

Literacy Matters

You're making a difference!

Newsletter for Donors and Friends of Oakland Literacy Council

Immigrant student advances toward dream of entrepreneurship

Working with an OLC tutor gave Hyunjung the confidence to enroll in beauty school.

Hyunjung Kim is a highly motivated and resourceful wife, mother, and former insurance professional. A 2014 immigrant from South Korea, Hyunjung came to Oakland Literacy Council about two years ago and was paired with tutor Jenny Keenan.

When Jenny first met Hyunjung, she quickly saw how much Hyunjung already had going for her.

"Hyunjung is very smart," Jenny says. **"I needed to challenge her to work on speaking English and gaining confidence.** She wanted to start a new career in the U.S. but lacked the confidence that she could do it because holding conversations in English was difficult for her."

"In five years, I want to open my own salon."

As the two met twice a week over several months, Jenny's positivity kept Hyunjung going. "Jenny always inspired me," she says. "She'd tell me to try it, and she was patient with me."

"I'd say, 'I'm right here if you need help, but you can do this!'" Jenny recalls with a smile, remembering pre-COVID outings to stores or cafes where she would encourage Hyunjung to interact with Americans.

Hyunjung shares, **"Before starting beauty school and getting my green card, I felt like I didn't have a future."**

Hyunjung will graduate as a nail technician in June. But, for her, it doesn't end with school. Hyunjung has a new goal: "In five years, I want to open my own salon."

"I want to see her through as she takes the state board test, applies for jobs, becomes employed full time, and works in a public setting," says Jenny. **"I want to help her excel.... I'm so proud of her!"**



OLC tutors focus on helping students reach individual goals. Tutor Jenny Keenan (right) accompanies student Hyunjung Kim (left) to visit a beauty school and learn about the program.

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Partnership promotes literacy for the next generation of skilled trades professionals



Foundational skills include reading/writing, math, and digital literacy. These skills are essential for CarNav student Shane and others pursuing careers in skilled trades like masonry.

This past year, OLC has taken an active role in the grassroots efforts to build a stronger workforce in Pontiac through involvement in the Pontiac Talent Development Coalition (TDC).

Through the Pontiac TDC, Oakland Literacy Council began working with the CarNav Group (CAReer NAVigation), which prepares young adults for skilled trades in high demand industries, including construction, health care, advanced manufacturing, and business information technology.

CarNav's current pre-apprentice program in construction offers young adults the chance to job shadow in various construction trades and earn certifications to prepare for future employment (OSHA-30, First Aid, CPR/AED).

Early on, though, CarNav Group leadership realized there was a piece missing and Oakland Literacy could fill that gap.

"We have found through our experience of this pre-apprentice program that our students are in need of additional reading and math support, as well as literacy for digital improvement," explains CarNav Group Chief Executive Navigator Carlton Jones.

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Oakland Literacy Council was ready to step in. The CarNav students came to the OLC office for assessment of reading, math, and digital skills. Several students went on to enroll with OLC and have been matched with tutors.

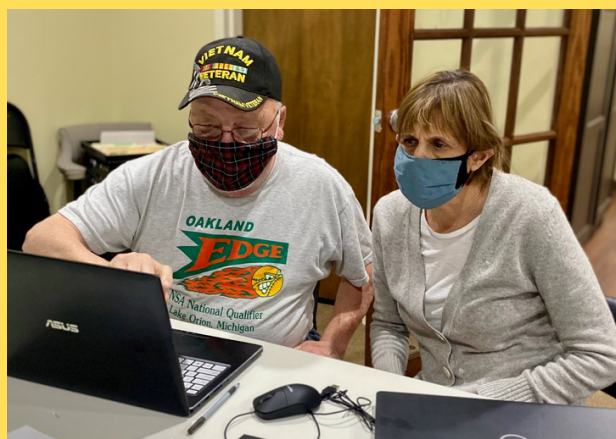
Jones sees that the tutoring program is working well for his students. **"We know that this relationship and partnership between CarNav and Oakland Literacy Council is showing value already.** There have been several students who have benefited from just the systems and tutoring that Oakland Literacy Council brings to the table."

Senior is ready to connect with new digital skills

At 73, new OLC student Ray has a lifetime of experiences behind him. He is a proud Vietnam veteran. However, he never learned to use a computer.

Recently widowed, Ray wants to keep active, to stay connected with friends and family, and to make new friends. At OLC, Ray is learning to use a computer, send an e-mail, join a Zoom meeting, and surf the web!

Thanks to your support of OLC's new digital literacy program, OLC is helping many more students like Ray learn to use a computer. Also, you are making it possible for us to provide laptops and hotspots for students who need them.



OLC student Ray works with the digital literacy coordinator to learn to use the computer. The computer belonged to his wife, who passed away recently.

Board member advocates for literacy and diversity

Donor



Spotlight

As a dynamic leader and host of Council events, Alicia Stephens strives to make sure all who want to improve their literacy skills have the opportunity.

Alicia Stephens already had a full plate as a mom and wife, church volunteer, OLC board member, and executive at Comerica Bank, but when asked to lead OLC's newly formed Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee last summer, she believed it was a cause deserving of her time.

"Diversity is a differentiator of success," Alicia says. "The more variation you have, the better chance you have of being able to put together a strategy or solution that's going to lead to more positive outcomes."

Positive outcomes is what this dynamic advocate leader is all about. "Wherever I go, I want to bring a positive spirit and energy to the room," Alicia says, **"There are only so many hours in the day, and if you're going to dedicate yourself and invest in something, you should always put your best foot forward and be an enabler of positive results."**

Alicia first got involved with OLC just over two years ago while seeking opportunities to leverage her professional skills to serve the community. A passionate reader since childhood, she was immediately drawn to the mission of OLC. Her interest grew as she learned more about the organization. "Books and education open the world to you," she remarks.

"To lift the adult literacy level in Oakland County, we have to understand what are the drivers for inequalities."

Early in her career, Alicia worked at a bank branch and recalls interacting with some customers who struggled with low literacy. "They were unable to fill out a deposit or withdrawal slip," she recalls, "and some customers weren't able to sign their names."

As DEI Chairperson, Alicia is excited to help OLC always "interact in a way that communicates that all are welcome," she says. The Committee is already making progress toward its initial goals of increasing diversity among board membership, selecting materials and resources for learners that reflect the varied cultures of our learners, and educating tutors about diversity and inclusion.



A Pontiac native, Alicia served as emcee for OLC's program (in collaboration with the Oakland History Center) to spotlight the 50th anniversary of events surrounding racial integration in Pontiac Schools. Alicia also hosted the Ex Libris 2020 virtual fundraiser.

Alicia is also enthusiastic about OLC's desire to explore historical and systemic sources of inequity in education and literacy. "To lift the adult literacy level in Oakland County, we have to understand what are the drivers for inequalities," she states, referencing economic, gender, racial, and other influences.

Along with broadening diversity, Alicia reports that the Board recognizes growth as the Council's most pressing current opportunity. Virtual tutoring has been well received and widened the pool of volunteer tutors beyond southeastern Michigan, communities are seeking to bridge inequitable educational gaps, and the Board is looking at ways to elevate fundraising to support the growing demand for literacy support.

"The Oakland Literacy Council has been around for decades. The Board wants to make sure that it's around for decades to come," Alicia shares, "and that means always keeping our eye on not just today but tomorrow."

Your investment **adds up** for adult learners

OLC launches math program



Thanks to the initial support of the **Village Club Foundation**, the **Phillip and Elizabeth Filmer Memorial Charitable Trust**, and the **Ray Beebe and Mary Boland Charitable Fund (Donor-advised Fund)**, the Oakland Literacy Council is now offering basic math services for those with skills under the 9th-grade level.

This math literacy program provides numeracy instruction using the successful relationship-based tutoring model OLC utilizes for reading and English language instruction.

Students are matched with a one-on-one tutor, given access to self-study using *Essential Education*, an online curriculum program, and participate in group and individual instruction guided by math consultant Carolyn Masserang, a Ph.D. who specializes in mathematics education.

As of May 1st, 16 students are enrolled in the new math program. Soon OLC will begin recruiting new tutors for math. **If you are interested in becoming a math tutor, contact Laurie Weeks at laurie.w@oaklandliteracy.com.**

Students and tutors receive vaccine assistance



This year, digital skills became a matter of health, first for virtual visits with doctors and, more recently, for getting a COVID-19 vaccine.

Tutors and staff have been helping students schedule vaccines. Lisa Machesky, OLC Executive Director, explains, "Finding a site and registering for a vaccine has been extra challenging for our students who face language barriers or do not have strong computer skills yet."

Earlier this month, over 45 OLC students, tutors, volunteers, and family members received their COVID-19 vaccine, thanks to a partnership with **Rahma Worldwide**, located in Beverly Hills.

If you or someone you know needs help scheduling a vaccine, call the State of Michigan's COVID-19 hotline at 888-535-6136.

View the recording:

50 YEARS LATER: RACIAL INTEGRATION IN PONTIAC SCHOOLS

This year marks 50 years since the start of court-ordered busing of elementary students to facilitate the racial integration of Pontiac's public schools — and 50 years since the traumatic bombing of ten school buses right as the school year was to begin.

Thank you, **Oakland History Center** and **Michigan Schools & Government Credit Union**, for partnering with us to share about these events and how they have shaped our communities and educational system.

Over 275 community members attended the live presentations in February. **To view the recording, use the QR code or go to www.oaklandliteracy.com/pontiachistory/.**



Gratitude blooms, thanks to local artist



In celebration of National Volunteer Month, Birmingham artist **Julie Dawson** generously gave each OLC volunteer a beautiful signed zinnia print. Julie has been gifting her art to volunteers and frontline workers since the pandemic began. View her collection at www.juliedawsonartist.com.



**43700 Woodward Avenue, Suite 20
Bloomfield Hills, MI 48302
248-253-1617
www.oaklandliteracy.com
info@oaklandliteracy.com**