much of my time will be saved in taking the course on zoom. If I have a phone, I can take the class anywhere. Going to school most likely my time is wasted. For example, suppose I have no car. In that case, I will go to the bus and wait at the bus stop, and sometimes the bus does not come on time. I will arrive late, sorry, so if I have a phone, I will take a class anywhere on zoom. Most of my time is saved, I will easily manage my time, and when I have a task, I know it everywhere because I have written in my reminder, which makes its uncomplicated.

Student: Rida Butt  
Country: Pakistan  
Tutors: Barbara Levine and Todd Stone  
Site: LV Gateway

My Life

When I was 30 years old, I took a look back at myself. I did not know how to read very well. I was thinking about going back to school to learn how to read better. I also like math, English, and spelling.

When I started with my tutor, I was nervous at first, but now I am getting better at reading and math. I am not nervous anymore.

The Reading Program is important to me, and the best for me. It has helped me a lot, and I am happy to keep learning all I can.

My Work

I work at the Big Y grocery store. It is a great place to work. My manager’s name is Anna. She is a nice person to work with. I didn’t have any problems when I had to go to another store.

I am always at work on time. I come to work happy. I bag groceries and help people to their car.

This year is my 19th year at Big Y. I love Big Y because they treat me well. I will work there until they kick me out!

Student: Vanessa Caldwell  
Country: USA  
Tutor: Mary Alice O’Brien  
Site: Derby Public Library
My Family – My Strength

My earliest memory is of my sisters when we lived in Westville. My baby sister Lisa slipped on the ice and hit her head. I carried her into the house to my mother. She needed stitches at the hospital. My other two sisters were Loretta and Lynette. Before I was born a brother and sister died from a gas leak in the apartment. After I was born my brother Darryl died from pneumonia.

We moved to Bassett Street in New Haven. We kept moving from place to place. Since my mother worked and my father had two jobs, we kids did not see them very much. I felt that I had to be there for my mom which made my sisters think that I was a momma’s boy.

I decided I had to make my own way and looked to pick up work wherever I could get it. By doing this, I figured I could contribute to my mother and put less pressure on her so she could provide more for my sisters. I was lucky to have my grandparents who also provided support.

At age 16, everything changed. I had picked up smoking and drinking. I was on my own - I took temporary jobs and became a man before my time. I had been expelled so many times from the schools I attended. My school education had ended. By the age of 17, I was living with my grandparents. I acted out by getting into mischief and fighting. I was sent to Clifford Beers for treatment. Instead of taking the medication that was prescribed, I was defiant and faked taking the pills. My behavior was actually giving me the attention I wanted.

After several jail sentences for assault and fire arm possession and my mother’s passing in 2010, I turned my life around. My three sisters were there for me. I joined a church in New Haven which the three of them also attended. Loretta took me into her home to satisfy parole.

I am grateful today for all the support I have received from my very large family and church members. I have 4 children, 8 grandkids and a host of nieces and nephews. Being involved in the literacy program has helped me to do my usher duties at the church and to be able to read the Bible.

Student: Stephen W. Jones, Sr.
Country: USA
Tutor: Rosemary Benivegna
Site: Literacy Resource Center

I Like To Learn English

I’m learning English because it’s good to communicate with people. It’s good to understand other people. I want to make friends. If you know English, it will help you to work. I can help the kids with homework. English helped me to pass my citizenship test and to get my passport.

Student: Mirishahe Mehmeti
Country: Kosovo
Tutor: Linda Gabor
Site: Zoom
**A Single Mother in a Foreign Country**

I came to the United States in 1996 to start a new life with my husband. I didn’t know English at that time. Life was very difficult for me in many ways. I attended a welcome party where people of different countries were talking and having fun. Not understanding, I could only smile. I watched TV without understanding anything. When I went shopping, I would look at the packages and try to guess the contents. I love driving, but I could not pass the driving exam because my English wasn’t good enough. I couldn’t work as a doctor because I didn’t have enough English to pass the exams. Although I am quite smart, I started to feel as if I had a low IQ. A wall had formed between me and the world.

Unfortunately, my relationship with my husband got worse and worse. After Fatma, my daughter, was born, we divorced. I was a single mother in a foreign country whose language I did not speak.

I had to earn money to take care of my daughter and to pay for English lessons, but it was not enough for both. So I went to a place that gave free English lessons, taking my daughter with me in the evenings. I could not speak English, and neither could she. When Fatma was 3 years old, she just made strange noises I couldn’t understand. I felt as if the world had collapsed around me.

There were foreign families in the apartment complex where we lived. Fatma had a young Chinese friend. One day, her friend’s mother started talking to my daughter in Chinese, then she turned and spoke to me in Chinese too. I said, “I don’t know Chinese.”

“But your daughter speaks Chinese,” she said in surprise. I started laughing. My daughter was growing up with friends from different cultures who spoke different languages and becoming a citizen of the world. Fortunately, I was also improving my English.

Being in a foreign country wasn’t so bad after all. Those beautiful people who helped me to survive as a single mother in a foreign country by trying to teach me English have always had a special place in my heart.

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**Student: Zeynep Coskun**  
**Country: Turkey**  
**Tutors: Jerry Delamater and Desh Sharma**  
**Site: Yale Health Center**

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The story behind my name - Monica Jacqueline Encalada Villamagua

As we all know, Hispanics usually have a first/second name and two last names, in my case my first and second names were chosen by my father, who was a huge fan of reading, movies, philosophy and politics. I don’t remember well who inspired him to call me Monica but I do remember how he told me how much he admired Jacqueline F. Kennedy, in honored of her he decided to choose Jacqueline as my middle name. You may notice how my whole name is very long, so long that it used to stand out in school and high school. Whatsoever, I love my whole name, since I am very proud to have both, my father’s and mother’s last names. I am currently divorced but when I was married, I never used my husband’s last name, personally in my opinion, I don’t like having someone else’s last name that is not related to me. I respect whoever disagrees with me. It’s all about principle.

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**Student: Monica Jacqueline Encalada Villamagua**  
**Country: Ecuador**  
**Tutor: Ruth Bryan**  
**Site: LV Gateway**
**My American Dreams Keep Coming True**

My name is Fatumata Kamara. I’m from Liberia in West Africa and the sixth of thirteen siblings. When I was six years old, my family fled to Guinea where I was inspired by my little cousins’ dedication to their education so I want to be an inspiration for others. I used to teach the alphabet to children in my neighborhood who couldn’t afford to go to school. You have to stay focused for your dreams to come true. My hope was to trust myself and believe in God that I am going to be who I want to be.

Since I was a little girl, my first hope was to come to America and improve my education. In 2014 when I was 20 years old, I migrated here to live with my Aunt’s family and become someone I have always dreamt of. I didn’t know how to read, write or speak English well, but when I found Literacy Volunteers my life completely changed. Reading started getting better every single day. I received my high school diploma from New Haven Adult Education in 2018. Then I got a scholarship for Gateway Community College while working two jobs. I focus on my education to set a big example for my nieces and nephews. If I can do it, you can do it, too. Last month I received my Associate degree in Criminology. This is by far one of my most significant achievements because I am the first female in my family to earn a college degree.

More dreams are coming true! Last summer I became a US citizen, and this spring I was accepted by Penn State and the Peace Corps. In September I will move to Lesotho as an Adolescent Health Advocate for two years. I’m excited to meet people of different backgrounds and speak their languages. Seeing other people happy has been a significant part of my life. In Africa there are many smart kids with big dreams but no opportunity. I want to share the love and create smiles on the faces of children I believe have struggles similar to mine.

Coming to America has allowed me to create a new me and build a better future. I am a proud example of the American dream. To have patience, belief, hope and trust are really hard for some people but I think I have these things in me. I never give up for anything. No matter what you are going through, keep chasing your dreams.

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**Student, LV Board Member: Fatumata Kamara**

**Country:** Liberia  
**Tutor:** Karen Reyes-Benzi  
**Site:** West Haven Public Library

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**Rebecca’s Horse Adventure**

I enjoy riding at High Hopes. High Hopes is a riding therapy stable. My horse is Val. She is a white and grey mare. She likes to neigh. And she likes to walk fast. I like that, I feel like she is not going to sleep on me. She loves having treats. I feel really relaxed and seeing Val makes me very happy.

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**Student: Rebecca Mohr**  
**Country:** USA  
**Tutor:** Jill London  
**Site:** Guilford Free Library
My “Why”

Our staff, tutors and volunteers thoughts on their “Why”, what motivates them in their work with Literacy Volunteers of Greater New Haven.

Name: Corinne Fucci
How long have you been with LV? 6 months+
What do you do for LV? Literacy Coordinator for the Valley Program
Why do you do it?
I think helping people learn how to interpret and share thoughts, ideas, and information through written and spoken language is one of the most meaningful types of work I can be doing. Learning how to read and write or learning a new language in a new home country are transformative and emotionally stirring experiences. And in observing the interactions between tutors and students, I know the tutors appreciate the importance of the work their students are doing and genuinely care about helping them succeed. Being able to witness the connections tutors and students make is my favorite part of my job.

Name: Charlotte Luzzi
How long have you been with LV? 11 years
What do you do for LV? Tutor
Why do you do it? Pure selfishness. There’s the joy I get from watching students achieve success with their English skills over time. There are the emotions I feel when I see their inspiring “transformations” from shy, anxious students to confident English speakers. And then there is the knowledge I receive from my students about their countries, their culture, their unique perspective. When they express how grateful they are for the help they’ve received with from the Literacy Volunteer’s tutors, I always let them know that we’ve probably all learned more than they have.

I have been a Literacy volunteer tutor for nine years. During these years I have tutored many Literacy and ESOL students. I was the first ESOL tutor at Gateway, it was a 12:30 Lunch Conversation Group and lunch has lasted for nine years, but who is counting! We usually had around ten students, with very diverse backgrounds: Afghanistan, Sudan, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, Mongolia, China, Japan, Turkey, West Africa(various), Brazil, Venezuela, Peru, Columbia, Ecuador, Puerto Rico, that’s all the memory will allow.

It didn’t matter what country the students were from, we all bonded together and everyone had a chance to expand their English. Food was always our favorite subject and it provided a great way to share our unique recipes. The end of each term we had a fabulous feast from all over the world to celebrate what we had accomplished, to speak English and laugh together.

Tutor: Enid Sherry
Site: Gateway Community College
Hear Our Voices Tutor Submission

Name: Darice Gall

How long I’ve been with NHLV: Nov 2021

What do I do for LV? Tutor ESOL All Levels

Why do I do it? I have always loved different cultures and languages, as well as reading and writing. When I spoke to a colleague of mine about her experience tutoring ESOL students, she encouraged me to get involved with LV. I love the diversity of the students in my class, they come from Haiti, China, Syria, Belarus, Turkey, Peru, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Togo, Korea, Cameroon, Colombia...they are an inspiration to me as I am also a student of languages; I speak intermediate Italian and am learning Spanish since I have a new son-in-law who is from Guadalajara, Mexico. Volunteering brings me immediate satisfaction in that I feel I can make a difference and help them navigate life in a new country. I love teaching them about different holidays, phrases, and ways of saying things to make them feel comfortable here. I also love to ask them about traditions from their home countries. One thing that is always wonderful to me is hearing how much more we have in common with each other!

I have been a Literacy Volunteer since 2016. My adult neighbor confided that he had low self-esteem and blamed it on his inability to read. His coworkers made fun of him and he felt hopeless to find a job he could be proud of. Now he enjoys his job at Big Y, supported by managers who help bring out the best in him.

Next I met Ms. Fatumata, a young woman from Liberia, orphaned at a young age, who joined her aunt’s family in New Haven. I witnessed her incredible self-motivation and discipline as we met once a week while she also attended N.H. Adult Education. We filled out her first job application and practiced all the new words she needed for her first job at Dunkin Donuts. She held down two jobs then bought herself her own laptop. We worked together to get her enrolled at Gateway Community College that she attended while working nights at Amazon. She became a citizen of our great nation in 2021. She went from handwriting her essays, to using a laptop, to teaching me how to use Google Docs!

I also tutored Ms. Martha, a single mother of two young children, a factory worker, and Ecuadorian immigrant who desired to improve her English so she could help children with their homework and lead workers. She dreams of becoming a real estate agent. I witnessed Ms. Fatumata and Ms. Martha push each other as we met every week at the public library. Two very different women became friends. When I could not accompany Ms. Martha to Gateway to meet an advisor, Ms. Fatumata went to help advocate for her as they planned her course schedule. These two always encourage each other.

Witnessing people work hard to improve their circumstances and being their mentor has been a great gift to my heart. I shape lessons to whatever the student desires. Maybe they need help with a form or document. Maybe they want to learn how to use a computer program like Word. They reach out to me whenever they need support. This work matters. I love every minute of being a tutor/mentor, as it reminds me of taking care of my sailors. I loved every minute of observing people bringing out the best in each other and themselves.

Tutor: Karen Reyes-Benzi
Senior Chief Petty Officer, Hospital Corps
United States Navy (1986-2012; retired)
ESL Class and Food!

It was inevitable that food would be a recurrent subject in an ESL class that meets in the late afternoon every Friday. I don’t remember exactly when we first started talking about food, but the varieties of food-related topics—and food-eating experiences—have been memorable. Students have shared their favorite recipes. We watched and discussed the final scene in the film Big Night (where a character prepares an omelet for his brother). And there have been numerous vocabulary and sentence-structure exercises with food words and terms (for example, a lesson on homophones used this sentence: “The recipe says that we need to knead the bread dough twenty times to achieve the right texture”).

The food theme even preceded the class schedule. During the more than ten years that I have tutored this class, I always stopped for coffee at Blue State Coffee on York Street on my way to the Friday session. Over time several students learned of my routine and started to join me. As a result, the class began earlier than four o’clock, and often lasted longer. Frequently some of us would go to dinner after class, meet on Sunday mornings for brunch, or have lunch together during the week. We came to know each other quite well, and those friendships have endured long after students left for far away locations. Food has been our binding ingredient.

Although we also shared food in class on many occasions, perhaps the most enjoyable and most poignant were when we said goodbye to departing classmates with an in-class party. Several times, students who were leaving New Haven brought something home cooked, while others brought cakes, cookies, or pastries from a local bakery. Because two of the students who have been part of the group for the past two years (during the virtual, zoom-conducted classes) are leaving us this spring, another student kindly invited us to her home as a farewell to our departing friends and for us to see each other in person after all this time. This meal served as our class for that Friday in late April, and, of course, food was the principal topic of conversation. Good luck to our friends. Eat well wherever you are.

Tutor: Jerry Delamater
Site: Yale Health Center

I’ve been with Literacy Volunteers for four years, and have tutored in both the Basic Literacy and ESOL programs. At the moment I’m working with ESOL students who speak seven different native languages and intermediate-level English.

Before the pandemic I taught mostly at the Science Park location, occasionally filling in at Junta. After two years of Zoom classes my students and I have all come to recognize some advantages in online learning, but we’re still looking forward to getting back together in person, at least occasionally.

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 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
Site: Science Park
**Name:** Joyce Nesta

**How long have you been with LV?** I just started. I finished the training session about 4 months ago.

**What do you do for LV?** Tutor

**Why do you do it?** I have recently found myself with some time to spare. I was taking care of the grandchildren full time. The youngest has just reached preschool age. I decided to find a volunteer position, so I searched for opportunities near me. When I came across Literacy Volunteers, I remembered researching them years ago. I thought it was a worthwhile organization then, and I still do.

I tutor ESOL at Gateway Community College for Beginner 1 as a volunteer. Although I’ve only been volunteering with Literacy Volunteers of Greater New Haven for a little over 6 months, I find it to be very rewarding. It’s not just about the time or salary, but it’s about the heart, compassion, unselfish caring, and patience. I am proud to say I too can help make a difference in shaping and molding the present into the future.

From my perspective, you don’t have to a college degree to volunteer. I see it as a heroism on a rewarding scale. If you are on a fence about volunteering, I hope this will inspire you.

“We don’t get paid not because we’re worthless but because we’re PRICELESS! “ If you have the time and the heart, I hope you will consider volunteering. YOU too can make a difference. You are selflessly helping people and your community without asking for compensation in return. One can do little but together we can do more.

There’s no time like the present to start volunteering and make a difference.

**Tutor:** Marrisa Latsavanh

**Class – Beginner 1**

**Site:** Gateway Community College/ Havenly Treats

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**Being a Math Tutor for Literacy Volunteers**

I have volunteered my time to the organization as a math tutor and to assist with administrative tasks however I can. The organization accomplishes a great deal with few resources and what they accomplish ripples out through the community.

Students receiving math tutoring have gone on to pass exams to qualify for military service, to enter occupational training programs, and to become US citizens. They will contribute to our community in ways not possible before their Literacy Volunteers experience. The results of the work of Literacy Volunteers are stunning and life-changing on a personal level to those individuals and beneficial beyond measure to Greater New Haven.

From my time as a volunteer within the organization I can also say the working atmosphere leads to highly motivated and creative staff.

**Tutor:** Randall T. States, P.E.

**Site:** Literacy Resource Center, 5 Science Park, New Haven

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I have done volunteer work since I was a college student in Brooklyn, NY, tutoring kids in reading and exposing them to the many cultural amenities the city has to offer. In giving we receive, or as my student would say “ in blessing others, we bless ourselves.” I have worked with the same student at LV for the past five years, witnessing all of his setbacks and triumphs. His faith has been an inspiration to me, strengthening my own spiritual path.

**Tutor - Rosemary Benivegna (5 years at LV)**

**Site:** Literacy Resource Center
Name: Swarupa Madhavan
Site: Gateway Community College, New Haven
How long have you been with LV? 6 months
What do you do for LV? Tutor – Beginner Level
Why do you do it? Being an immigrant myself, I can understand the difficulties of other immigrants. These difficulties are further multiplied if someone is unfamiliar with the language. I thought if I can help someone, ease their difficulties a little bit, with my language skills, why not!
The enthusiasm and commitment of my students to better their English skills motivates me to be a tutor. Teaching is a two way learning process. I learn a lot about different cultures and lifestyles every class.

Learning to Teach with Literacy Volunteers
I came to be a tutor with Literacy Volunteers because, when I saw the advertisement asking for volunteers, it rang a bell for me. I wanted to follow in the footsteps of my late mother, who taught for several years at the International Institute in St. Louis, Missouri.

I expected to like the teaching, but I didn’t know how challenging and rewarding it would be. The biggest challenge for me has been figuring out how best to plan a lesson, given the variety of materials available and my own lack of experience. The rewards, which outweigh the challenges, have been getting to know people from all over the world, hearing their stories, and seeing them gain the confidence to speak more freely. My favorite times are when people in the class relax and have a good time chatting with each other, making connections, becoming friends and forming a community. I believe this is an extremely important function of Literacy Volunteers. I think this is even more important now, in the time of Covid.

I didn’t have the chance to get advice about how to teach by asking my mother, but I am grateful to the tutors I have taught with, to the students, and to the people who run Literacy Volunteers for their help and encouragement.

Tutor: Ruth Bryan

COVID and Tutoring with Literacy Volunteers
While living through the COVID pandemic, many of us have been isolated and fearful. Being able to connect with others in a positive experience of language sharing has been a gift during this time for tutors and students. Teaching and learning online has been a challenge, but the addition of the Burlington English program has helped, providing visuals, audio and videos to help with learning. We are all happy to finally be more free to connect with others in person and continue the Literacy Volunteers mission of supporting adults with literacy.

Tutor: Cora Perrone
Site: Miller Library

Name: Joshua Greenberg
How long have you been with LV? 7 months
What do you do for LV? I am a math tutor
Why do you do it? I am a recently retired educator. LV provided me the opportunity to continue impacting people’s lives through education. It is rewarding to provide people with skills that help them achieve their goals. It is great to be a part of their success.
Name: Mary Alice O’Brien

How long have you been with LV? Since 2017.

What do you do for LV? Tutor

Why do you do it?

I began to tutor in 2017 because I wanted to share my love of reading. I remember my mom reading to my brothers and me before we went to sleep. My whole life has been full of books, and I don’t think I will ever stop reading and learning.

I was assigned my first student, Vanessa. It has been a tremendous and satisfying learning experience for both of us. We have developed a relationship that centers on humor and understanding. Recently I have been paired with another student, Joan. We are finding our way with each other and it is looking good.

I am teaching Vanessa and Joan that reading is a pleasurable activity. I encourage them to read the “old-fashioned:” way and hold a book and turn the pages! I also share with them that some of the benefits of reading include:

• Making you smarter
• Helping you to write better
• Exercising your brain, improving concentration and feeding your imagination
• Teaching you lessons and making you realize there is more than one way to do things
• Helping you learn new things, new places, new cultures that may be different from what you know
• Improving your spelling skills
• Helping you to do well in your daily life and embracing new experiences
• Building your vocabulary
• Helping you to better express your thoughts
• Giving you confidence
• Inspiring you to do great things
• Can be done almost anywhere
• And mostly it is enjoyable and fun.

There are many opportunities and reasons to volunteer. It can be done to lend a hand, help a cause that is close to the heart, or support an organization in need. Volunteering evokes feelings of well-being and satisfaction. Time is one of the most important things you can give someone else. Volunteer work illustrates your interests and your character. Volunteering encourages interaction with many different types of people. It makes me feel productive, happy, and grateful.

Volunteering for the Literacy Program has rewards that go far beyond my typical day. Personal satisfaction and accomplishment are key to me. When Vanessa and Joan show me how well they do during our classes, it makes me feel proud of what we all do together as a team.