



# English Express

Winter 2021

**From: Paddy Padmanabhan, Board Member**



My family hails from India; I was born in Mumbai (formerly called Bombay) and grew up in Chennai (formerly called Madras) in southern India. Growing up in a family of 10 children, I was number 9 in the pecking order. I recall fond memories of a happy childhood spent exploring Chennai on my cherished bicycle and competing in cricket tournaments for my high school.

When I was growing up, it was the desire of every Indian kid to go to the US and “live the American dream.” In our minds, America was heaven on earth. We created a country in our minds using what we saw and heard in American movies, books, news, and radio. So obsessed were we with all things American that to listen to *Voice of America* news gave one an air of superiority, and to speak English at a young age was a mark of intelligence. When I eventually arrived in the US, I had confidence that this was indeed a place of opportunity.

English was one of India’s national languages until 1966. At home, we read English-language newspapers daily and sometimes even conversed in English. In high school, the language of instruction for all classes, except English class, was Tamil, the world’s oldest language. Not until college were all of my classes instructed in English, and it is also the time that I relied on it most outside the classroom. Hindi, the reigning language in northern India where I attended college, is distinctly different from the Tamil I grew up speaking in southern India. It was in fact English that served as a common language across the country.

I attended Birla Institute of Technology and Science BITS. Previously a small, independent college, the school became BITS in 1963 as a result of collaboration with Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). I’m proud to have captained the BITS cricket team and earned my Bachelor’s Degree in Pharmacy. Although a career in pharmacy wasn’t my initial plan, it turned out to be my ticket to the USA!

After graduating from college and working for a few years in Mumbai, I learned of an opportunity to go to the US. At that time, America had an open immigration policy for all professionals, including pharmacists. So in 1976, one of my closest friends and I filed petitions for immigration. To my astonishment and elation, I received an approval letter just six weeks later, and on March 15, 1977, I arrived in New York.

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***From: Penny Corell, Board President***

Aren't we all happy to put 2020 behind us and look forward to a new and Happy New Year? All in all, LVSSC did an amazing job of staying relevant these past few months. It would have been easy to just give up and say the challenges that COVID-19 presented were too great. Thank you to all the tutors, sponsors, students, staff and members of the Board of Directors for the support and innovative ideas that kept LVSSC relative and productive.

In this newsletter, we want to emphasize the outstanding projects and people who made 2020 a success. I hope you enjoy reading about them.

It is a tradition that we have an annual meeting in the spring where all the students, tutors and board members gather. This year we are thinking "outside the box" because of COVID-19. Instead of gathering, there will be a special newsletter sent out with testimonials shared from students and tutors about someone or something that was special and meaningful to your LVSSC experience. These will be collected and the best ones will be published. There will be prizes for the winning entries. Your entry can be a short paragraph or longer with a maximum word count of 200 words. Mail it to our editor Judith McGinty: [heyjude43@gmail.com](mailto:heyjude43@gmail.com). If you don't have a story, send a recipe from your home town or country.



Penny Corell, President

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***From: Judith McGinty, Vice President and Newspaper Editor***

This issue is a bit different. You will learn about one of the outstanding LVSSC Board members, Paddy Padmanabhan. Paddy is always available to pitch in for any task. He is delightful to work with, and as our Speakers Bureau Chief, Paddy keeps the communities we serve well informed about the LVSSC mission.

You will also find that the staff has been working on our most important projects: Learning Upgrade, Tutor Chats, our English Literacy Computer Lab, On-line Tutor Training, and ordering new books for the Tutor Resource Library. Their reports are included.

There is an excerpt from CNN about a remarkable elderly woman who has, for many years, devoted her life to helping immigrants learn English. At 87 years of age, she is still volunteering as an ELS volunteer.

And lastly, there is an informative article about the benefits of getting COVID-19 vaccine. There are many in our non-English speaking communities who are not convinced that it is safe. If you need this article translated into another language, please contact Karen Bridegam or Kim Pike.

*Literacy Changes Lives*

## ***From: Peter Norrman, Venice Coordinator***

In March 2020, the coronavirus pandemic hit us hard. As an organization, we simply were not prepared for the long-term implications. Until then and for many years, we focused on 1-to-1 tutoring, matching volunteer tutors with students with expectations of them meeting at libraries or similar locations, to work on lessons.

When the libraries shut their doors, our ability to function effectively decreased dramatically. Tutors and students were fearful of this pandemic. Our older tutor population were prime targets for the most serious of symptoms. Our student population was forced to care for children who couldn't attend school any longer, and they had to deal with lost income from jobs that were disappearing due to closed employer sites.



Some resourceful tutors turned to Skype, FaceTime and Zoom video chat programs to attempt to continue to work with their students. This proved to be an effective way to reach out from afar and maintain the “connection” that was established between tutor and student. But many tutors didn't know how to use these tools effectively. What to do?

In addition to teaching tutors to use these video conferencing tools, LVSSC established a pilot program to investigate a “distant learning” program called “Learning Upgrade.” With a group of 15 – 20 students and tutors, we ambitiously sought to study this new (to us) program that offered some exciting opportunities:

Students could use any device that they currently had: cell phone, tablet, laptop, desktop computer. All devices worked. Students could take organized lessons from home, or anywhere else, day or night, without the tutor.

Tutors could monitor activity and progress at any time and when seeing difficulties, could offer assistance through Skype, Facetime or ZOOM or even a simple phone call. Reports of activity and progress for each student were easy to view and document.

The program has been a success, and we now have 50 “seats” to be used by eager adult learners. The latest statistics for instruction using the Learning Upgrade app.

- 785.7 student hours on Learning Upgrade app courses
- 2,867 student lessons completed
- 31 student certificates (for successfully completing 60 lessons)
  
- 7.9 student hours on MATH courses
- 693.1 student hours on READING courses
- 84.8 student hours on GED courses
  
- 156.4 student hours on IOS IPHONES and IPADS
- 283.9 student hours on ANDROID devices
- 345.4 student hours on COMPUTER web browsers

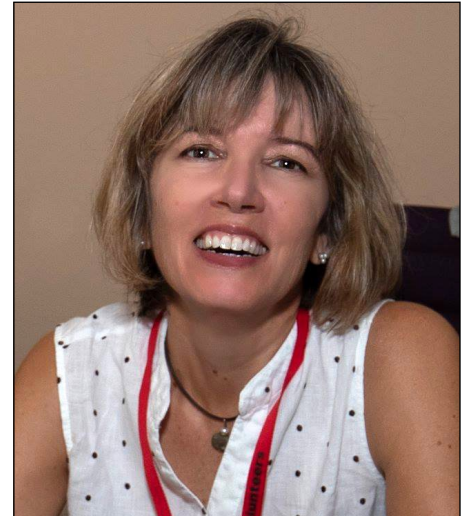
If you are interested in learning more about “Learning Upgrade,” please contact me in Venice or Karen Bridegam, the Literacy Coordinator for North Port.



## **From: Kim Pike, StartNow! Project Manager, on Tutor Chats**

Literacy Volunteers offers Tutor Chats each month on Zoom to provide tips for distance tutoring and an opportunity to share your experiences working with a student using remote/online methods with each other. Many tutors have adapted to this new format, but have developed their own unique process for working with a student.

We have learned much from each other at the Tutor Chats! Some tutors are regularly texting with a student; others are making weekly phone calls; still others are meeting via video chat platforms like Skype or Zoom. During Tutor Chats, we also discuss and share resources that are valuable for our tutoring efforts, and we discuss ways to share materials with students.



Peter, the Coordinator in Venice, has presented information about the Learning Upgrade app, which learners can use independently or with a tutor to improve English reading and grammar skills.

Many tutors have successfully surmounted the obstacles caused by the pandemic and have adopted distance tutoring methods that actually make tutoring more convenient. Attendees at the Tutor Chats are not required to be actively tutoring. In fact, we encourage those who gave up tutoring due to the pandemic to join the Tutor Chats to listen and ask questions.

We are eager to hear from you and support you when you are ready to resume tutoring. The Tutor Chats are held on Zoom. If you are interested in attending, please email Peter or Karen at [venice.literacy@gmail.com](mailto:venice.literacy@gmail.com) or [north.port.literacy@gmail.com](mailto:north.port.literacy@gmail.com). We will send you a Zoom invitation.

If you need help joining the meeting, please let us know and we will work with you one-to-one to teach you how to use Zoom. We hope to see you soon at a Tutor Chat!

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## **From: Karen Bridegam, Literacy Coordinator in North Port**



I'm happy to report that I've been busy purchasing new books for the Tutor Resource Library in LVSSC's Literacy Office in the North Port Library. This was made possible by a generous grant from the Heron Creek Community Foundation. Hopefully, as more people are vaccinated, I can work in the Literacy Office in the North Port Library again. In the meantime, if tutors see books on the list that they'd like to check out, please email me at [north.port.literacy@gmail.com](mailto:north.port.literacy@gmail.com).

Here are some of the titles: *Challenger, Side by Side*, including Activity Workbooks for Levels 1-4, *Endeavor, Pronounce It Perfectly, Pronouncing American English, Mastering the American Accent*, and *Very Easy True Stories*. We're going to talk about some of the new books I received at the Tutor Chat on Wednesday, Feb. 10.

## ***From: David Williams, Board Member and Computer Lab Instructor***



The purpose of the LVSSC Computer Lab is to assist tutors and students in learning basic computer skills.

In the computer lab they learn the differences between MacBook and Windows-based computers.

The classes start with the very basics: computer-related vocabulary, turning on the computer, and logging on to websites. They learn that while there are different browsers such as Firefox, Safari, or Chrome, there is no difference in the content they access.

Hands-on experience in the lab gives tutors and students the confidence to navigate the digital universe without the fear of making a mistake. Experienced, patient instructors guide the students through the class and clarify any confusion.

The Computer Lab is a resource that students can use to apply for jobs, set up appointments, and build other basic computer skills necessary in today's virtual, digital universe. Funding for the establishment and support of the Computer Lab has come from the Plantation Community Foundation, the Arline Smyth Quinn Foundation, and Dollar General Foundation.

Students learn how to use ESL programs, like Rocket English, Voice of America, Easy English News and other online ESL programs to improve their English skills.

ESL tutors and students learn to use communication platforms such as SKYPE, Face Time, and Zoom that have become essential communication tools in today's world of social distancing. We encourage tutors who would like to practice using these tools before they meet with a student to make an appointment with a coach in the Computer Lab.

These distance tutoring platforms give students a safe way to learn, practice, and improve their English skills, by keeping in touch with their tutor and attending classes online.

We are looking forward to welcoming tutors and students back to the Computer Lab again for in person classes as soon as the pandemic declines. Did we mention the computer lab and training is FREE? If you have questions or are interested in learning more about the Computer Lab resources, please contact David at: [lvssc01@icloud.com](mailto:lvssc01@icloud.com) or Kim at: [start.now.north.port@gmail.com](mailto:start.now.north.port@gmail.com).



## ***From: CNN about Florence Phillips***

### ***ESL Tutor Extraordinaire***

Florence Phillips was born in New York to Jewish parents who fled Europe before the Holocaust. Growing up, she experienced first-hand the burden of being a child of immigrants who didn't speak English. Helping her parents interact with the outside world fell on her shoulders. "I did all the translations for them," Phillips said. "I saw how they struggled being new to a country and not knowing the language."

For most of her life, Phillips worked various desk jobs. Then, in her late-50s, she enlisted in the Peace Corps. She served three tours—in Kenya, Guatemala and Jamaica—working on community building projects and teaching English. After returning to the US in 1999, at age 69, Phillips realized there were countless people in her own backyard in need of her support.

"It came to me that I didn't have to leave the US or my hometown to help. I could do here what I did overseas," she said.

She became an AmeriCorps volunteer and moved around the country, eventually settling in Carson City, Nevada. There, immigrants make up roughly one in five of the state's population. Phillips met many adult immigrants who were struggling to learn English.

To address the need, she started the [ESL In-Home Program of Northern Nevada](http://www.eslinhome.org/), a nonprofit that provides free ESL (English as a Second Language), citizenship, GED and computer classes. Since its inception in 2004, the nonprofit has helped more than 5,000 immigrants and their families.

Today, at 87 years old—when most people are deep in retirement—Phillips shows no signs of winding down.

CNN's Laura Klairmont spoke with Phillips about her work. Below is an edited version of their conversation.

**CNN:** What are some of the barriers that get in the way of immigrants accessing English classes?

**Florence Phillips:** It was amazing to see how many immigrants there were that wanted to learn English. I got calls from all over Nevada. Many of these immigrants could not attend ESL classes because the schools and other organizations have a set schedule, and their times were not convenient for the student who works three jobs. So, my program teaches morning, noon, night, weekends, holidays. We provide these services at the times and days that the student is available and wherever the student is or can be. My program is very flexible.

We teach English on all levels to immigrants and refugees in Northern Nevada who want to learn. There is no other program like this in the state. We give the students personal attention; I match them with a tutor. We teach at no cost to the student.

There are people who were living in rural counties and in other counties where they did not have transportation if there was a class available for them to go to. If they lack transportation, just had a baby, are sick or disabled, we will tutor in their own homes or the tutor's home.

<https://eslinhome.org/>



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After a short time as a retail pharmacist, I was extended an offer to join a mid-sized pharmaceutical company as a Sales Representative. It was the start of a very successful career, which included the opportunity to earn an MBA along the way. It was as a Sales Rep working on the west side of New York that I first met a lot of people who spoke Spanish, but not much English at all.

I joined Literacy Volunteers of South Sarasota County (LVSSC) in 2016 because I thought I could contribute in a small way to help non-English speaking immigrants attain proficiency in English and improve their quality of life. Because of my loud mouth, I was asked to be on the Board, and I am extremely grateful for the opportunity and experience. I am the Speaker Coordinator for LVSSC. I enjoy going to various organizations to promote LVSSC with the objectives of recruiting volunteer tutors and bringing in donations for LVSSC. Prior to the pandemic, I was working with a student from Haiti who is a Certified Nursing Assistant in Port Charlotte. During my time with her, she secured a home through Habitat for Humanity, and earned her US citizenship.

I love my volunteer work at LVSSC because of the people on the board. I also volunteer for the Venice Lions Club and currently hold the position of President. I am also very actively involved in raising funds for All Faiths Food Bank's Backpack Program, and I help Atwater Elementary School Pantry. I find great fulfillment in giving back to the community and being of service.

Latha, my wife, is a retired Registered Nurse. We have two daughters, Asha and Tina. Asha, a Major in the US Air Force and graduate of the US Air Force Academy, is currently working in Washington, DC. Tina, who graduated from the University of Colorado, is a CPA and lives and works in New York.

I am proud to call myself a resident of Venice, proud of the work LVSSC has done, and look forward to our future accomplishments!

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**CNN:** Your program also provides free classes that help people prepare for their citizenship test.

**Phillips:** It is a very difficult test. A lot of Americans say they could not pass. These people have to know the answers to questions about the branches of government, how many senators there are, etc. It's a lot of history, a lot of civics, a lot about our government. They have to know how to write, how to read. They have to know how to converse in English with the interviewer. We do all of that for them. We have a mock interview at the end of the class so that they know what to expect when they go for their exam. It takes a commitment of coming to a 12-week class. It takes a lot of memorization. To apply for citizenship today, it costs more than \$700. Many of our students cannot afford to apply. So, we help to raise money to help these students apply. Whether they're working two, three jobs, they have to sit down and study every single day, and they make that commitment because it is their desire to become an American. My students inspire me because of their dedication, their commitment, their motivation to learn.

**CNN:** How has your work affected the lives of your students?

**Phillips:** I have students that were promoted to be supervisor. I get students who call me and say, "I was able to talk with the teacher about my child." And I'm being told by the students that they went to the market and the clerk understood them. Those are the rewards I get as they progress. My students love this country. They are very proud about being here, learning English, learning our culture. I see the pride when they say, "I am an American."



## ***From: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on COVID-19***

If you would like to have this information translated into the native language of your student, please contact Kim Pike or Karen Bridegam.

We understand that some people may be concerned about getting vaccinated now that COVID-19 vaccines are available in the United States. While more COVID-19 vaccines are being developed as quickly as possible, routine processes and procedures remain in place to ensure the safety of any vaccine that is authorized or approved for use. Safety is a top priority, and there are many reasons to get vaccinated.

### **Can a COVID-19 vaccine make me sick with COVID-19?**

No. None of the COVID-19 vaccines contain the live virus that causes COVID-19 so a COVID-19 vaccine cannot make you sick with COVID-19. [Facts about COVID-19 Vaccines](#)

Below is a summary of the benefits of COVID-19 vaccination based on what we currently know. CDC will continue to update this page as more data become available.

### **COVID-19 vaccination will help keep you from getting COVID-19.**

- All COVID-19 vaccines currently available in the United States have been shown to be highly effective at preventing COVID-19. [Learn more about the different COVID-19 vaccines.](#)
- All COVID-19 vaccines that are in development are being carefully evaluated in clinical trials and will be authorized or approved only if they make it substantially less likely you'll get COVID-19. [Learn more about how federal partners are ensuring COVID-19 vaccines work.](#)
- Based on what we know about vaccines for other diseases and early data from clinical trials, experts believe that getting a COVID-19 vaccine may also help keep you from getting seriously ill even if you do get COVID-19.
- Getting vaccinated yourself may also protect people around you, [particularly people at increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19.](#)
- Experts continue to conduct more studies about the effect of COVID-19 vaccination on severity of illness from COVID-19, as well as its ability to keep people from spreading the virus that causes COVID-19.

### **COVID-19 vaccination is a safer way to help build protection.**

- COVID-19 can have [serious, life-threatening complications](#), and there is no way to know how COVID-19 will affect you. And if you get sick, you could spread the disease to friends, family, and others around you.
- Clinical trials of all vaccines must first show they are safe and effective before any vaccine can be authorized or approved for use, including COVID-19 vaccines. The known and potential benefits of a COVID-19 vaccine must outweigh the known and potential risks of the vaccine for use under what is known as an Emergency Use Authorization (EUA). [Watch a video on what an EUA is.](#)
- Getting COVID-19 may offer some natural protection, known as immunity. Current evidence suggests that reinfection with the virus that causes COVID-19 is uncommon in the 90 days after initial infection. However, experts don't know for sure how long this protection lasts, and the risk of severe illness and death from COVID-19 far outweighs any benefits of natural immunity. COVID-19 vaccination will help protect you by creating an antibody (immune system) response without having to experience sickness.
- Both natural immunity and immunity produced by a vaccine are important parts of COVID-19 disease that experts are trying to learn more about, and CDC will keep the public informed as new evidence becomes available.



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of South Sarasota County**  
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*Literacy Changes Lives*



**FIRST CLASS**

**Literacy Volunteers of South Sarasota County**

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