

LITERACY VOLUNTEERS

CHARLOTTESVILLE / ALBEMARLE



In March, students, tutors, and their families visited the Farmers Market at IX Art Park together as an activity with The Link.

Introducing “The Link”: Where We All Belong

link [link] noun: *anything serving to connect one part or thing with another; a bond or tie*

“The Link” connects people and provides activities and outings to help our students and tutors feel they are integral to the Charlottesville/Albemarle community. The group is a new initiative as part of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) implementation.

Initial efforts have included guest speakers from the City of Charlottesville last November and the Farmers Market at IX in March. The group learned about the City's services and how to become a vendor at the Market. As a follow-up, they enjoyed a field trip to the Market in March to experience it firsthand.

The group has organized many other activities, mainly outdoors, to navigate through the COVID era.

The walking group has been meeting twice a month since February. So far, they have visited the Saunders-Monticello Trails, Riverview Park, and Ivy Creek Natural Area. They will explore the Botanical Garden of Piedmont with a tree identification expert in mid-July.

The walking group allows tutors and students to build relationships while working on important conversation skills in a relaxed environment.

“My student and I have gone on two walks with The Link group as a way for my student to practice her conversational skills,” said tutor Caroline Wilhelm. “Speaking and listening in a group was a challenge at first, but on the second walk

my student participated with more confidence. The group setting is a nice change of pace from our one-on-one lessons.”

One of the most notable activities might be the first student-led salsa dancing class on Saturdays in July. Blanca, a student from Colombia, will teach new steps each week in the courtyard of The Jefferson School City Center.

The group hopes to have many more opportunities to showcase the talents and leadership of our students and share the fun. Family and friends are always welcome to participate.

Participants have learned the best gift we can give one another is our presence, which fosters a sense of community and belonging.

Bi-monthly walks will continue, and the group is excited to offer a six-week meditation class starting in September. A fall outing is also under development. These are just some of the offerings inviting student and tutor participation beyond learning and teaching English.

The Link welcomes student and volunteer input. Contact link@literacyforall.org if you have ideas that would inspire a sense of community or would like to help organize or host events behind the scenes. Check The Link page on the LVCA website literacyforall.org/the-link to view the schedule of activities.

It Was Latin, Not Latin America

By John Schroll, LVCA Tutor

"One day, he spoke for 45 minutes in English. I stopped him. 'Do you know what you just did?' He didn't. I told him, and he flashed a big grin. That grin made it so rewarding."

I took five years of Latin in the 1960s. Surely they would be useful in my retirement! With this clear thinking, I signed up for training with Literacy Volunteers.

I began tutoring with Juan in January 2020, and COVID hit us in March. A great start! After a couple of months of figuring out Zoom, we resumed.

Juan was 30, having moved to the U.S. from El Salvador when he was almost 18. He spoke very little English and was shy. He was a self-employed mechanic with two children. Juan wanted to be able to understand teachers and to feel more comfortable in stores. I knew about ten words in Spanish.

Juan knew the English terms for auto repair, so that's where we started. He learned more English, and I learned more about cars. We discussed food, his home country, and his extended family.

Our sessions were a combination of reading, writing, and conversation. I repeated 1,000 times that English was hard and its rules crazy.

Early in 2021, he said he wanted to take the citizenship test, so we focused more on that.

One day, he spoke for 45 minutes in English. I stopped him. "Do you know what you just did?" He didn't. I told him, and he flashed a big grin. That grin made it so rewarding.

In April of 2022, Juan had his citizenship interview. I paced the floor until he called and told me he had passed. I was thrilled for him and, if I'm honest, proud of myself. We celebrated with donuts, his favorite breakfast.

Before Juan said he wanted to be a citizen, I asked for a second student who had already started citizenship classes.

I met Misael in January 2021. He and his wife moved to the U.S. from Venezuela to be closer to their daughter and her family. Misael was 65 when they arrived and spoke little English.

We met on Zoom and then outside the Jefferson School City Center during the warmer weather, usually under shade.

When we finally met in person, Misael gave me a big hug and said, "Hello, my friend!" Misael is outgoing, happy, and likes to joke around.



Juan and John celebrated in the LVCA library with a breakfast of donuts after Juan passed his citizenship interview in April 2022.

He had a lot of first language interference. His confidence was low. He missed his beloved Venezuela, so that was a good starting point. I have learned a lot about his country and his life there.

Misael talked with pride about his small business and his family. Misael has taken several Zoom citizenship classes and worked hard during our sessions. He and his wife work full-time in their cleaning business, so it is not often easy to find time and energy to do much homework. His English and confidence are improving. He can easily talk about Venezuela for nearly an hour, complete with photos.

What have I learned over the past two years from these men? I learned about the importance of building trust first. I learned about other cultures. I saw before me the value of hard work and devotion to family. I am still learning how to slow myself down and appreciate small victories. And I have appreciated the support from the amazing LVCA staff.

Finally, as corny as it may sound, I have valued the gifts these two men have given me.

Citizenship Program Continues to Thrive

"I love this country, and I want to be part of it," said a new U.S. Citizen student.

Under the direction of Citizenship Coordinator Catherine McCall, Literacy Volunteers' citizenship program continues to thrive through a combination of online group instruction, one-to-one tutoring, and the perseverance of our students.

Since July 1, 2021, 71 current and recently enrolled students passed their citizenship interviews. The citizenship interview consists of four tests.

We now offer three different classes each week. The first class focuses on the speaking, listening, reading, and writing portions. The second focuses on the civics questions, and the third is an interview practice class where students take turns in the hot seat to practice all four parts of the citizenship interview. Many of our students take two or three classes, devoting up to three and a half hours each week to our citizenship classes.

At the request of our students, we've

developed an additional study resource for them: audio recordings of the civics questions and answers and definitions to key words included in the speaking and listening interview questions. Students have appreciated having an extra review tool they can listen to in the car or while working.

We're thrilled that many of our students have taken us up on our offer to complete a practice interview before they go in for their USCIS interview. We conducted 70 practice interviews last fiscal year—some students have done more than one, and in many cases, the students' tutors have joined us for the practice interview. Tutors have found the experience incredibly helpful in identifying strengths and areas to focus on as they move into their final preparations for the USCIS interview.

Many of our students work with a tutor on their citizenship goals in



Nazia, left, took several citizenship classes and worked with tutor Jackie to prepare for the Citizenship interview. She became a citizen at Monticello on July 4, 2022.

addition to or instead of enrolling in our citizenship classes. Our tutors continue to amaze and inspire us with their dedication to their students.

As her student prepared for her USCIS interview, one of our tutors commented recently, "I feel so invested, like I'm taking the test with her!"



From Writing to Drawing, Student Talents Published

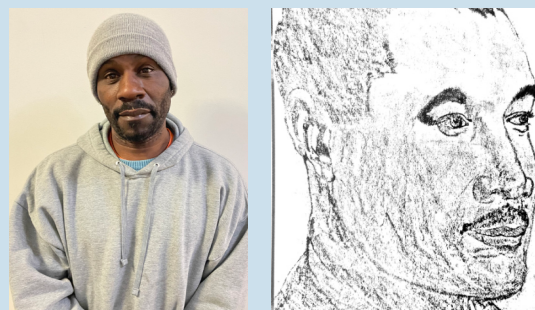
Golara Haghtalab, top left, a former LVCA student and UVA alum, published her memoir, *Immigrant: Courage Required* earlier this year. Golara was born and raised in Iran and immigrated to the United States when she was twenty-one. From her website:

"As an immigrant from Iran, Golara wanted to share her story of change and adaptation because she thinks everyone can learn something from immigrants about accepting what is, letting go of what isn't working, and starting anew."

Golara was featured at a reading and book talk at New Dominion Bookshop, where you can order a copy of her book.

David Chambers, bottom left, has shared his drawing and sketches with tutors and staff for years. We were thrilled to see his illustration of Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. published in SPOTLIGHT, an online publication from the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center.

"My goal is to improve my reading. I keep trying every day to reach my goal. Learning to read is like being a superhero you learn how to do things for yourself," said David. "Reading is the best thing you can have. You have mind strength. It's more important than money. If you can read, you can reach your dream, and money can't buy knowledge."





Conversation and Community Building

By MaryLewis Meador, LVCA Tutor

Over the last two years, conversation groups have brought a sense of community to students. While practicing their English, students gain the invaluable bonus of connection. MaryLewis, a conversation group leader, offers her reflection on the experience.

New Tutor Training Dates

Saturday, August 27

10:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

Northside Library, 705 Rio Rd W

Thursdays, September 22, 29, and October 6

6:00 – 8:00 p.m.

Virtual only, on Zoom

Saturday, October 29

10:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

Location TBD

Saturday, December 3

10:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

Location TBD

Upon completing training, volunteer tutors can teach in person or virtually.

Visit our website for more details and registration information.

www.literacyforall.org/tutors

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.

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We have a pretty regular group that includes women from Afghanistan, Mexico, Korea, Vietnam, and Tibet. They are so curious about each other and thoughtful with their questions. We've talked about head coverings, the Taliban, marriage, favorite artists, music from their home countries, and recipes and food from their cultures, all with great respect. Dumplings exist in all of our cultures!

We spend time checking in on each other, asking questions about daily life in Charlottesville, looking at art together, and playing games. Twenty questions often leads to lots of laughter as we take turns being "it."

Sometimes I sit and marvel as I watch them interact and wonder where else you can find people from around the globe who find genuine connection and camaraderie each week together—all while learning English and how to better navigate life in Charlottesville. We can't wait to get together as the weather warms and we can meet outside, in person.

The group has reminded me how very much we humans have in common, how respectful curiosity is almost always welcome, and that learning a new language and culture is no barrier to friendship. They've taught me to slow down when we're speaking, listening, or observing together, so we can really focus and appreciate all the nuances and sparkle in each other.

Student responses to why they come to conversation groups:

"I come to class to practice speaking, to share opinions and ideas, and to learn about other cultures. I like that we end class with our dinner plans!"

"I come to class to learn English and to meet new people."

"I come to class to practice conversation."

"I want to improve my English, to make friends, and to have a chance to ask questions about living here. Especially with Covid, it's hard to meet people."



MaryLewis, top center, helps the students in her Zoom conversation class connect with others by building community and a sense of belonging during the pandemic.