

LVWC Student & Tutor News



Winter 2022



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Literacy Volunteers of Washington County

7 Elm Street

P.O. Box 245

Westerly, RI 02891

401-596-9411

www.literacywashingtoncounty.org

Join us!



Literacy Volunteers of Washington County will be closed for the holiday break from December 23 through January 2.

We will reopen
Tuesday,
January 3, 2023.
See you then!



Literacy Specialist
Contact Information

Barbara Heuer
Monday-Tuesday
9:30am-12:30pm
lvwcbhstaff@gmail.com

Theresa Gregal
Monday-Thursday
9:00am-1:00pm
lvwctgstaff@gmail.com

401-596-9411

Executive Director
Mary Carol Kendzia
lvwcexedir@gmail.com

Mann About Town Radio Show on WBLQ



Come listen to Tudy and Kristen talk about their journey and learn more about what we do at Literacy Volunteers of Washington County.

A link to the broadcast can be found on our website at www.literacywashingtoncounty.org.

Thanks to Rona Mann and WBLQ for having us!



Student Tudy Lopez, Tutor Kirsten Sweeney, Executive Director Mary Carol Kendzia, Literacy Specialist Theresa Gregal



Student Tudy Lopez and Executive Director Mary Carol Kendzia



Tutor Kirsten Sweeney

URI Graduate Village Conversation Class

By Barbara Oberle

The first meeting of the English conversation class at URI Grad Village took place on Monday, Nov.7, 2016, on the eve of the 2016 Presidential election. Sharon Liu from Taiwan was there that evening and has been with class ever since. From the beginning, students were quite diverse, coming from Indonesia, China, Taiwan, South Korea, Cambodia, Turkey, Iran, Czech Republic, Switzerland, Columbia, Brazil, Peru and Mexico. This presented a wonderful opportunity for us as tutors to learn about the cultures of those countries, as well as to share evenings of relaxed conversation, American culture and local events.

Over the years, I have worked with a number of literacy volunteers who have assisted with class. Anne Haviland Martin has been with us since May 2019, making her the tutor who has been with us the longest. Anne's dedication and input have been a blessing. Denis Martin, Anne's husband, has generously donated his time and tech skills to make our hybrid model successful.

This has enabled students who were at URI as visiting scholars but have returned to their home countries to join us by Zoom. Igor and Danilo from Brazil, Xuxu from China. Jaime Gardner, a literacy tutor who lived in RI before moving to Maryland in December 2021, continues with us by Zoom. With the onset of COVID, we met exclusively by zoom until October 2021 when we were welcomed back to Grad Village community center.

Now that COVID restrictions have been relaxed, we have new students who have come to URI as visiting scholars and some who are enrolled in graduate programs. One student, a man originally from Cambodia who has been in the US since 2015, is interested in pursuing US citizenship.

I would be remiss not to mention the support and encouragement we have received from Theresa, Barbara and Mary Carol. We look to the future with optimism and gratitude that we will continue to serve, learn and change as needed to meet the needs of our students.



Announcements & Events

Reminder LVWC will be closed for the holiday break and will reopen Tuesday, January 3.

The URI Graduate Village will be on winter break and will start again on Monday, January 23.

LVWC conversation classes will not meet during the holiday break and will resume Tuesday, January 3.

Join us as Carl Krueger from Dorcas International answers audience questions about the immigration and citizenship process. (Se habla español), Wednesday, January 11, 2023, 6:00 to 7:30 p.m. in the Westerly Library Auditorium, 44 Broad Street, Westerly, RI 02891

Immigration Lawyer Q&A

Wednesday, January 11, 2023
6:00-7:30pm

Westerly Library Auditorium
44 Broad Street, Westerly, RI

40 YEARS LITERACY VOLUNTEERS www.literacywashingtoncounty.org
and growing! of Washington County



**Free
Conversation
Class for Adult
English Language
Learners**

Monday Evenings
5:30-7:00pm
URI Graduate Village
Community Building

To register, email Barbara at
oberlejj@verizon.net

This class is hybrid (in person and online)



40 YEARS LITERACY VOLUNTEERS
and growing! of Washington County

Conversation Classes

for adult English language learners
Tuesdays & Wednesdays

11:00am-12:00pm



All levels
no registration required
7 Elm Street, Westerly,
RI 02891



See our website for more information
www.literacywashingtoncounty.org/classes-gatherings

Tutor to Tutor

By Grace Surdyka

I've been tutoring with LVWC since 2017 and have worked with the same student for the entire time. I can still remember the day we met for our first session. I must admit I was a little nervous that day! Although I had recently retired from a career in social work and always felt very comfortable talking with people, I somehow anticipated this was going to be different. I had never been professionally trained as a teacher, but I just decided to lean on to what I had always done and trust my gut.

We spent some time getting to know one another and developing a rapport. This encouraged a trust that is the key to a successful tutor/student interaction. Keeping in mind that this is a student-centered process, we just started where my student was at the time. She needed to care enough about reaching her goal, and she needed to know that I cared about it too. That's trust!

Here's an example: My student was a 35-year-old female who had moved to Westerly with her husband and their 18-month-old son from Chinatown in NYC, where they had previously resided for a few years after leaving China. Sure, technically she had been in the United States for a few years but her real introduction to everyday life in the U.S. was when she moved to Westerly. She was no longer cushioned by the convenient Chinese stores and markets, a large extended Chinese speaking family, or all the multilingual resources that were readily available in NYC. This was Westerly, RI!

Our first meeting was more informal, and we spent time getting to know one another. We discovered some commonalities through talking, for example, that my grandson was the same age as her son. I asked her what she hoped to learn at Literacy Volunteers, and her response was "how to speak to my son's doctor and at the stores so they understand me." So that's where we started! She was committed to being confident speaking and reading English in this new world of hers.

She also said she wanted to become a U.S. citizen, and I responded that we could help her with that -- even though I had no idea where to begin. But together with the literacy specialists, we figured it out. After two years of preparation, perseverance, and hard work, she passed her citizenship test and accomplished her dream. To be honest, I felt like I passed the test myself! I certainly developed new respect for anyone who goes through the citizenship process. It's difficult. I'm convinced that all this happened so successfully because she wanted it so badly, and she trusted that I was there to help. She wasn't in this alone.

Our tutoring has continued the same way over our years together. We follow her goals, and she trusts that my suggestions are in her best interest. She has since set up medical care and health insurance for her family, had another child, gone on two job interviews and is currently working at the casino. She brings in paperwork she needs to complete for her children's school or medical forms, and I guide her so she can complete them herself. Boundaries are hard to set -- it would be easier to just complete it for her. But it's important that she does it herself, even if it's not perfect. She arranged for her parents to move here from China, and most importantly, she feels more confident when shopping in stores and speaking with her children's teachers. Goal accomplished!

Tutoring has been and continues to be a learning process for both of us. I feel like I've learned so much about the Chinese culture and challenges facing non-English speaking adults. Reading, listening, writing, and speaking in English are complicated. Sometimes it can be challenging even for those of us who have lived here all our lives. At times, I think I am learning just as much as she is!



“What can I learn from you today?”

Tutor Tips

By Barbara Heuer

Do you remember when you first applied to be a tutor at LVWC? Did you ask if there were any educational or work experiences required to tutor adults? If so, hopefully you were quickly reassured, and you realized that while academic and work achievements are very much valued and relevant here, equally important or even taking priority is having a student-centered, respectful attitude toward working with adults.

We emphasize this student-centeredness everywhere (in the Tutor Handbook, on our website etc., and in almost every Tutor Tips column in these newsletters!). The challenge is translating this approach into practice. What does “student centered” look like in your sessions with your students?

I recently read several articles reflecting on adult ESL (as I often do! 😊) and found this gem of a suggestion; perhaps you do this already. Start each session with a question to yourself: **“What can I learn from my student today?”**

Rather than assuming that you know what the student needs or how much information can I deliver, this mindset encourages active listening and curiosity accompanied with humor and patience.

This skill often does not come naturally, which is why I suggest that you ask yourself the question before each session. It may help to slow down your impulse to fill in the silence as your student formulates her/his thoughts. It may help you to listen, not only to words but body language. What will you learn from your student?

Elsewhere in this newsletter, longtime tutor Grace Surdyka epitomizes this approach as she describes the journey she and her student have been on for the last six years. Initially she listened to her student’s practical questions. Over years they have waded through every day and work conversations, parental concerns, the initially daunting citizenship process, US cultural norms and so much more. Grace takes her lead from her student, responding beautifully to her questions or concerns of the day. She has created an atmosphere of trust



We are here to help!

Theresa, Barbara and Mary Carol

where her student knows she is heard. In Grace’s words, “I’ve learned so much from her.”

Being open and receptive to how much you can learn from your student will make for better learning all around. So, give it a go, if you’ve not already...and let us know how it goes!

Best wishes for a happy, healthy winter! Thank you for all you do.

Barbara 🙋



Tutor Gatherings Coming Up in 2023

January 30 (LVWC) 11:30am-12:30pm

April 24 (Kingston Free Library) 11:30am-12:30pm

February 27 (Kingston Free Library) 11:30am-12:30pm

May 22 (LVWC) 11:30am-12:30pm

March 27 (LVWC) 11:30am-12:30pm

See you there ☺

LVWC Holiday Party Pictures

Thank you to all who came out to share a little holiday cheer with us. Great food and wonderful people.



