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Part Two: Meet the Adult Learners

In part one of our series, you were introduced to new tutors Rich Ames, Glen Peterson and class instructor, Pam Zulauf. Now it is time to meet their adult learners.

Genesis Lores arrived in Venice from Venezuela two years ago with her husband and five-year-old son. Genesis's mother-in-law already resided in Venice. Rich Ames started working with Genesis soon after he completed the training course in November 2023.



Genesis graduated from a university in Venezuela and worked as a civil engineer in the construction of new office buildings. Currently, she is the photographer for an on-line auto parts store.

Rich's student is very upbeat and an eager beginning level learner who is progressing quickly. During their lessons they work using a variety of resources: Picture Dictionary, Side-by-Side and several other resources that Rich creates to augment his lessons. Additionally, they have gone on field trips to Lowe's and downtown Venice. Genesis says that she loves her teacher, Rich. She states, "Rich, my teacher, is patient and responsible. He understands me all the time. He knows some Spanish and sometimes helps me with a word."

Rich is not her only teacher. She shared that her now seven-year-old son is also her teacher. He has learned English since moving here and going to school. Genesis joins him when he does his homework and reviews his school papers with him. They read books in English to each other. She says, "My son is a good teacher, too".

Danielis Garcia is Glen Peterson's first adult literacy learner. As did Genesis Lores, Danielis, along with her husband and pre-school aged daughter, arrived from Venezuela about two years ago. Danielis and her family live in Venice where her mother has lived for the past eight years. Genesis and Danielis are sisters-in-law.

In her native country she was an accountant and her husband was a civil engineer. Here she works as a night custodian and her husband is a supervisor for a landscaping company.

Danielis is a learner who takes time to process English and asks Glen for help when she can't figure out the answer to a question. She is able to read and understand basic passages and books; however, she has a lot of vocabulary



to learn before she will be able to make clear connections between the text, the photos and her tutor's questions.

Danielis is also a student in a zero-level class at the North Port Library. She shared that the teacher has made arrangements for her to transfer to a different class. Her new class in North Port will be at a level 1-2. Additionally, Danielis is progressing in an on-line language learning program, Learning Upgrade. She is certainly a dedicated and motivated learner.



Lucy Zamora, Evelyn Castillo, Selena Castillo, Instructor Pam Zulauf, Mario Rodriguez, Martha Rivera, and Nellys Castillo

Pam Zulauf is a first-time class instructor of a beginning level English literacy class. In her class she has seven to eleven students whose native language is Spanish. Her class is offered on Saturday afternoons in an effort to accommodate her learners' work schedules.

Pam has three learners from one Colombian family who have been in North Port for about three months. There is mother, Nellys Castillo, who was a teacher of small children in Colombia, and her daughters Selena and Evelyn. Nellys' husband is not a class member. He has been in North Port for two years and learned some English during that time. He was matched recently with a one-on-one tutor. His instruction is at a more intermediate level.

Other learners in the class on this day included Lucy Zamora from Costa Rica, who has been here since last November. In Costa Rica she owned a restaurant and drove an Uber. In North Port, Lucy works as a care giver to a family. Husband and wife, Martha Rivera and Mario Rodriguez, who have been in North Port for six years, were also attendees. They have two grown sons who "speak English good". He is employed as a pool technician and she works as a school custodian.

Other learners in Pam's class are from Cuba and Peru. One studied medicine at a university for five years. She has been here four months and is eager to dedicate herself to becoming fluent in English so that she can attend college in the US and once again study in the field of medicine. Others learners are employed as house painters, house truss builders and fast-food workers.

All of the learners profiled in this article are in the early stages of acquiring English. They all value the opportunity to receive instruction in English from a Literacy Volunteer. They know that they have much to learn but that it is necessary since they have chosen to live here.

We will conclude this series in Part III, by checking in with these tutors/instructors and learners, in our November newsletter. We wonder what observable progress in learning English will be accomplished by then given the combination of dedicated tutors/instructors and eager enthusiastic learners.

March Tutor/Class Instructor Training Graduates and Instructors



The March Training Session graduated March 15, eager to get started as tutors and class instructors. Carolyn Pearce and Deb Metzler led the training, assisted by trainer Nancy Casalena.

Our two-day training sessions are held at State College of Florida, Venice campus in North Port near Cool Today Park. Training is currently scheduled every other month throughout the remainder of this year.

- May 21 and 23
- July 16 and 18
- September 17 and 19
- November 12 and 14

Feb 23rd Volunteer Networking Session State College of Florida, Library

Led by LVSSC's Executive Director, Sue Spayd, twenty tutor volunteers met and spent this session sharing resources, apps, books/workbooks and details of our Student Zoom Chats.

There was discussion around the fact that we all know that our tutor sessions alone are insufficient to promote quick English language acquisition. Many tutors were curious about finding/creating opportunities for their learners to interact and practice with other English speakers at home or in the community at large.



Lori Walker and Kathy Szczepanski

In this regard, while we respect that learners desire to speak their native language in their home with their children and other household members, maybe an exception could be made. If there is another English language learner or English speaker in the home, possibly a specific time each day could be identified when only English is spoken, maybe at dinner each evening.

Another idea would be to have learners identify and participate in one or more of the activities offered at local libraries, e.g., origami, crafts, topic specific informative sessions ...

A couple of tutors suggested that they buddy up and occasionally tutor each other’s learners. That would provide their learners a chance to hear and work with someone who may not speak or sound exactly like their tutor. Apps discussed were Simplex Spelling Phonics 1 and 2, My Playhouse, and MANGO, offered through Sarasota County Libraries. A library card is necessary to download and use MANGO.

LVSSC – By the Numbers

Since our founding some forty years ago, our growth has been steady and manageable thanks to the hundreds of volunteers who were trained to come alongside the many students hungry to learn. But over the last three years we have faced unprecedented demand.



IN JUST THREE YEARS
STUDENT APPLICATIONS
HAVE DOUBLED



WE NOW HAVE 400
STUDENTS, WITH
MANY OTHER
APPLICANTS WAITING
FOR OUR HELP

400 ACTIVE
STUDENTS

396 Active: 269 1-to-1 Tutored; 226 in Classrooms; 99 Doing Both

Ninety-nine new tutors have been trained this year, resulting in 187 tutors and instructors handling this student load, a 30% increase over the last three years, but still not enough to meet demand. Considering the rapidly growing number of students and tutors that need attention and support, **our four part-time staff are now overloaded**. To address this paid staffing shortfall, we will be more heavily investing time and effort in fundraising, community outreach, and advertising.

Where Our Student’s Live

America’s “melting pot legacy” is being borne out in southwest Florida. Between 1980 and 2020, our nation’s foreign-born population almost tripled, while the U.S. total population increased by one-third. This trend will continue.

Our area’s immigrant population growth has followed this national trend. And as a result, **LVSSC’s ESL students now comprise 90% of our clients**.

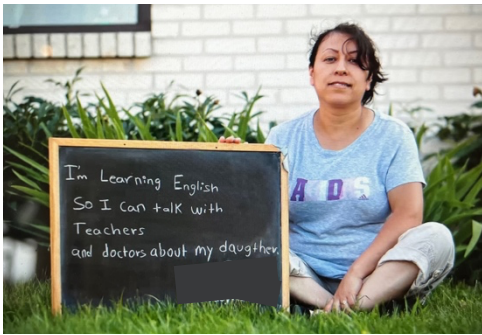
- 1/3 of our clients speak Spanish
- almost 1/2 speak Russian or Ukrainian

The large proportion of Russian and Ukrainian students has occurred because North Port is now home to some 6,700 people from these two countries. This concentration of Slavic people has enabled these new residents to protect much of their traditional culture, as well as provide a support system for those who are leaving behind their home countries, many out of desperation. In America, most are literally restarting their lives with hope of earning a piece of the American dream.

With North Port as a popular immigrant destination, it’s no surprise that 62% of our 400 students settle there and Venice is home to 19% of our students.



Meet Our Students



Our students disproportionately come from places plagued with chronic dysfunction: Crime. Poverty. Limited Freedom. War. Corruption.



Some of the “Troubled Countries” represented from our student intake include Cuba, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Venezuela, Russia, and Ukraine.

OUR STUDENTS WANT TO LIVE WHERE THEY HAVE A HOPEFUL FUTURE

*BY EARNING A PIECE OF THE AMERICAN DREAM
...FOR THEMSELVES AND THEIR FAMILIES...*

They are **MAINLY IMMIGRANTS** with 70% being **FEMALE** because their husbands work. They are **EDUCATED**. 90% are high school graduates from their home countries and many have college degrees. **MIDDLE AGED** people make up most of our student profile. And 62% **LIVE IN THE NORTH PORT AREA**.

HISPANIC (32%), UKRAINIAN (24%), AND RUSSIAN (20%) learners account for almost 80% of our student population.

THEY ARE MOTIVATED AND DISCIPLINED. They realize they must be able to communicate effectively using the English language before they can improve their lifestyles by becoming qualified for good employment opportunities, to build a positive legacy for their families. Student activity is monitored and those who lack commitment are dropped to make room for the many others on our waiting list.

Ongoing Outreach and Recognition

North Port Symphony Support of LVSSC



We have been given an opportunity to introduce our organization to the patrons of the North Port Symphony in an upcoming concert. The orchestra was founded in 1983 and performs at the Performing Arts Center on the North Port High School Campus. The Symphony is composed of advanced amateur and professional musicians.

We are being given space in the lobby to advertise what we do and solicit volunteers and financial donations. The ad to the right will appear in that night's performance program.

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IMPROVE THEIR ENGLISH

READING WRITING SPEAKING



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of South Sarasota County

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A 2023 Venice Best Nonprofit Finalist

www.literacychangeslives.org

LVSSC Community Recognition



Thanks to the dedication and passion of our staff and volunteers, we were selected as a 2023 Top Ten Venice Area Non-Profit by the Venice Area Chamber of Commerce.

This year the Chamber selected 37 businesses and nonprofits for this prestigious award, out of 179 nominations. We are grateful for this recognition!

Congratulations to Jan Gallas, Southwest Airlines Raffle Ticket Winner

LVSSC is very thankful that again this year we were able to raffle four one-way Southwest flights. We were awarded this opportunity through our partnership with the Florida Literacy Coalition. Tickets were available for \$10 each. Thanks to all those who sold and purchased these tickets. The \$3,960 raised will be used to further the work of our organization.

The winning ticket was drawn at our Annual Appreciation Luncheon on April 16. The winning ticket was held by much beloved, former LVSSC's President, Jan Gallas. Enjoy your flights Jan!

LVSSC's Appreciation Luncheon – April 16



Sue and Paddy



Yuliia and Barbara



Ray, Filipp, Alina and Carolyn

Board Chair Paddy Padmanabhan and Executive Director Sue Spayd welcomed everyone to the luncheon and expressed sincere appreciation on behalf of the board to the approximately 80 luncheon participants. There were board members, training committee members, tutor and class instructors, as well as quite a number of adult learners present.

Special guest presenters were tutor Barbara Di Cocco and her learner Yuliia Petriv. Yuliia shared that her journey to our area included many trying days and several flights. When she finally got to the last airport before arriving in Florida, she was exhausted but relieved when she saw a sign "Restroom". She thought at last, she could rest before the final flight of her journey. However, upon entering the restroom she was shocked to find only sinks and toilets. Now that time has passed, she finds humor in her airport restroom experience and is unwavering in her desire to learn as much English as possible.

Carolyn Pearce and Ray Szczepanski tutor a couple from Saint Petersburg, Russia. This couple, who have been here for only a few months, want to learn, grow and become connected as they work toward becoming citizens and fully employed in their previous professions. Carolyn works with Alina Nikonova who was a senior economist. Besides their tutoring sessions, Carolyn has arranged for Alina to volunteer in an area non-profit which provides her additional chances to practice her English. Ray tutors Filipp Nikonov who has been a senior computer scientist for over ten years. Both of these learners are appreciative of their tutors and hunger to learn English. They have an eight-year-old daughter who attends school in Englewood and who is also a student of English.

LVSSC President's Message by Paddy Padmanabhan

Effective in July, we will have a new president of the board. I have had a very interesting and challenging two years as the president of this august organization whose services impact not just the individuals but benefits the entire community. The volunteer tutors, staff, and board members are unique in their selfless and dedicated service to LVSSC. I am proud and honored to be associated with LVSSC and immensely grateful and thankful for your trust in me for the last two years.

We have made significant progress in areas of recruitment of tutors and meeting the increased demands of people who need help in learning and improving their literacy skills. We still have a long way to go. Due to reasons beyond our control and because of external influences, the demand for our services tripled in the last two years. Though we are still striving to find ways to overcome that challenge, we need to have better strategic planning and implementation to be successful.

As I have mentioned before, we need fresh ideas to have the maximum utilization of our current tutors. We need to look at other literacy councils, who tutor more students with less tutors than we currently have, and learn from them to increase our efficiency. We must get past the "this is how we have always done it" mentality.

The other area in which we must improve is making LVSSC more visible in South Sarasota County. It requires better traditional marketing and digital marketing. We need to raise more funds to achieve that objective. It is only through greater visibility that we can attract more tutors and more funds.

For those of you who could not attend our Annual Tutor Appreciation Day (April 16th) let me tell you that it was a roaring success. We had more than 70 tutors and students in attendance. I hope more of you will join us next year as it is an event not just to appreciate you, our tutors, but to celebrate your selfless and dedicated service to LVSSC.



The members of the Board of LVSSC express their sincere appreciation and gratitude to the various donors who supported our organization in the recent Giving Challenge. The Challenge was presented by the Community Foundation of Sarasota County with support from The Patterson Foundation. As a result of your generous donations and funds from the Patterson Foundation, this event raised \$14,000. After hearing of these impressive results, the Venice Lions Club donated an additional \$2,000 to our cause. Therefore, our total amount raised was \$16,000.



Literacy Volunteers of South Sarasota County

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