

Tutor Spotlight

What motivates a volunteer to tutor an English language learner? For Carole Lally, it was the memory of moving to a new country and not speaking a word of the local language.

Years ago, Carole's husband took a job assignment in Serbia. While her husband could rely on an interpreter on the job, Carole was on her own to get around Belgrade. Fortunately, her landlady spoke some English and offered to teach Carole enough Serbian to survive – the names of foods in the local market, the routes of local buses, everyday expressions. Eventually, Carole was able to



Carole never forgot the kindness of a stranger who became her lifeline, and she vowed to pay the favor forward.

enroll in language classes, and she became immersed in the local culture until she and her husband moved back to the United States two years later.

"Because someone cared enough to help me learn a

new language," Carole recalls, "I knew that I wanted to help someone else."

After Carole retired as an office manager at a law firm, she sought training as a literacy tutor for Oakland Literacy Council. Since 2012, she has helped several immigrants learn survival English – and so much more. "I'm truly interested in them achieving their goals and becoming successful in a new society," she says.

Carole says she receives much more than she gives as a tutor. "The relationships that I've made are wonderful," she says, reaching for her phone to scroll through photos of students with whom she remains friends even after they've graduated from the Council's program. "My students," she says, "are my kids."



More than 100 students are waiting for a literacy tutor. Can you help?

STEP 1: Take our e-learning course where you will learn more about the Oakland Literacy Council, who our students are, and what it takes to be a successful tutor.

STEP 2: After completing the e-learning course, take an in-person training session. **The next training session is Saturday, May 11, from 9 a.m.—3 p.m. at the Oakland Literacy Council office.**

STEP 3: Meet your student and come back for help with lesson planning.

Sign up online at: www.oaklandliteracy.com/become-a-tutor or call 248-253-1617 and get ready to change someone's life!

LITERACY MATTERS

You're making a difference

Celebrating
35
Years
OAKLAND LITERACY COUNCIL

"I Always Wanted to Learn"

Eric was a functionally illiterate adult because his K-12 education failed to address his learning disability. Thanks to Oakland Literacy Council, his lifelong wish to become a strong reader is now a reality.

Eric had struggled with reading and writing since he was a child. He has a learning disorder called dyslexia, which makes it hard for students of normal intelligence to process words. Unfortunately, he didn't receive enough specialized instruction; his schools simply "pushed me through."

He was embarrassed. "I didn't want anybody to know that I struggled so much with reading and writing," he says. "That's why I worked for myself."

Eric picked up carpentry from his father, who did woodworking on the side, and started his own business as a carpenter. He refurbished kitchens, basements, and bathrooms. He also liked to do finish carpentry. Eric is really proud of the additions he built onto homes. Because his math skills were good, he got along with the carpenter's adage to "measure twice, cut once."

Still, he had to rely on family members to write invoices for him. Because he struggled to read and understand instructions that came with items he needed to install, he relied on his innate ability to visualize how something should be installed.

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Eric's tutor, Alec, is a retired school principal who once taught fourth and fifth graders, making him uniquely qualified to work with Eric.

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Had he been a stronger reader, he might have been able to sit for the exam to get a full-fledged builder's license, he says.

But Eric never lost his desire to read better. **"I just always wanted to learn," he says.** He took a night class in reading near his home until the program closed. He hired a private tutor, but she quit. Although discouraged, he didn't give up. Then he heard about Oakland Literacy Council, whose trained volunteer tutors provide individualized instruction for free.

His tutor, Alec, is a retired school principal who once taught fourth and fifth graders. Alec has useful techniques. He helped Eric create a spelling dictionary and stresses the importance of writing for a particular audience. Eric and Alec

enjoyed the surprise endings in a collection of short stories by O. Henry that they read together, and they recently started the novel *Wonder* by R. J. Palacio.

"He's had me write more than I ever have, so it's getting easier for me," Eric says. And reading is easier, too. "It's getting to where I like to read." One of his favorite reads so far: "My Life on the Mississippi" by Mark Twain.

"Eric is totally into learning for learning's sake," Alec says. Almost every single week since October, they have met at a library, where Eric works on building his vocabulary, spelling, writing, and reading fluency.

Eric says he once doubted his ability to learn, but no longer.

15 Years of Service

Judy Lindstrom grew up in household that valued reading, with a father who gave his children new vocabulary words to learn every week and a mother who loved books. It's not surprising, then, that when Judy received an invitation to support Oakland Literacy Council twenty years ago, she heartily agreed. She's been helping the Council ever since, serving as president for the last 15 years.

She began her volunteering with the Council as a tutor, and even today she counts the success of her students as among her proudest moments. As president of the board of directors, she steered the Council through the economic downturn of 2008-9. "We were very close to shuttering," Judy says. "The board rallied together, and our supporters, tutors and students helped us get through that bleak period."

"What keeps me going is our core mission of opening doors for people who have a hunger to read or to comprehend English," she says.



Donations at Work

Thanks to your support, conversation groups have sprung up throughout Oakland County that give our English language learners extra practice in listening and speaking.

This spring, seven conversation groups for our English language learners are underway in Troy, West Bloomfield, Bloomfield Hills, and Rochester Hills. Some meet during the day; some in the evening.

Conversation groups are organized with students whose listening and speaking ability is about the same level. This approach differs from other conversation groups in the area that are open to everyone. Our approach ensures all students can participate equally.

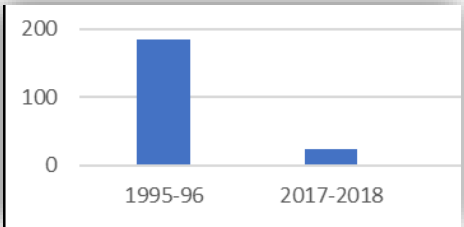


The more conversation practice students get, the faster they will become proficient communicators.

Why Donor Support Matters

The Trump Administration's proposed fiscal year 2020 budget calls for a 24 percent cut to Title II Adult Education State Grants, from which Oakland Literacy Council receives funding.

Low literacy is as prevalent now as 20 years ago, yet there are fewer public resources dedicated to solving the problem. **In the state of Michigan, a cut at the federal level would be a continuation of a trend. Support for adult education has fallen 87 percent since 1995.**



Funding for Michigan's Adult Education Programs (in millions). Source: U.S. Department of Education and Michigan House Fiscal Agency.

The funding decline has hit already under-served cities particularly hard. The latest casualty is Hazel Park, which shuttered its adult education program in July 2018. Other programs remain operational but with reduced service. Currently, no adult educa-

tion programming exists for adults in the high-need Oakland County communities of Madison Heights, Oak Park, Hazel Park, or Southfield. While adult ed programs in surrounding communities will enroll adults from other cities, we know that this population often lacks transportation to access services beyond their neighborhood borders.

While the Trump Administration's proposed budget may not pass, the bottom line remains: it's even more important today that Oakland Literacy Council is here to bridge the gap.