



# LITERACY VOLUNTEERS

## CHARLOTTESVILLE / ALBEMARLE



## Improving Employability One Apple at a Time

When Guadalupe switched jobs from clothing retail to a specialty food store, she knew she would have to learn new words. Knowing the basic food vocabulary taught in textbooks—strawberry, apple, potato, squash—wasn't going to be enough. An apple isn't just an apple. It can be Honey Crisp, Gala, Cosmic Crisp, Golden Delicious, just to name a few. And so, Guadalupe and her tutor, Lisa, got to work. Every week, they reviewed new vocabulary she encountered. "Lisa showed me all the different names of fruit and vegetables," Guadalupe said. They worked on pronunciation since what Guadalupe heard in her mind when she read Gala was different from how the customers said it.

This experience is not unique. It's a cornerstone of many student-tutor relationships. When LVCA student Mary opened a stall at IX Farmer's Market, she worked with her tutor Grace to identify types of money. When LVCA student Patricia got promoted to cashier at a local restaurant, she spent each week with her tutor, Jean, working on vocabulary she encountered each day. Patricia's boss noticed, and she continued to get promoted. "I feel good," she said. The unique nature of one-to-one tutoring is that it lets the students' needs drive the content. Whether it be citizenship, certificate programs, driver's licenses, employment, or daily tasks, tutors throughout the organization consistently adapt their sessions to their students' goals. It's one of the reasons 123 students met a workplace goal last fiscal year, and it's also one of the reasons why both tutors and students find the relationships they forge together so

### Literacy Volunteers of Charlottesville/Albemarle

LVCA is a nonprofit organization that promotes adult literacy through equitable, inclusive, free, confidential, one-to-one English and citizenship tutoring. Please donate if you can.

233 4th Street NW, Suite L  
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 434-977-3838 • [info@literacyforall.org](mailto:info@literacyforall.org)



*Guadalupe and Lisa*

meaningful. By working so intimately together, they see their lives change.

Lisa and Guadalupe are acutely aware of this. As a customer-facing employee, Guadalupe recognizes her growth. "Now I can start a conversation and sometimes I can help other people," she said. When a co-worker mislabeled packages, Guadalupe instantly recognized the mistake because of the vocabulary she had been learning with Lisa. Working with Lisa allowed Guadalupe to feel "ready for work" on her first day. "When I have a question, Lisa helps me. It's easy to ask her a question."

Lisa recognizes this as key to Guadalupe's learning success: "She's a great student. She is ready to learn. She's ready to make mistakes. She wants to speak immediately. She wants to know all the little idioms that we have. She wants to use them. She picks up on the patterns of English better than I can at times. And she's excited, very excited."

This is at the heart of Literacy Volunteers' work. In creating a student-tutor relationship, students have a space where they are comfortable asking questions or making mistakes. That space is where learning thrives and lives begin to change. Guadalupe is ready for the path ahead of her. What's next? Her driver's license. ❖

# The Dynamic (Curriculum) Duo

In late 2023, someone from California called Literacy Volunteers' office to try and enroll in our citizenship program. They had heard from someone who knew someone who told them about Literacy Volunteers and the work we do. While we had to turn this particular person away—we serve the greater Charlottesville area, not California, after all—it was a clear example that students know our program works, and they're eager to refer others. The reason behind why we were able to serve 370 students and 250 volunteer tutors in the last fiscal year has everything to do with our amazing and dedicated tutors, the support of our staff, and the two minds behind our curriculum and training programs: our program coordinator, Steven Reid, and our citizenship coordinator, Catherine McCall.



Catherine McCall

## Citizenship Coordinator Catherine McCall

Citizenship Coordinator Catherine McCall came to Literacy Volunteers first as a volunteer when her family relocated to Charlottesville. She had been working at University of Maryland supporting undergrad and grad students preparing to become social studies teachers while volunteering at a local library teaching citizenship classes, and she knew she wanted to find something similar in Charlottesville.

Literacy Volunteers was it, and when the citizenship coordinator position opened, she saw it as a way to have a job that, in her words, “made [her] feel a part of the community.” Since then, she has brought her expertise to LVCA, creating a program that adapts to students’ needs, including recently redesigning the citizenship handbook.

She said that her goal for the handbook was to provide a comprehensive workbook “that feels more cohesive and less overwhelming. Tutors make decisions about which parts to focus on based on the individual needs of their students, so we wanted to give the tutors a way to easily access specific materials.” The redesign not only took into account the tutors’ needs, but she also thought about how students use the text. By including QR codes and reorganizing the textbook, Catherine sees this as a tool for students to use independently.

This approach embodies the citizenship program under Catherine’s guidance. Whether it is offering multiple Zoom options to accommodate both day and evening students, lesson recordings so students can access the material if they miss a course, schedules that take into consideration students’ religious practices, or practice interviews, Catherine is always considering how students will learn best. “With an interview pass rate of 95-percent, Catherine’s success speaks for itself,” Executive Director Ellen Osborne said.



## Program Manager Steven Reid

When Steven was hired, his knowledge and skills in adult education and professional development were essential to helping our volunteers build the skills to effectively work with their students. Prior to his time at Literacy Volunteers, Steven served as an adult education program manager and educator in both New Hampshire and Slovakia.

Over the past nine years, other organizations across the country have sought Steven out for professional development help. As a result, Steven has partnered with *ProLiteracy*, a national organization dedicated to providing training for adult educators, leading a regular webinar series on Teaching ESOL to adult learners. Additionally, Steven has coordinated with organizations in Texas, Oklahoma, New Jersey, and Missouri in helping guide their own literacy programs and has presented at national conferences in California and Tennessee.

Steven also leads a group of Program Managers and Executive Directors for Community-Based Literacy Organizations from across Virginia, designed to share best practices and discuss policy and curriculum. “Steven’s expertise makes LVCA training events top notch,” said Director Ellen Osborne. ❖

## Instructional Resources at LVCA

Students and tutors use the *Ventures* series workbook and textbooks, including considerable online resources provided through *Ventures*' publisher, Cambridge. Tutors also have access to the extensive online resources created and curated by LVCA staff, which includes recordings and copies of our monthly workshop presentations.

Students receive their first textbook free. As they progress through the program and need the next level textbook, LVCA requests that students invest in their progress by donating \$20 to cover the cost of their next textbook.





# Upcoming Events

## New Tutor Training

Saturday, April 13  
9:30 – 3:00 p.m.  
Jefferson School City Center

## Wordplay! Charlottesville's Game for Trivia Lovers

Thursday, March 25  
7:00 – 9:00 p.m.  
The Paramount Theater

## New Tutor Training

Saturday, May 4  
9:30 – 3:00 p.m.  
Jefferson School City Center

## Tutor Appreciation Event

Tuesday, May 28  
5:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.  
Eastwood Farm and Winery

## Tutor Mini-Conference

Saturday, June 22  
9:00 – 3:00 p.m.  
The Center at Belvedere

## Citizenship Program Update

So far this fiscal year, 36 active and recently former students passed their naturalization interviews to become U.S. Citizens.

### 14 Different Countries of Birth

- 19 students from Afghanistan
- 3 students from Mexico
- 2 students from Peru
- 2 students from Congo DRC
- 1 student each from China, Congo, El Salvador, Honduras, India, Kenya, Romania, Spain, Togo, and Venezuela.



## From Tutor to Teacher: How the Pandemic and Literacy Volunteers Opened Up a Pathway to Master's Degree

When Ali Buchanan signed up for tutor training in January 2020, she didn't know that her life was about to change. Part of the last in-person tutor training before the pandemic hit, Ali was only able to meet with her student a few times before the world shut down, but it was enough to make a difference. A former high school French teacher, she was immediately struck with the motivation that adult learners have. "Tutoring [my student] made me realize that I really like working with adult learners," she said. "He was very motivated to learn English because he wanted to be better at his job and be part of the community."

When the pandemic hit, like so many of us, Ali reevaluated what she wanted to do with her life and was inspired by her work at LVCA to go back to school for a master's in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) education with a focus on adult learners. Now, as Ali's shifted careers, she finds herself balancing tutoring at LVCA, finishing her master's program, and working as an ESOL tutor at UVA's Speak Language program, which offers free English tutoring for UVA's facilities' staff. Going through the coursework and her professional tutoring, she sees how her time at LVCA influences her. In particular, the nature of LVCA's one-to-one tutoring helps because "you already can personalize your lessons so much, and that has really helped in understanding my classwork."

When her current student was interested in learning more about citizenship, Ali approached Citizenship Coordinator Catherine McCall for materials. In talking about her work with Ali, Catherine said, "One of the things I love about our citizenship classes is that it's not just for student classes, but it also supports tutors who are working individually with students. So many of our tutors get really



Ali Buchanan

invested in their student's citizenship process, and Ali is a great example of that." In their discussion, Ali mentioned her final teaching practicum, and Catherine encouraged her to observe the citizenship classes to fulfill the requirement.

Finding a support community has been instrumental in Ali's journey as an adult educator: "one of the best experiences was LVCA's mini-conference last summer as it featured other community organizations that were working with the same population. I didn't fully realize until I volunteered at LVCA just how enmeshed the resources and organizations are. They are all passionate about helping those in the community who are trying to improve their lives."

Volunteer Engagement coordinator Heather Tebbenhoff said, "Ali's dedication to adult education and her passion for helping others is apparent in everything she does, including supporting new tutors during tutor training."

As Ali thinks about next steps after her master's, she knows that adult education and literacy will remain at the forefront. "Ideally, I'd love to work for a company that's creating resources for adult learners and teaching. I really do love teaching. I can't seem to quit it." Thank goodness for that. ❖

# The Catering Outfit Recognizes LVCA Catering to the Community

Literacy Volunteers is proud to announce that *The Catering Outfit* is generously providing catering, both food and labor, to make our annual fundraising event, Wordplay, a success. When asked why he supports Literacy Volunteers, The Catering Outfit owner Walter Theo Xavier Slawski wrote,

*As a leader in Central Virginia's hospitality industry, The Catering Outfit recognizes the incredible contribution that immigrants, and particularly those recently immigrated to the United States, make in our market segment. Without these hard-working folks, our world just wouldn't spin. We find that a language barrier is the single-most limiting factor in this community's ability to achieve their full earning potential.*

*Literacy Volunteers provides critical and, more importantly, free access to effective language learning services. The unique one-on-one tutoring relationships fostered within the program provide a judgement-free space to learn our language, and the tutors often tailor the learning process to job specific language needs.*

*This is critical in helping motivated folks achieve their "American Dreams" in the most efficient manner possible. Many of these people are immigrating to escape resource scarcity, so having a seat at our resource-rich table as soon as possible is instrumental in their lives.*

We are grateful to businesses like The Catering Outfit and all of our Wordplay sponsors who recognize the value of our services to the Charlottesville community. If you are interested in supporting Literacy Volunteers through Wordplay, you still have time! **Team registration is open, and as of printing, 35 teams have registered to compete.** A team sponsorship of \$600 covers the cost of supplying educational services to one student for six months.



Frank and Josefine from Catering Outfit making menu plans at the Paramount in preparation for Wordplay

If team competition isn't for you, join us as an audience member! **Tickets are \$20 and can be purchased at Literacy Volunteers' office or from The Paramount's Box Office.**

Additionally, the event includes a fabulous raffle drawing with items donated from businesses throughout the area. Tickets are \$5 each or five for \$20, and you don't have to be present to win—though we hope you will be!

Prizes this year include a 2-night stay at The Omni Homestead Resort, a round of golf at Glenmore, passes to Massanutten Water Park, wine tasting, local dining, and so much more!

For more information about the event, visit [literacyforall.org/wordplay](http://literacyforall.org/wordplay). Register your team of three players online or contact Heather Tebbenhoff at [heather@literacyforall.org](mailto:heather@literacyforall.org). We hope to see you there! ❖



## LVCA MINI-CONFERENCE

WORKSHOPS AND NETWORKING FOR ADULT EDUCATORS

Literacy Volunteers will host a mini-conference on Saturday, June 22 at The Center at Belvedere. This annual day-long retreat for volunteer tutors and partner organizations will explore best practices in adult education.

We are currently seeking corporate or individual sponsors for this event. Sponsorship opportunities range from \$500—\$1500 to make this event a success. For information on becoming a sponsor, contact Ellen Osborne at 434-977-3838 or [ellen@literacyforall.org](mailto:ellen@literacyforall.org). ❖

**wordplay**  
Thursday, April 25, 2024

Thank you to our sponsors!

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