Hear Our Voices
Essays and Reflections
From Literacy Volunteers
Students, Tutors, Staff & Board Members
June 2023
Envisioning a future in which the power of literacy enables all adults to thrive in their communities.
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Introduction

June 2023

Dear Partners in Literacy:

I am very pleased once again to present to you our 2023 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 happy to share with you the stories and accomplishments of our students, tutors, and staff, all of which represent empowerment through improved literacy and true testimony of the impact this has had on their lives. Congratulations to each of these courageous authors! We are so proud of them!

So much has changed over the past 3 years, however what has not changed is the fundamental importance of reading and writing, and the ability to clearly communicate. We have seen that basic literacy is fundamentally a matter of survival. We know that the efforts of our agency and the quality of tutoring provided—all through volunteers—are making a difference.

This past year Literacy Volunteers continued to transform lives through the power of literacy. Our tutor enrollment, the backbone of our program, began an upward trend, student enrollment continued to increase, and new strategies were implemented to positively impact our program.

We ask you to share the inspiring words in this collection with others—both those who are interested in adult literacy, and those who may not be aware of the full scope of our services and the positive difference they make in Greater New Haven, Meriden, Wallingford, and the Valley communities. Encourage adults who struggle with literacy or who want to improve their English language skills to seek Literacy Volunteers out and never be afraid to learn.

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 inspiring stories. The support of our partners and the wider community will bring Literacy Volunteers closer to our goal of 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
Student Essays

These essays and reflections were written by adult students who attended Literacy classes and English classes in Greater New Haven, Meriden, Wallingford and the Valley in 2022-2023.

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.

The Struggle of Learning English

by Adriana Pérez

Country: Mexico
Tutor: Barbara Levine
Site: Zoom

Learning English is like any other new task you are trying to learn. With practice and patience, you will successfully learn how to speak or read English.

Practicing your English every day is key. I remember when I first started to learn English, I could not pronounce multiple words and did not understand parts of my first classes.

What did I do to better understand English? Well with the help of my children and by practicing my English out loud every day, I was able to pronounce and read more words. Also, do not be afraid to ask someone who knows English how a word is said or written. Use the resources given to you. Communication is a key component to greatness and can help one come up with solutions together. If you are struggling to learn English, never give up and keep practicing. Thank you.
Hear My Story, Hear My Voice

by Agata Pereira

Country: Portugal
Tutor: Cynthia Curtis
Site: SCOW – Meriden

My name is Agata Pereira and I’m from Portugal, I’ve been here in U.S. for three years. I received a magazine in the mail from Wallingford and I saw the English classes and I want to improve my English because I like be independent and speak the English like American people.

I’ve been in the English classes only a few months, like three months, I started with a basic English class but because I speak, read and write English more than the basic class the literacy volunteers move me to another level.

I feel happy and excited about the new class. The day that I wrote this project was my second class and I feel grateful for this opportunity given to me. Talking a little bit about my country, I was born in Portugal a little country in Europe.

Portugal is a very beautiful country, but now it is difficult to love there because the economy is bad and everything is too expensive, but my life being in U.S. is being good because I have my family here with me and it is the most important thing to me.

When I was in the basic class and I saw how hard it is for the others students speak and understand English I try to help translate for the students and for the teacher because I kind speak Spanish to. I infer sad about the others students struggles and I don’t want they give up and keep with the classes.

For my future I will continue with class because I want to be independent, find a better job, have my own house and feel like home living in the U.S.
A Chance Meeting

by Angela Andrade

Country: Ecuador
Tutor: Keith French
Site: Zoom

I met Maria Gonzalez by chance in October 2019 in the city of Meriden. I had just arrived in this country. From that moment she became my best friend, partner and guardian angel.

We first met in the Literacy Volunteers parking lot. Maria asked if I needed help. I said I needed to learn English. Maria brought me to talk to Martha and helped me sign up. Maria also told me about Meriden Adult Education. We were students together in English and other classes. We studied English together all day before the pandemic.

She was a woman with many qualities, always kind, respectful and supportive. Talking to her filled you with joy, she always had advice and a smile. She was over 80 years old, but she had enviable energy and vitality. Maria was from Cuba but she loved Ecuadorian food.

One time she stayed with my family for over a week. She enjoyed. My family enjoyed. My son Julio said, “Tell your daughter to go away more often.” During the pandemic, I had a job disinfecting bank offices. Maria rode along with me in my car. We talked to each other all day long.

Sadly, Maria died in 2022. In the 3 years we shared I have so many good memories and shared joys.
Never Give Up

by Charles Mitchell

Country: USA
Tutor: Nina Ruckes
Site: West Haven Library

No matter what you do in life, always be positive. Reading is very important, because when you go to the store to buy something, you have to read the labels. That way you know what you’re buying.

Reading is a successful way of communicating whether you know that or not. When you are struggling for something like reading and you succeed, that’s success. In order to succeed you have to struggle first and with that comes success. But never give up. You see struggling is a part of life, because without it, there is no success.

Now, understanding what you read is another part of reading. It’s a must that you understand what you’re reading. You can learn a lot when reading, especially when you understand what you’re reading. I must admit I do get lazy at times, but I never give up because at the end of the tunnel is reading and understanding what you read. Oh, I must not forget, writing is another way of communicating. Reading, writing, spelling are good skills to know.

Even when I was in the United States Army I never gave up. Because if I had given up, I would not have gotten an Honorable discharge. Instead, I would have gotten a Dishonorable discharge. So when you give up you let yourself down and your family.

Always keep an open mind when it comes to learning. From the day we are born we are constantly learning till the day we die. When I first found the literacy program I didn’t read that much. Sometimes I’d go for months without reading. So you see reading was not my thing, and writing, forget it! I had no interest in writing, I’m a firm believer if you learn the basics no matter what it is you can learn it.

Since I started writing I became interested in writing. The mind is a terrible thing to waste. Having a cell phone or a computer is a plus. Like a dictionary, it knows everything. I advise everyone to purchase one. It knows medical terms and history. By reading a lot your mind
opens up and you are able to acknowledge words you thought you would never know. That comes from reading a lot.

My Christmas Vacation

by Gilbert Lord

Country: Belize
Tutor: Mary Jane Kenley
Site: Stetson Library

The whole family got together for the Christmas vacation. We drove from Connecticut to Delaware. My brother, Tyrone, came from Florida. He brought his family—his wife and 3 children. Tyrone’s oldest son, Adrien, lives in Texas. My nephew, Seth, came from Virginia. He had a surprise engagement for his girlfriend, Janlee, on Christmas day. We were all happy for them.

On Christmas day we had the “Secret Santa” gift exchange. Each family member had chosen a name and purchased a gift for that person. We had a wonderful Christmas dinner.

The following day we went to an art exhibit. Then it was time to pack up and return to our homes.

My sister, Tamara, always plans a great family reunion. We have also been to the Outer Banks in North Carolina and to Disney World in Florida.
My Dreams for the Future

by Hadiye Balik

Country: Turkey
Tutor: Linda Gabor
Site: Shelton Library

I want to be a kindergarten teacher because the truth of the matter is that my biggest dream was to be a teacher. However, living conditions had gotten me behind in my education life at some point. During this time, I have improved in many subjects and observed that I have always gotten on well with young children. Moreover, after I had a child, I thought I should make this dream come true as soon as possible. Because just playing with the kids was not enough. At first, I felt I had to give more to my son and other children. It is a good reason for me to establish a dialogue with children, support their development processes, and raise well-founded children. I want professional training from someone who consistently supports children's emotional and social aspects. In the past, I learned on the job at preschool and daycare. In the future, I want to get experience working in a kindergarten.

I want to learn the piano because when I was a child, I heard the sound of the piano and felt relaxed. I heard the piano first on the television. There was a Sunday concert on the television. I noticed the piano sound made me feel peaceful. I have been listening to the piano since childhood, but I have never played the piano. If I have a piano one day, I will try to play the piano. I have a lot of dreams, and this is one of my dreams. I hope one day I will actually achieve my dream. I can achieve my dreams because there are a lot of good volunteer people in America who can share their experience.

I want to join a hiking group. If I join a hiking group, I can meet new people. And hiking groups usually go to the mountains and the riverside for walks. If you go hiking in the mountains, you can see a perfect view. Nature is very generous in this regard. But I like to take a walk by the riverside more because I like the sound and sparkle of the water.
Due to events beyond my control, I dropped out of school in the seventh grade. I returned for one year in ninth grade but hardly attended class. I spent most of my life hiding the fact that I couldn't read and feeling embarrassed about it.

I'll never forget when I attempted to enroll in night school in my 20s. After testing me, the teacher told another instructor, "He can't read." For many years after hearing that remark, I felt discouraged as I was already ashamed of my struggles with reading and spelling.

Another example is when I applied for a higher job at the company I was working for. My inability to read was discussed in a conversation between the manager and another supervisor. The supervisor didn't ask me to read anything; instead, he asked me to spell "dough," which I did by spelling it as "doo" rather than the correct way. Again, those are some of my struggles through the years.

When I was in my 50s, I decided to focus on reading my bible and slowly picked up specific terms. I decided to stop lying to myself at 70 and face the truth after all those years. I decided to seek assistance, and that's when I discovered New Haven's Literacy Volunteers. Before meeting my tutor, Ms. Ebony, I had anticipated that I couldn't enroll in the GED program for at least a year. But she immediately encouraged me to sign up for GED classes and helped me regain my confidence. Now I am reading and understanding things much better. I am also excelling in my GED classes.

I read my bible regularly, which has improved my reading abilities. God has provided me with a literacy tutor and a math tutor, and enrolling in the literacy program was one of the best choices I've ever made.
Japan is an island nation surrounded by the sea and rich in natural country. I will now introduce Japanese culture. One part of Japanese culture is “Origami”. Origami is one of the traditional Japanese activities. When I was little, I learned it by myself and enjoyed making various shapes.

Origami was born from the fusion of Japanese national trait of using resources effectively and of modesty as a virtue, the culture of folding clothes and bed sheets and the sensibility of the beauty of straight lines such as squares and rectangles.

Origami is full of good things, such as training your brain and communicating with others just by playing origami. If you have children or the elderly, by all means try playing with Origami. I’m sure you’ll have a lively conversation and deep bond.
Hello, my name is Marcela Pérez. I have four daughters and a son and a husband. It is a big family. Everybody all speaks, reads, and writes English and Spanish.

My daughter Lizzet motivates me to learn to speak English. She enrolled me in Gateway Community College to take classes and now my classes are online. I have learned that pronunciation is very hard for me. My daughter Erika helps me to listen to music in English that will be helpful for me.

Thanks to the teachers who are very patient, I am learning slowly, though with more dedication I will achieve it.

At work I helped two people listen to the customer and write down their orders, since everything is in English on the computer, so you can help me if it gets busy.
Being in the U.S.

by Maricel Pava

Country: Colombia
Tutor: Ruth Bryan, Nancy Ferraro, Desh Sharma
Site: Gateway Community College

My name is Maricel Pava. I am 60 years old. I am from Cali (Valle) Colombia. I came to the United States in 1993 for love of my husband. I started my new life with my husband and son at this time. I didn’t know English at the time because I have many reasons: a) My life changed because I had two more children b) I didn’t have car c) I didn’t have papers d) My economic situation is bad for these reasons, and I don’t go to school. Right now, I have time to learn English. I feel very happy to start in the school. I always wanted to go study and I think is my opportunity learn English because I would like have communication with other people. I continue learn English and go to class. I want to help children’s elementary school and bilingual program (Spanish-English) for math, Science, Spanish, etc. I feel good about my dreams because I finished my university in my country with a bachelors degree in elementary school. It is very important to practice my studies, and education. It would be the achievement of my life.
My Dream for the Future

by Maxime Barhayiga

Country: Congo  
Tutor: Lara Minotti and Catherine Duncan  
Site: Zoom

The world, certainly, would be better if people did not watch each other with animosity or distrust, while keeping silent due to the atrocities of all kinds perpetrated in the world.

My dream is to encourage the world to dialogue in order to silence differences, to call people to common sense so that man is not considered as a wolf for another man. Peace for everyone!

My Sister Denise

by Rebecca Mohr

Country: USA  
Tutor: Jill London  
Site: Guilford Library

She is very generous when it comes to people. She helps them out. Denice shares the good.

She buys food and gives me some of it. Denice is wonderful because Denice is always there for me.

She is blessed with a good home and grandkids. She reminds me of our Nana when we were growing up. I am so blessed to have her in my life.
There are a lot of things that bring me joy. One of the most important things in my life is my health. If I am not sick I feel relaxed and can enjoy my life; when I don’t feel good, I feel tired and cannot do anything.

The second important thing that brings me joy is my family. They bring me great happiness every day. To see them smiling and doing good makes me so happy. I go shopping with my family. We all like shopping for new clothes for my children. Having a picnic with all of our family gives the children time be with cousins.

The most important part of my life was when I got my U.S. citizenship. I was so proud to be a citizen.

These things give me great joy in my life.
During the Past Year, Who Has Helped You? Who Have You Helped?

*by Mirishahe Mehmeti*

Country: Kosovo  
Tutor: Linda Gabor  
Site: Zoom/Valley

My friend is helping me to be a cashier. My doctor is helping me to be healthy. Sometimes my neighbor waters my plants and flowers.

I have a good friend, Kefserja. She watches my kids and when she needs help, I will watch her kids. She also has three kids. My daughter is helping me learn the computer.

God’s Power Will Never Cease

*by Mike Taylor*

Country: USA  
Tutor: Alan Solomon  
Site: Derby Public Library

God’s word is the truth and I am his holy knight

If you believe in god he will give you the gift of sight.

Yes, you can see even in the darkest night.

So don’t try to be cool

So we need to trust in God because he knows how to cure our sinful lust

One day we’ll all be free
So come with me and worship thee.
I’m telling you if you want those blessings you have to follow Jesus and head to the right direction.
I’m telling you all God wants is the connection that you believe in him and he’ll give you protection.
We should make God our obsession.
I am telling you that is one of our most important lessons.
So I’m telling you come with me and pray every day.
Yes, that’s what I’m gonna say because there’s no other way.
Yes, God will put us through multiple tests
But when we get through, it will be great at our final rest.
My love for God has finally been released.
I know God’s power will never cease.
That’s why I’m at peace
And when I’m with God I’ll be eating a feast
As I beat the war against the evil beast.
That’s why I learned when we believe in God, he’s like our lifeguard
And one day he’ll bring us to his church yard.
That’s why I worship God because it’s my choice.
I’ll worship God with my voice.
I’ll continue to do that while I rejoice.
That’s why am saying God is so magnificent
And that’s why I’m saying demons are maleficent.
Demons are bad.
God is good he won’t make you sad.
And now I know where I’ll go
Because God’s love is spreading through me like a virus
And I will not hide because God is on my side.
And because he’s on my side who will dare to try us.
Working in a New Country

by Monika Lopez

Country: Ecuador
Tutor: Bud Sielaff
Site: Zoom

When I came to the USA it was hard to adapt to the new culture, weather, and friends. My first job was cleaning offices in the morning and I attended English classes in the afternoon. On the weekends I was melancholy because I didn't have friends and my family was far away.

I took English classes where they also provided me information about nurse assistant courses. I became interested and began to attend on the weekends. It was difficult to pass the state exam because it was in English and my original language is Spanish. It was difficult, but I did pass on the second try! After I obtained the license, I was able to get a job as a Certified Nurse Assistant (CNA).

Working as a nurse assistant, I became more patient and empathetic. In my work, people needed help with daily chores like preparing food, changing clothes, buying groceries and also taking medicine. Many are patients with different illnesses like Parkinson, Dementia, Alzheimer’s, and Cancer.

Now I’m working at First Student Company as a driver. This company is dedicated to picking up kids from their homes and taking them to schools, then returning them to home at the end of the day. I drive a school van which has special features for kids with disabilities. This job requires full attention and responsibility when the kids are in the bus. Safety always comes first, plus the kids need to be on time.

My next project is to apply for a new job in construction. There are many opportunities for this kind of work. For me it will be a new experience. I like to learn new things and enjoy the activities that are presented. The first step will be acceptance into a training program – I hope to hear something soon!

Right now, I feel more comfortable living in this country since I have many friends from different countries. I currently participate in a Colombian dance group called “la Raza”. It
is an interracial group - made up of girls from different countries. We participate in different activities throughout the year. I personally feel happy to be part of these activities. They connect me with my roots and the culture where I am from.

My Story of Coming to the U.S.

by Amani Ben Amer

Country: Yemen
Tutor: Donna Maronde
Site: Zoom

My name is Amani Ben Amer. I am from Yemen. I am married and have four children. I now live in the U.S. with my husband and children. In 2013 my husband did a paper for me and my children to come to the U.S. They approved it and made an appointment for us in the U.S. Embassy in Djibouti. So we went from Yafa to Aden City where the airport is. We got a hotel room for 1 month because of the problems. Finally we traveled to Sudan. In Sudan it took 4 hours and we rented another hotel for 10 days until we could travel to Djibouti. In August 2018, we interviewed at the U. S. Embassy but because of the Trump Travel Ban could not come. We stayed for 4 months living in Djibouti waiting. It was very expensive and hot. We then went back to Yemen because we had no word from the U.S. Embassy. We stayed another year, then we heard and made another trip back to Djibouti. We waited 2 more weeks before the next interview. They approved visas for the children but not for me. We waited another 2 months. Then I returned to Yemen with the small children. The older children went to the U.S. with my husband. After 4 more months they sent my visa, so I went back to Djibouti with the children. My husband came back to get me and bring us to America. We came in October 2018.

Now we are happy we all live in this beautiful country. My children are going to school and I am learning English. I thank a lot of people who have been teaching me English so I can read, write, and speak English. I am very happy.
I’m from Venezuela, a South American country. It’s a really beautiful place with amazing landscapes, beaches, mountains, good restaurants and friendly people. It was very nice to live there, but in September 2014 my family and I moved to Spain, specifically to Madrid. From this moment Madrid became my new home. It’s hard to change your entire life but I loved Madrid at first sight. I really enjoyed its culture, food, people, and much more. After eight years living there, I moved again! This time to the USA, New Haven, Connecticut. I’m here with my husband and little doggy named “Luna” (means moon). My husband’s company transferred him for a specific project, maybe for one or two years. I’m improving my English by studying hard every day. I’m discovering this city and its surroundings and I can say that it is amazing. New Haven is a good place, has lots of restaurants from many countries, the people are so kind and pet friendly, there are many parks, museums, theaters, and one of the best universities…Yale! To be honest, every place where I’ve been living has been amazing. The most important thing is to have a good attitude and be positive about changes…changes are an opportunity for life!
Moving to the United States

by Rosanyi Almonte

Country: Dominican Republic
Tutor: Enid Sherry and Swarupa Madhaven
Site: Gateway Community College

My name is Rosanyi Almonte. I am 20 years old, I’m from República Dominicana. I moved to the United States when I was 15 years old. It was difficult for my new country and language. But I have a family here and although change is difficult, it is necessary in life.

I study English to be able to study at the university, have a career and a good job. Although I still have a lot to improve, I want to be able to communicate better. I want to meet good people and have new experiences in life.

I'm a Legal Alien – I'm a Sardinian in New Haven

by Gianni Carboni

Country: Sardinia
Tutors: Robert Glen and Lee Stolzman
Site: La Casa

One of the most interesting things about my U.S. experience has been to make others aware of the existence of Sardinia, my motherland. It became clear to me that few people abroad know Sardinia. Each time, it was almost a social experiment for me to say "I am from Sardinia," to test the reaction of others. When, as almost always, I thought that people did not understand, I added more information: "An island of Italy." And if that was not enough: "Not Sicily, another island."
Most people abroad associate the words "island" and "Italy" only with Sicily. But no, there is also Sardinia, much further away, much more isolated, much more different. Neither better nor worse, just different.

Actually, people's confusion is quite understandable: few people know Sardinia as part of Italy because, culturally, it is not. Legal and administrative constraints sometimes override cultural, linguistic, and historical ones. To tell the truth, I have never felt Italian. I have nothing against Italy. There's nothing parochial in that, no competition, no comparison. It is simply the truth that arises if I listen to my heart.

I am glad that now, thanks to your wonderful English courses that I was so lucky to attend, even Literacy Volunteers in New Haven know about the existence of Sardinia. If you happen to have another Sardinian student in the future, you can say that you already know Sardinia and its flag. I am grateful to have been the cause of this.

My Hopes and Thanks

by Rafael Ito Ramirez

Country: Mexico
Tutors: Don Desmond and Robert Glen
Site: La Casa

I want to speak English very well. I would like to be a citizen, so I need to learn English very soon. I feel very happy because with my teachers I am learning English. I hope to improve my English because I am studying about citizenship now. I am also studying in my English classes in the house where the teachers instruct us. I am extremely grateful for their teaching and for our classes at La Casa.
Let me tell you something about my culture and where I come from, Colombia. (It is spelled with an "o", not with a "u." With the letter "u," it is a university and the district of the U.S. capital.) I know that many people think they know Colombia, but all they know about is illegal drugs or some public figures. We are more than that. We are very capable people. We can adapt wherever we go, we have a strong and creative soul, and we don't give up. Visit Colombia and experience our culture!

My goal is to learn more about the United States, its culture, and the English language. This is not the first time I have been in the process of learning English as a second language. My perspective is different now because I live here, and immersion is part of the adventure. I think it is just the beginning, and I thank all the people who have helped me and continue to help me on this journey.
L earning English has not been easy. It took time for me to become comfortable in front of someone and have a nice calm conversation. It took me even more time to be able to bare my soul and share my needs, my joy, and my emotions in general.

Everything in the beginning was challenging, even having a small talk at the local grocery store, paying the bill at a pub, and every other kind of casual daily situation. But I was not scared--! was excited! And during the year and half since I moved here, I have never lost this excitement.

I love to learn English, and I knew that I would need time to start improving. I needed to patiently adjust to this new world, its new habits, and its unique background. It's a melting pot of people from all over the world, everybody with their needs, their dreams and their realities.

The time of survival is over. I can now speak confidently, but there is still room for improvement!
A New Life in a New Country

by Maria Salome Camacho de Ito

Country: Mexico
Tutors: Don Desmond and Robert Glen
Site: La Casa

In the United States, I want two things. First, I want to learn English. Second, I want to enjoy the company of my daughter because she is a citizen and lives here. I also want to become a citizen. Although I am retired from my professional life, now I have a new job to overcome - obstacles of learning English. I have amazing teachers, and I admire them because they have a lot of patience and dedication to teach us. This country is amazing. It gives many people the opportunity to go to a school, taught by literacy volunteers.

I never imagined I would live in the United States, to see the difference from one country to another. Here the seasons are very marked. In Mexico all time is beautiful, there is no snowing, the trees always are green. There are many flowers and birds. In this country the people are very kind. I want to be loyal to the United States.
Who Has Helped during the Past Year?

by Yuliia Pavlyshyn

Country: Ukraine
Tutors: Don Desmond and Robert Glen
Site: La Casa

I arrived in America a year ago with my family from Ukraine. A very wonderful family took us in to live with them for a while. It was all new for us – a new country, a language we didn't know very well, a new culture, a new life. We faced many difficulties, but this family helped us a lot. They even taught me how to drive a car and helped me find language courses. I am very grateful for their help. And I also want to thank all the Americans who are helping and supporting my country right now in this very difficult time.

What I’ve Done this Past Year

by Ghada Chater

Country: USA
Tutor: Gene Kirsten and Catherine Miller
Site: Literacy Resource Center

I’ve been with LVA for four years. Catherine Miller and Gene Kirsten have been my tutors. Right now I am studying for my GED and learning how to better read and write. For the GED, I am learning math. I never realized there are so many principles and functions that comprise math, but I'm learning. Eventually, I feel that I will be able to pass the GED test. Last summer I visited my family in Syria. I am hoping to do so again either this summer or the next one. I am grateful for the help that LVA has given me.
Many Good Things

by Malak Abdalqawi

Country: Yemen
Tutor: Donna Maronde
Site: Zoom

My name is Malak Abdalqawi. I am from Yemen and live now in CT. I am a housewife and am learning English. One of my most happy moments was when I became a citizen in the U.S. this past year.

I am very happy and have a lot of joy when I see my kids happy and healthy. My children go to school and I have great joy when they work hard and are learning many new things. We had a busy year because of a new house and car. Many good things for all of us.

My Dream Came True

by Hana Salem

Country: Yemen
Tutor: Donna Maronde
Site: Zoom

My name is Hana Salem. I am from Yemen. I live in the United States in New Britain Connecticut. I live with my husband and 5 children. I am learning to speak and write English. I am doing online classes. We came to America because my husband had a job there. All my children go to school and they love it. We
love our new home. It’s a safe place and you have your freedom. When I came from Yemen I started learning English for beginners. After one year, I started learning 100 quotations so I can get my American citizenship. After 5 years I applied for the test and I passed it and my dream came true.

My New Life

by Eduardo Vazquez

Country: Mexico
Tutor: Lynn Napoli and Lillian Topf
Site: Gateway Community College

I arrived in this country more than a year and a half ago. I have been assimilating now that I am here forming a new life, family, and friends. I feel happy and content to be with the person I am, for my girlfriend and for me arriving here in a new state for her, my first city outside my country and I learned with her help from her to value family more and to know that it is not the place, but who you are with. Everything is new to me - culture clashes keep happening. I have to mention that even if you have seen it on television, read or heard about it, it is very different from how it is when you experience it day by day, seeing people from other cultures and people from your own culture assimilate into this one. My process of learning the English language has been a bit slow but I think it has gone progressively well and although it plays an important role in being here, I recommend – do not despair and take the process slowly but surely. Life in a new country with other cultures, ways of dressing, eating, and learning a new language is never easy and difficult to experience. Living the process is what has helped me recognize where I am, recognizing who I am, and living the process at my own pace is what has helped me a little.
Our Experience at Literacy Volunteers of Greater New Haven

by Carius and Darius Stevenson

Country: USA
Tutor: Gene Kirsten
Site: Literacy Resource Center

We are new to the Literacy Volunteers program. We are twins who are attending the Pathways Academy in New Haven. Our tutor is Gene Kirsten. Not only is he helping with teaching us how to read better, but he is also helping us to study for our Driver’s permit questions. We eventually would like to get our GED. We know besides reading that we’ll need help with other subjects such as Math. We know that this will take a while. We look forward to our time at Literacy Volunteers.

Dreams for the Future

by Hiram Flores

Country: Mexico
Tutor: Linda Davis and Donald Desmond
Site: La Casa

My dream is to get my own home. I have never owned a house before, I have always rented. My house will have three bedrooms. I want a big backyard where there could be a garden. I would like to plant flowers and vegetables. I really like the idea of roses and tomatoes. I have never owned a garden, so in the future I plan...
on learning how to plant a garden. I think it will be fine to have a chicken coop and raise enough chickens to be able to feed my family. My dream is my goal for the future. So I know what I have to do to reach my goal. I will work hard to reach my goal, and I hope to achieve it. Also, part of my dream for the future is that my kids will work with me to reach my goal and to learn enough to go to college.

Learning English
by Yamileth Acosta Hoyos

Country: Colombia
Tutors: Ruth Bryan, Desh Sharma, Nancy Ferraro
Site: Zoom

My name is Yamileth Acosta Hoyos, I am from Colombia, I was born in Palmira Valle del Cauca, I’m 28 years old. When I was 20 years old, I made my first solo trip, after which I decided to spend my money and time to gain experience and knowledge by seeing more of the world. When I was 26 years old, I took one big decision for my life, I decided to come to USA, When I arrived in USA, I didn’t understand a lot in general, culture, and the language too. I remember I felt so bad, confused and frustrated, this time was so difficult for me because I can’t communicate anything, I can’t order food, take bus, train, or airplane. I was afraid, but I have a lot of determination and confidence in my ability to learn. I spent my time listening to podcasts, and taking classes in English. Meanwhile, I was working and started to make Native American friends, or people around me. The people helped me with care and patience, so one day it just happened for me, like a “miracle”, my brain just started to understand automatically when people speak with me, I can’t believe it, I felt so happy. Nowadays I feel more comfortable, and free because I can
communicate my opinions, I am more independent and I can help other people if they don’t speak English, I feel so good when I can help other persons.

Learning English absolutely opens your mind, to the world and opportunities. Just over and over again it is my advice, don’t be afraid. I feel so proud of myself because of my progress in improving my English.

My Journey with Literacy

by Joan Phillips

Country: USA
Tutor: Mary Alice O’ Brien and Robin Musante
Site: Derby Public Library

I went to kindergarten and grammar school. When I was in high school, I was in Special Education.

I had a hard time reading and spelling. It was hard to do my homework.

I had two night classes after high school. My sister did help me, but she did not have a lot of time after she started her family.

I went to class at BHC but that class ended.

I have been in the Literacy Program for about one and a half years.

I go to class every week.

I think my reading, writing, and spelling is getting better.

It is still hard for me, but I will keep studying.
My Dad is a Good Dad

by Martha Navarrete

Country: USA
Tutor: Joyce Nesta
Site: Ansonia Public Library

My dad works hard. He works in the yard and cleans the pond with the fish. He shovels the snow in the winter. My brother, my nephew and I help him. He goes to the grocery store to get food. He takes me to the library to do my reading and picks me up when I am done. My dad is always there for his family.

My Dreams for the Future

by Vanessa Caldwell

Country: USA
Tutor: Mary Alice O’Brien and Robin Musante
Site: Derby Public Library

I want to try to learn how to live on my own with my caseworks Marquis, Lisa, and Natasha. They are like parents to me. They take care of me when we go out. I know they will help me with my own place so I can be happy to learn how to depend on myself, but with help. I can enjoy my life with other people besides my family and friends. The Continuum of Care program is important to me, and is the best place for me. I always have fun.
My daughter Erica is the one who found Literacy Volunteers for me. She is also My Remarkable Woman. She struggled so hard and she made it! She told me, “You make plans and God laughs is the truth. Every trial has made me stronger and the woman I am today. I can tell my son there will never be anything you cannot do if you want it bad enough.”

Erica always dreamed of becoming a nurse but thought she'd never afford it or be smart enough to get in. After high school she got a Yale Hospital position as Respiratory Aide. When I asked about college, she said she needed a break. I thought that's it, she’s not gonna be a nurse. She’s a teenager, got a nice job, hanging out with friends. But she said, “Dad, I'm still going to be a nurse someday.”

She fell in love and dated for 3 years. When she got pregnant, someone told her she was never going to be a nurse. But she got motivation from her mother Carol who always tells us, “Don't let anybody say you can't do something. You can ask God and with Him you can do anything. It’s never too late.”

Erica told me, “When Justin came into the world, he changed my life forever. I wanted to protect him and be the best mother I could.” She started in a Respiratory Therapy program in Norwalk and kept working full-time at Yale. Every day for two years she dropped Justin with me by 5:00AM and drove to school. She felt guilty but I loved keeping him and we’re real close.

Erica’s partner left her and she had to file bankruptcy for their debts. She said, “I was battling depression but couldn't dwell on it because my son needed me.” She graduated top of her class and was hired as Respiratory Therapist. She continued school for her RN, BSN and Nurse Practitioner.
When Covid hit, Erica was terrified, praying she wouldn’t bring it home. No visitors allowed in ICU, so she helped patients say goodbye to their families on FaceTime.

She said she did it all for Justin: “I had this little boy looking at me and I just could not quit.”

America

by Kesorn Kumar

Country: Thailand
Tutor: Lynn Napoli and Lillian Topf
Site: Gateway Community College

My name is Nok. I am from Thailand. I’m not good at English but I want to try to learn English. I have studied very little in Thailand because my family didn’t have money to send me to study. So, I dropped out of school to provide for my family. I’ve had a lot of hardships in Thailand, but I’m still fighting. Now I have the opportunity to study in America. I’m so glad that this country has equal opportunities for everyone. I feel very good about this country and thank you for allowing me to be here in this country.

I have a dream, but I don’t know if it will happen. I want a better future and go back to hug my kin in Thailand and want to come back to America again. Because this country gave me a chance and was very good to me. I’ve always thought of America as another home that I love and want to live here. This is my future.
I came to Literacy Volunteers because I wanted to better myself. I wanted to do something positive with my life. When I was younger, I was wild. As I got older I got wiser. When I go to the grocery stores, I wanted to be able to read the labels. Now having learned to read better, I can read the labels and packages. The more I learn to read the easier my life becomes. I have the best teacher in the world. He is like a brother to me.
Tutor / Staff / Volunteer Essays

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

Tutoring for Literacy Volunteers

by Rosemary Benivegna

Site: Literacy Resource Center

I have tutored the same student in Basic Literacy since 2018. He never ceases to surprise me and give me hope in his progress. Last summer I gave him a lined notebook for his birthday and encouraged him to write even just one or two sentences a day. For the next few weeks he brought in the book with whole pages of written text. I didn’t expect this. I asked him how he had known how to spell the “big” words. He had looked them up in dictionary on his phone. Although this outcome has been hit or miss, there have been some astonishing sharings.
I Look Upon Tutoring as a Life Coach

by Gene Kirsten

Site: Literacy Resource Center

I have been a tutor since 2018. I find that tutoring adults is both rewarding and challenging. I look upon this task as a life coach. Most everyone who comes here has other goals that they want to attain besides being able to read. These include: preparing for the learner's driving test questions, studying for the test (both reading and math) so that the tutee can have the state pay for his/her training, getting tutored in math, preparing to enter the workforce are some examples of what they are hoping to prepare for. When someone has successfully passed a test, I am happy for them. I feel that person deserves a pat on the back for enduring the hard work that they put in to achieve their goal. I continue to hope to inspire those who I work with so that they can hopefully achieve some of their goals and dreams.

Empowering Lives is Influential

by Kai Perry

Board Member / Development and Equity Committee / Tutor

I currently sit on the Literacy Volunteers of Greater New Haven’s Board of Directors and was also involved with the organization’s Development and Equity Committee as well as its yearly fundraising event, the Scrabble Challenge. Additionally, I currently tutor an LV student.
I volunteer my time with LVGNH because I believe it’s important to give back to the communities we serve and to help eradicate the hardships associated with low self-esteem and to give people a better outlook on life. Many individuals who struggle with literacy or where English isn’t their first language struggle with being accepted and navigating everyday life isn’t as easy. Empowering others is influential, and I’m committed to being an example of getting people to see the greatness that exists within them.

Purpose & Transformation

by Carlos A. Coriano

Marketing & Communications Consultant

Purpose and transformation have been my ethos throughout my professional life and career spanning over 20 years in integrated marketing, entrepreneurship, and consulting. In the fall of 2021, I was presented with the opportunity to join Literacy Volunteers of Greater New Haven as a Volunteer Marketing Board Member, which I immediately accepted as empowering and transforming lives through literacy is a social cause close to my heart. As with every marketing consulting assignment I have embarked on in my career, I conducted a comprehensive assessment of the marketing function to identify opportunities for optimization and transformation. A final assessment was presented to the team to drive the new marketing strategy for Literacy Volunteers and achieve its financial objectives.

At the end of June 2022, I was presented the opportunity to join Literacy Volunteers as a Marketing & Communications Consultant. The transition was natural given my current involvement as a volunteer marketing team member. Since then, I have been spearheading and executing a successful integrated digital marketing and communications program including
design, development, launch and content management of the new website; execution of the
digital and social media marketing program; creative design; public relations and
communication, and measuring and tracking key performance indicators of all marketing
activities.

Nearly two years after joining Literacy Volunteers of Greater New Haven, I feel gratitude
and fulfillment to see first-hand the success of our integrated marketing programs which has
elevated and transformed Literacy Volunteers’ marketing function and performance. Most
importantly, these accomplishments with the support of the marketing team have fulfilled my
purpose to transform lives through the power of literacy.

**Beyond Literacy**

*by Corinne Fucci*

Literacy Coordinator for the Valley Program

As a Literacy Coordinator for over one and a half years, I have loved continuing
to support people in learning how to interpret and share thoughts, ideas, and
information through written and spoken language. But beyond literacy, this
work epitomizes human beings’ commitment to one another and seeing others through. I am
unbelievably thankful for how committed all the LV tutors are to their students and I am proud to
be able to provide support to my community of Valley tutors and their phenomenal partners in
learning.
The ability to read and write is sacred to me. I try to never take it for granted. I’ve never known a life in which words were not everything to me. Since I was a child, I was drawn to words, and I played with them, the way other children played with toys. As a young adult, during my undergraduate studies, I spent a few years tutoring my peers in academic college writing and found myself interested in supporting individuals one on one. Afterwards, I worked with youth in large groups but once again, preferred one-on-one connections. I had moments with young people that brought me closer to myself - my empathy prospering with each new connection. I was drawn to Literacy Volunteers because I wanted to do meaningful work and felt a free service that helps adults improve their literacy skills matters. I believe literacy is vital for a quality life; for a thoughtful and creative life - which I’m fortunate to have. All people deserve access to education which I consider to be the best path into a substantial and beautiful life.
Tutors & Volunteers

New Haven ESOL Tutors

Kris Arnold  
Carla Baricz  
Jean Blue  
Nancy Brown  
Ruth Bryan  
Frank Corrigan  
Ann Dallavalle  
Linda Davis  
Jerry Delamater  
Don Desmond  
Catherine Duncan  
Nancy Ferraro  
Stephanie Fitzgerald  
Darice Gall  
Robert Glen  
Susan Hackett  
Susan Hathaway  
Marissa Latsavanh  
Selena Lee  
Barbara Levine  
Margaliet Ligtenstein  
Doug Logan  
Charlotte Luzzi  
Swarupa Madhaven  
Patrick McCreless  
Lara Minotti  
Hank Mixsell  
Victoria Morrell  
Serena Mottala  
Lynn Napoli  
Laurie Ongley  
Charlene Raube  
Paula Resch  
Anikka Schliesmann  
Peter Schwartz  
Desh Sharma  
Enid Sherry  
Virginia Stevens  
Lee Stoltzman  
Todd Stone  
Liza Tolstokoraya  
Lillian Topf  
Sophie Tworkowski  
Eleanor Weseloh  
Isabel Wood

New Haven Basic Literacy Tutors

Julia Alboiu  
Ian Alsgaard  
Cicely Barnwell  
Katherine Bates  
Rosemary Benivegna  
Patricia Birungi  
Georg’Ann Bona  
Melinda Charles  
Leo Christophar  
Vanessa Clarke  
Dr. Ebony Cole  
Lynn Comer  
Douglas Dupuis  
Laura Fawcett  
Agata Ferdzyn  
Wendy Gamsu  
IféMichelle Gardin  
Joshua Greenberg  
Sara Handleman  
Mary Von Hermann  
Aziza Hill  
Susan Holahan  
Merle Hornstein  
Colette Hughes  
Don Iddings  
Mitsue Iwata  
Colleen Karkhang  
MaryJane Kenley  
Gene Kirsten  
Alexandra Kleinman  
Thien Le  
Jill London  
Emma Lusanga  
Margaret Macilvain  
Tammi Means  
Catherine Miller  
Bonnie Morehead  
Doreen Novak  
Cynthia Ostroff  
Michele Penn  
Kai Perry  
Miriam Puttermen  
Nayeli Rojas  
Nina Ruckes  
Joshua Schroder  
Enid Sherry  
Ana Simeonova  
Kathryn Simmons  
Suzanne Stack  
Randall States  
Charles Swanson  
Kellie Therriault  
Kay Twyman  
Okon Umana  
Sonya Valentine  
Margaret Verratro  
Carol Wade  
Melanie Waynik  
Edmond White  
Liz Wrynn  
Neil Zack
Valley Tutors

Iqra Asif
Linda Brower
Sarah Cohen
Florence Falkowski
Linda Gabor
Lorraine Inzerra
Datrice Kristof
Liz Laden
Darlyne Milord
Joanne Milord
Peg Moffitt
Mark Moskowitz
Robin Musante
Joyce Nesta
Mary Alice O'Brien
Kira Savarese
Alan Solomon
Jo-Ann Williams
Joyce Zaldo

Meriden / Wallingford Tutors

Karen Arata
Sue Burchsted
Cindy Curtis
Paul D'Andrea
Stephanie Durbin
Keith French
Paula Helyer
Fran Jakubiak
AJ Jirian
David Longworth
Donna Maronde
Joseph Marrone
Caroline Misarski
Louise Nelson
Rodrigo Orozco-Silva
Kerry Sheldon
Bud Sielaff
Richard Silkoff

New Haven Volunteers

Amy Crowell
Georgina Lee
Marilyn Fenichel
Thank You to All Our Outstanding Partners in Literacy!
Envisioning a future in which the power of literacy enables all adults to thrive in their communities.