

*YOU are making*



*Transforming Lives Through Literacy*

# The LITERACY Difference

Newsletter for Donors and Friends of Oakland Literacy Council



**YOUR GIFT OPENS DOORS TO A  
MEDICAL CAREER FOR  
ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS**

*"I felt very nervous because the medical terms were very difficult,  
but Dr. Patti made them easy to understand...  
Let's all pass the state exam together!"*

FALL 2023



# "I feel like I better understand my family and can connect with others."

## 95-year-old immigrant from Iran proves age is no barrier to learning

Upon arriving in the U.S., Mahmoud Fotouhi, an accomplished doctor for six decades in Iran, found it challenging to connect with his family.

**"The biggest problem for me was connecting with my son, my daughter-in-law, my grandson, and others," Mahmoud recalls.**

Forty years ago amid political unrest in Iran, Mahmoud Fotouhi and his wife made the difficult decision to send their sons to the U.S. Their sons stayed and became U.S. citizens.

Mahmoud and his wife remained in Iran, and he continued his thriving medical practice. However, after his wife's passing, he decided to reunite with his children in the U.S. He moved to the Detroit area in 2022.

Determined to bridge the communication gap with his family, Mahmoud enrolled in OLC's ESL program in January 2023.

**Twice a week, Mahmoud meets with his tutor, retired English teacher Bob Clement, for English lessons.** Mahmoud is a dedicated learner, going above and beyond with his homework. He impresses Bob with his questions about the language.

**Mahmoud also participates in group learning and online study, logging 45+ hours per week of independent study with English-learning software Burlington English.**

Mahmoud's hard work is paying off.

**"I feel like I better understand my family and can connect with others. I am happy I understand what others are saying,"** says Mahmoud.

In addition to his studies, Mahmoud leads an active life. He hits the gym every day for one to two hours!



*Mahmoud Fotouhi's dedication and thirst for learning reminds us that it's never too late to pursue new passions and connect with those around us.*

## Lions, Tigers, and Learning!



Thank you, **Judy Lindstrom Educational Fund**, for making the **Detroit Zoo Tutor-Student Family Learning Experience** possible! The late August weather was perfect as we welcomed 130 students, tutors, and their families.

The morning was spent in groups with docents touring the Zoo learning more about various animals and habitats. Afterwards, we gathered for lunch, sharing highlights of our experiences. A great time was had by all!



**Interested in becoming a TUTOR?** We are now recruiting for reading, ESL, math, GED, and digital literacy tutors. Attend an information session: [www.oaklandliteracy.com/become-a-tutor](http://www.oaklandliteracy.com/become-a-tutor)

**NEW this fall! Barbara Bush Foundation pilot program for digital literacy tutors!**

# Adult literacy graduates improve skills for better jobs, pay, education, citizenship, and more



Oakland Literacy Council recently celebrated the graduation of a record 45 adult learners, marking their remarkable journeys towards success.

Graduation 2023, held at *Kirk in the Hills* in Bloomfield Hills, brought together nearly 100 participants graduates, tutors, OLC board members, and family members. Graduates honed their skills in ESL, reading, or math, resulting in better employment opportunities, increased wages, citizenship, and newfound confidence in achieving their dreams.

*Qambar Ali Sarwari*, a recent immigrant from Afghanistan, received the "Outstanding Student Award" for his exceptional dedication to improving his English skills since his arrival in the United States. Despite holding two jobs upon settling in Michigan, he made time for learning. His tutor, **Frances Hammond**, supported him with scheduling and valuable resources. Sarwari is now pursuing a career in accounting.

*Isabel Romero*, an English student from Venezuela, secured a higher-paying job just months after arrival in the U.S. She appreciates the help, dedication and support of her tutor, **Meera D'Souza**.

*Isvi Schelesky*, a reading graduate from Mexico, obtained a leadership position at work along with U.S. citizenship. She also shared her gratitude to her tutor, **Jessica Shefman**.

*Jacob Stoll*, a 2023 mathematics graduate, expressed newfound confidence in problem-solving and simplifying complex tasks. He is now enrolled in a college level math class at *Oakland Community College*.

The event culminated with well-deserved applause and a dessert reception for the graduates. **Congratulations and best wishes for the promising futures awaiting them!**



Executive Director Lisa Machesky presents Qambar Ali Sarwari with the Outstanding Student Award.



Math graduate Frankie Duffy received her certificate in front of proud son Kashous. Frankie is now working on her GED with the future goal to go to college.



Brenda Ortega (right) and tutor Connie Ofori-Dankwa (left), who lives in Midland, starting working together remotely in 2020.

## For new U.S. citizen *Brenda Ortega*, Graduation Day was a double celebration!

On the morning of June 29, 2023, Brenda Ortega became a U.S. citizen. Just hours following her naturalization ceremony, she also became an OLC graduate!



Brenda, a Pontiac resident originally from Mexico, is dedicated to helping others. She is on staff at **Centro Multicultural La Familia**, a Pontiac organization providing a range of support services in this diverse community.

**Congratulations, Brenda, on this dual achievement of citizenship and education!**



# Oakland Literacy students take a big step toward dream of becoming Certified Nursing Assistants (CNA)

Thanks to community partners and *you*, six students from four countries completed a pilot CNA training program.

This summer, Oakland Literacy Council collaborated with *Covenant Academy* and *Michigan Works!*, with initial funding from *Rahma Worldwide* and the *Pontiac Collaborators Conference*, to assist English Language Learners in developing careers in health care.

The six students completed the **Integrated Education and Training (IET)** program, combining occupational training and English support from OLC's English language tutors.

During their three-week training, the ELL students met with Covenant Academy's lead instructor Dr. Patricia Reeves to learn and practice CNA procedures for restorative care, infection control, disease process, and more.

"We are proud of this pilot and would like to develop more programs in the future that tie foundational skill-building with career training to better help our learners launch their careers." said OLC Executive Director, Lisa Machesky.



The CNA graduates are honored at a recent ceremony.

*"At the beginning of the class, I felt very nervous because the medical terms were very difficult, but [Dr.] Patti made them easy to understand... I also appreciate the tutors from Oakland Literacy ... My excellent classmates always helped me very much, Let's all pass the state exam together!"*

-- CNA graduate Asuka Uda



The need is great in Oakland County.

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

Mark your Calendar!

## EX LIBRIS

OPENING ROADS TO LITERACY



34th Annual Fundraising Dinner  
to Benefit Adult Literacy

**Thursday, November 16, 2023**

The Village Club · Bloomfield Hills, Michigan

An evening featuring Patrick-Flores Scott, author of *American Road Trip*

Sponsorships still available. Tickets on sale in October.



[www.oaklandliteracy.com/exlibris2023](http://www.oaklandliteracy.com/exlibris2023)

### Thank you, Bookstock 2023 Team!

Thank you, OLC sorting and sales volunteers and *Comerica* and *Amazon* teams for your incredible effort!  
You raised close to \$12K for adult literacy!

A special thank you to  
**Jewish Women's Philanthropy**  
who gifted their 2023 (and upcoming 2024) proceeds to Oakland Literacy Council!

**Please give TODAY.**

Consider a monthly gift.

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