

*YOU are making*



*Transforming Lives Through Literacy*

# The LITERACY Difference

Newsletter for Donors and Friends of Oakland Literacy Council



**YOUR GIFT GAVE ALEXANDRA  
A VOICE THAT CARRIES OVER TO  
HER SON AND NEW BUSINESS**

*"I attended my first parent-teacher conference without an interpreter"*

OLC graduate Alexandra, pictured with son Rodrigo and his teacher, Cynthia Kiser

SPRING- SUMMER 2022

# "WHEN HER ENGLISH SKILLS AND CONFIDENCE GREW, SO DID RODRIGO'S!"

Graduate finds her voice with teachers *and* customers

Alexandra used to ask her son, fourth-grader Rodrigo, to call the other parents about playdates. An immigrant from Venezuela, she was afraid of making a mistake. But even more afraid of what she might miss as she raises Rodrigo, 9, and Thiago, 2.

"In the last year, I feel like I really want to know more about my son in school, but I didn't understand," Alexandra recalls.

But after meeting weekly with OLC tutor Julie Jones, she gained fluency and confidence. **Now Alexandra volunteers at school and feels comfortable speaking with other parents.** She no longer needs a translator for parent-teacher conferences.

Rodrigo's teacher, Cynthia Kiser of Rochester Community School District, sees the difference it makes for Alexandra's son.

**"He was so excited to have her attend school functions or help in his class. When her English skills and confidence grew, so did Rodrigo's!"** says Ms. Kiser.

***Now Alexandra is turning confidence into entrepreneurship!***

An engineer by profession, Alexandra is also known for creating beautiful balloon and flower arrangements.



Learn about Alexandra's business!



Rodrigo's teacher Cynthia Kiser is proud of all Alexandra has accomplished with the help of tutor Julie Jones, who is holding a special thank-you gift from A&G Party Creations!

This year, she started *A&G Party Creations* with a friend. The business is "blowing up" with orders and referrals!

In July, Alexandra and her husband, Ricarte, will be honored at the OLC graduation. The balloons will be supplied compliments of A&G Party Creations!

**"I'm really, really grateful to this program and thank you, thank you so much!"** says Alexandra.

# "I KNOW THEIR MOTHER WOULD BE PROUD"

Now raising her grandchildren, Evelyn has the courage and determination to seek her GED and share her story with county commissioners

See Evelyn's powerful speech!



OLC honor student Evelyn has made gains in reading and math. **Your gift will help her reach her goal of earning a GED.**

In 2020, Evelyn lost her daughter, mother of Jayden, 12, and Nevaeh, 11, to COVID-19. Soon after, she enrolled in OLC's *reading and math programs* with the goal of earning her GED. On April 5th, Evelyn inspired Oakland County commissioners as she shared her story.

"I have told the kids several times, 'You don't know what that paper means. That's your lifeline, literally. That's going to tell you how much you make on a job. That's going to tell you how far you can go'," she explains.

Evelyn expressed her gratitude to OLC and her tutor, Leslie Littell, who is "part of the family."

Evelyn concluded with a powerful message to the commissioners about how we should show up for the next generation.

***"You can do whatever you set your mind to do, and we have to continue to teach that and never let that fall towards our children or grandchildren."***

# I GIVE SO FIROZA, AN AFGHAN MOM, IS **READY** FOR HER FAMILY'S NEW LIFE HERE

## Donor tells you why it's her chance to "pay it forward"

I met Firoza, a recent immigrant from Afghanistan and mother of two boys, with her tutor. I watched them name colors and coins.

"She is so smart and so excited to learn," says tutor Don Haffner.

Then we showed each other pictures of our children. We smiled. We laughed. We hugged goodbye.

With barely a word spoken between us, I felt like we were instant friends. I look forward to the next time I see her.

In that moment, it became clear to me why I give my money and time to Oakland Literacy Council. Why I will work late nights so I don't miss a grant deadline.

**It's not just because Firoza suddenly finds herself raising her two young sons in a country where she doesn't speak a word of the language.**

**It's not just because I am in awe of her courage and resilience.**

It's because meeting Firoza opened my world. All the moms from Afghanistan, Ukraine, and every place where they are forced to leave and start a new life became more real.

**"For my family to thrive, I had to learn the language of autism. Now Firoza is learning a new language for herself and her family."**

**Because it made me proud to be part of a welcoming community.** Proud of the family that sponsors Firoza and her family. Proud of the tutor who spends hours teaching her.

Because Firoza reminds me of myself when my kids were young. For my family to thrive, I had to learn the language of autism. Now Firoza is learning a new language for herself and her family.

**I remember so much uncertainty.** It was scary at times. It was isolating.

**But there was a community that wrapped their arms around my family** – friends, teachers, and organizations that made the difference.



*Firoza meets with veteran tutor Don Haffner twice a week at Rahma Worldwide. **Your donation will help OLC prepare tutors to work with the growing number of immigrants arriving with little to no English skills.** Also, some immigrants did not have the chance for an education in their home countries.*

Now my daughter with autism is a thriving 23-year-old. **Now I have a chance to pay it forward.**

Parents like Firoza – no matter how they joined our community – want the same for their children.

**Won't you join me in making sure that Oakland Literacy Council can always be there for Firoza and every other mom – from the U.S., Afghanistan and every country – who needs to learn?**

**— Sue Klunk, Huntington Woods**

*A former tutor, Sue joined the Oakland Literacy Council staff in 2019 and now serves as grants coordinator. She and her husband, Jim, are donors.*



**Over 1700 Afghans evacuees have arrived in Michigan since September 2021.**

**We are grateful to partner with the agencies, faith communities, and families who are helping them resettle.**

# REGIONAL FOUNDATION INVESTS IN VITAL STUDENT SUPPORTS

Community Foundation  
FOR SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN

**Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan** recognizes need for a full-time student coordinator to keep 300+ **adult learners YOU care about** on track

Just like for young children and teenagers, the road to learning for adults isn't always a straight line.

"Our adults are often juggling many work and family responsibilities," says student coordinator Amanda Powe. "They come in expecting so much of themselves but often have learning, emotional, and practical barriers to overcome. COVID-19 only added new curves."

Thankfully, the **Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan** recognized the critical need for more individual student support. Last year, the foundation awarded a **\$42,000 grant to Oakland Literacy Council** to make the student coordinator a full-time position for the 2021-2022 program year. The grant also included technology for student communication and instruction.

**"This program is helping our community to recover and thrive, and we look forward to the impact it will have in our region."**

— Ric DeVore, President  
*Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan*

"Now I am able to build an individual learning plan with each student," says Amanda. "I make sure they know I am here for them if anything comes up and will do all I can to help them achieve their goals."



Thanks to the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan and you, student coordinator Amanda Powe (right) can meet with Teresa (left) to review her progress.

**THANK YOU** for making possible:

- ✓ Reading, math, ESL, and digital literacy
- ✓ Individualized student support
- ✓ **Exceptional, highly trained tutors**
- ✓ Innovative online learning programs
- ✓ Loaner laptops and hotspots
- ✓ **Record student achievement!**

The need is great in Oakland County.

**YOUR GIFT, large or small, makes the LITERACY DIFFERENCE!**



"Years ago, I went for my GED in Pontiac. It opened up a new beginning for me."

Rose, Pontiac,  
on giving her **first** gift

*In Honor of the marriage  
of Grandchildren*

"The money I give to Oakland Literacy lasts much longer than any present."

Former tutor Nancy,  
Waterford, on giving  
her **tenth** tribute gift



"Thank you for supporting me. I hope someone else could be pleased, too."

Student Mikyeong,  
Novi, on giving  
in honor of her tutor

OAKLAND  
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