“Sometimes just a little extra support makes all the difference between success and failure,” said volunteer tutor Susan Gass. Susan works with LVCA students enrolled in the Certified Nurse Aide (CNA) credential program at Piedmont Virginia Community College, a collaborative program between the educational institutions. Susan provides additional instruction and guidance through the credentialing process, which is difficult for English language learners.

“While tutoring through the CNA collaboration program, my students and I discussed test taking skills and study techniques, breaking down material into finite pieces. We reviewed quizzes and workbook assignments. Just as important, as a tutor, I listened to their struggles, offered encouragement, shared relaxation techniques, and laughs. All this was to bolster self-esteem and confidence, offered with a smile and encouraging text message before a test.”

LVCA has designed pathways for students to obtain industry-recognized credentials in collaboration with our educational partners, the Thomas Jefferson Adult and Career Education department at PVCC and Albemarle County Adult Education. LVCA’s role in the collaborative effort is to provide one-to-one tutoring to anyone on a path to a recognized credential. This allows LVCA to shepherd adult learners through the credentialing process—moving them on to the appropriate next step with confidence and steady support when they are ready.

Susan’s students were able to complete the CNA program, obtain the Nurse Aid license, gain employment as a CNA, and move on to higher level medical training. In our region, the health care field is in need of well-trained and credentialed employees to fill hundreds of open jobs.

LVCA also has the ability to create specialty classes for groups of learners at the lowest educational level that have common interests. In October, Literacy Volunteers also began a CPR/First Aid certification course for English Language Learners. Students in this class spent three weeks with a volunteer learning the vocabulary they would need to successfully obtain a certification. A member of the American Red Cross then provided a full day of hands-on skill training to complete the credential process. All six students were able to successfully obtain an Adult and Pediatric First Aid/CPR/AED certification. Students in this class can now move on to other health care certification courses with a more complete knowledge of emergency response and health care related vocabulary.

“These stepping stone classes and experiences are important, because they introduce a learner to the field and the vocabulary they will need to understand in that field,” said Executive Director Ellen Osborne. “It also gives them the opportunity to see if they might be interested in pursuing a career in that area.”

Six students completed their CPR/First Aid certification with the American Red Cross. Special thanks to Pat Graham, volunteer tutor, for preparing them for the course and certification process.
I have to give credit to my oldest daughter for helping me find Literacy Volunteers of Charlottesville/Albemarle. She was a tutor with LVCA before I was.

In early 2017 I found myself wanting to be more of a presence in our country and the world. I wanted to do more than post feelings on social media, but I struggled to find a venue. My daughter’s words of wisdom were “...you are not doing much to change things by ranting and raving, chose a corner of your world and take care of it. You should try volunteering with LVCA.” She was right.

I signed up for a tutor training session in May of 2017 and by April 2017 I was paired with my amazing student, Margarita. The entire training and match process is truly efficient. You are ready to roll in a short time, but there are resources and support all along the way.

Margarita and I had our first meeting on April 14, 2017. She spoke very little English and I did not speak Spanish, but it did not take us long to figure out a way to communicate and laugh! Margarita was very shy about speaking English, but she knew more than she realized. We knew very early that obtaining American citizenship would be our first goal. We tackled English while studying for the citizenship exam.

Margarita is such a wonderful and dedicated student. She practiced and worked hard to learn all the citizenship material. I was also able to assist with a citizenship class taught by Paige Zelikow, LVCA Citizenship Coordinator. Margarita attended the class and together we met and got to know many very deserving people from many countries. In addition to our weekly sessions, Margarita took advantage of working on the computers and participating in a conversation class offered through LVCA.

In October of 2018 she took and passed her citizenship test and in December of 2018 she was sworn in as an American citizen. I had the privilege and honor to play a small part in some of her accomplishments and it was truly moving (beyond any expectations) to watch her take her Oath of Allegiance.

LVCA turned out to be “a little corner of the world” where I could help.

It is hard to believe that Margarita and I have been working together for two years. We are now tackling English grammar and I have to confess I am learning just as much as I am trying to teach. English is tough. Working with someone as dedicated as Margarita is easy.

If you’re interested in learning more about becoming a volunteer tutor like Nancy Jo, or if you’d like to register for an upcoming tutor training, visit www.literacyforall.org/tutors.
From “Beginner” to “Completer” in Only Three Years

When José came to the United States in 2016 he had the full support of his older sisters to pursue his education and improve his English without worrying about finding work.

He entered the LVCA program in the fall of 2016 as a “low-beginner,” meaning he could barely speak ANY English. After a year of study, he jumped to an intermediate level, could communicate better and started a job. He kept studying.

José diligently met with his tutor every week and continued based learning. He picked up multiple jobs in the restaurant industry but kept his English learning a priority.

“For me, learning English is very important because it makes you enter a new circle of life,” said José. “You realize what life is like in the USA and it makes your life easier.”

Now, three years after entering the U.S., José has officially tested out of LVCA’s programs and left his restaurant jobs behind for bigger plans. He has partnered with colleagues to open their own Mexican restaurant in the Belmont neighborhood.

According to his tutor, Emily, he was tight-lipped about his plans until just a few weeks before the restaurant opened.

“I wasn’t surprised that he had opened his own business,” Emily said. “His dedication, creativity, and high personal standards came through in every class we had together. He’s an exceptional student and member of the community.”

While opening a restaurant is impressive enough on its own, LVCA staff is amazed at how quickly José improved his English.

For an adult learner, we typically expect to see a student advance from one level to the next in about one year. José advanced six levels in only three years.

“To make that kind of progress in half the time is an extraordinary accomplishment,” said Program Manager Steven Reid. “In my 13 years of adult education, I’ve only seen it happen twice.”

While José has moved on from our formal tutoring program, we look forward to hearing more of his accomplishments as an exemplary member of our community.

“I want to thank LVCA and their tutors for being a great program and helping many people to learn English,” said José.

Zheng Gives Back at the SPCA

When Zheng told his tutor Warren that he wanted to help in the community, they began discussing his interests. Zheng and Warren decided that he should apply to be a volunteer at the SPCA.

Warren helped Zheng apply and even attended the orientation session with him while Zheng got acclimated to his new position. Zheng started volunteering in the lobby where he could practice his English and conversation skills. Warren helped teach him the vocabulary words he needed.

“I like to help at the SPCA because it makes me very happy,” said Zheng. “I can be with a lot of cats and dogs! I can communicate with many people and learn new things.”

We’re so proud of Zheng for giving back to the Charlottesville community while practicing his English!
Bushiri Wins National Award

The National ProLiteracy Conference on Adult Education was held in San Diego, September 25—28. Thanks to a grant from BAMA Works, our Executive Director and Program Manager were able to go to the conference and present workshops to literacy colleagues from across the United States.

LVCA student Bushiri Salumu was selected to receive the Dollar General Student of the Year Award at the conference, which included an all-expenses paid trip to the event. Bushiri accepted his award and gave a brief speech at a reception on Friday, September 27. His speech was met with a standing ovation!

Bushiri is originally from the Democratic Republic of Congo. After his parents and several of his siblings were killed in a civil war, he left the Congo and lived in a refugee camp for four years before coming to the U.S. as a refugee in 2012. Since then, he has earned his GED, obtained U.S. citizenship, completed his CNA certification, and has recently accepted a CNA position at UVA Children’s Hospital. He continues to work with his tutor David at LVCA.

The staff and board of LVCA are very proud of all of his accomplishments and look forward to seeing what comes next for this remarkable man.

Become a Volunteer Tutor

Our volunteer tutors are the heart of our program. Becoming a tutor will enable you to make a profound difference in a person’s life. Join us at an upcoming training to get started.

Saturday, December 7
9:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

Saturday, January 18
9:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

Tuesday, February 11 & Wednesday, February 12
5:30 – 8:30 p.m.

Each training will be held at the Jefferson School City Center. Call 434-977-3838 to register today!

www.literacyforall.org/tutors