



*The Insider*, the monthly newsletter of LVA Essex & Passaic Counties, will keep you in the loop on all of the organization's upcoming events.



*Was good to catch up with veteran tutor Abby Kane (second from right) and students Barbara, Masiel, and Maria during a recent session at the Bloomfield Public Library.*

## Literacy Volunteers of America Essex & Passaic Counties

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## *The Insider*

Greetings LVA family!

Given a chance to improve their English skills, several adult students of Literacy New Jersey said they would seek better jobs, become more involved in their children's schools, or help their communities. Then there was the issue of social isolation.

"Before I came to the literacy class, I don't talk to Americans," explained Yancy, one of the Literacy NJ students profiled in a short film the organization used to open its annual conference last month. "Because I am afraid. Now, when I go shopping or meet the neighbors, I can talk English to them."

The sentiments expressed by Yancy and others help remind us why we became involved in adult education and volunteer with our respective organizations: To improve lives. Thank you for doing your part to help others.

Did you know that the state labor department offers a host of services to the unemployed, everything from help in preparing a resume to free job training programs to writing to a college on a student's behalf, requesting that the school waive tuition? For more info on the state's services, or to request a virtual appointment in English or Spanish, please see: <https://nj.gov/labor/career-services/>

We are extremely lucky to have talented workshop presenters like Darnelle Richardson, an adult education leader who put her Toastmasters International experience to work last month as she showed our tutors how to help students overcome their fear of speaking. You can view our upcoming workshops on the next page of this newsletter.

There's still time to register for this month's NJALL annual conference, held May 18-21, which offers a variety of workshops to enhance your tutoring skills. For more info: <https://sites.google.com/view/njall-2022-annual-conference/home>

## *In the News*

To view the following story, copy and paste the highlighted website into an internet search bar.

**"Holy Learning, Batman! Using Comics in Language Courses."** observatory.tec. <https://bit.ly/3w1kH4S>

**"National Volunteer Week: 87-year-old a blessing to Immigrant Welcome Center."** Comox Valley Record. <https://bit.ly/3w6Ri9y>

**"Literacy as Liberation."** American Libraries. <https://bit.ly/3w8IoIt>



*Sonia, a former pre-med student from the Dominican Republic, is studying to become a medical assistant, as a stepping stone to a career as a nurse.*

## Tutor Support Workshops

### **"Writing Can Be Fun - Even Virtually!"**

with Todd Evans  
Platform: Zoom  
Thursday, May 19, 2022  
11:00 am - 12:30 pm

### **"Language and Beyond: Integrating English Language Learning with Cross Cultural Understanding,"**

with Lauren Randolph  
Platform: Google Meet  
Tuesday, June 21, 2022  
11 am - 12:30 pm

## Monthly Coffee Hour with Tutors

with Catherine Angus  
Tuesday, June 7, 2022 at 4 pm

<http://www.lvaep.org/workshops.html>

## NJALL 2022 Conference

May 18th through the 21st, 2022  
(Online)

<https://bit.ly/3EPhmci>

## Getting to Know Us

### Sonia, LVA student

When she's not in language class for six hours every week, Sonia learns English by watching Netflix. In Korean.

That's right, this Dominican Republic native is a huge fan of Netflix K-dramas, using English subtitles to strengthen her vocabulary and comprehension as she views shows in their original Korean dialect.

She easily recites trivia behind series like "Crash Landing on You", in which a South Korean heiress accidentally parasails across the border into the communist north. There the heiress falls in love with a North Korean army captain who hides her, helping her evade arrest and prison for illegal entry.

"Did you know that the actors are married in real life?" she asked, referring to the series stars, Hyun Bin and Son Ye-jin.

But Sonia draws the line when it comes to thrillers like "All of Us Are Dead" or "Train to Busan," which are favorites among K-horror fans. "I don't like zombie movies," she explained with a good-natured laugh.

Besides her television streaming, Sonia's found English help through willing practice partners like her U.S.-born husband and sister-in-law. She even speaks nothing but English to her 10-month-old-niece, whom she babysits during the day. And she receives guidance in the ESL class she recently joined with teacher Leslie Gersho, who described Sonia as an attentive student who follows instructions well.

Sonia, the second-born of five children, hails from Santa Cruz de Mao, also called "Mao, Valverde" for its province or just "Mao", the largest city in the Dominican Republic's northwest.

There, she completed high school and was a pre-med college student for two years. In the U.S., where she arrived eight months ago, she is studying for a medical assistant's certificate at a Passaic County vocational institute. She eventually hopes to become a nurse.

"I wanted to be a doctor but I didn't finish" college, Sonia said. "My passion is assisting others."

***Literacy opens a wide door to life. Help us keep that door open with your donation!***

*Thanks in large part to you, we are able to aid hundreds of students each year. Please continue your efforts to improve the lives of others by giving the gift of literacy. You can contribute by mailing us a check or through our website @:*

<http://www.lvaep.org/donate.html>



## An Immigrant Story: One Jersey City Resident's 19-Year Journey to American Citizenship

**Tapinto.net**

By Al Sullivan, April 23, 2022

JERSEY CITY, NJ - For Ukrainian native Iryna Bilenka, it has been a long road from her home country to America.

Although she had been here before, she was unable to stay. But by sheer determination, nearly 30 years after her first setting foot in the United States, she will be sworn in as an American citizen on April 30 in Jersey City City Hall.

Bilenka first came to America in 1993 on a tourist visa, and when she got here, she applied for political asylum, a case which lasted almost 10 years during which she got divorced and raised two daughters in on her own, was denied, appealed was denied again, and was scheduled for deportation in 2002. She paid a bond for voluntary departure and left back to Ukraine on her own.

"We applied for political asylum in 1993. I had a few immigration courts, two denied appeals and a deportation. I was not allowed to get a US visa and visit my children in the USA for 12 years. Today is 2022. It was a long, long journey for me," she said.

During her subsequent 10-yr ban she lived with her mom in Kyiv, experienced two revolutions, and the annexation of Crimea. "I had to return to Ukraine in 2002 after 9 years of struggle and desperate tries to get a legal status in America," she said. *(cont.)*

*Reprinted from Tapinto.net. For full story, paste the following link into your favorite web browser address bar:*

<https://bit.ly/3KVJATI>

*Learning a new culture is more than studying a language. Tutoring is more than learning techniques. Our "Resources" webpage covers everything from legal matters, health care, & scholarships for immigrants, to professional development for tutors. Give us a look @: <http://www.lvaen.org/students.html>*

## Getting to Know Us (cont.)

**Diane Masucci, LVA tutor**

You might not expect the sensational defamation trial of actor Johnny Depp against his ex-wife, actress Amber Heard, to make it into your literacy lesson plan.

Neither did tutor Diane Masucci.



But when it came up in her class, this writer and former newspaper reporter who once covered New Jersey courts, recognized it for what it was: An opportunity to explain the U.S. justice system to adult immigrants.

"I said, 'You know what, whatever I can do to get them talking'," Diane said of her students, who hail from China and Haiti.

"I explained to them what it's like as you're sitting, watching a case, and you only have the information that's presented to you by different sides," she added. "So you have to make decisions based on that information."

The Michigan native worked her way through college as an editorial researcher for the Detroit Free Press, one of the nation's largest daily newspapers at the time, which paved her way to a career in journalism.

These were earlier times, before popular use of the internet and computers in the newsroom. "I used to run copy written on manual typewriters out to the typesetters in the back shop who used linotype machines to print the paper," Diane said.

Later, she landed jobs at New Jersey publications The News Tribune and The Home News, earning prestigious state and national awards for deadline reporting along the way.

She's earned a master's degree in fiction, taught at the Montclair Writer's Room, and is writing a historical fiction novel.

She's also tutored adults for three years.

"They help me understand what it's like to grow up in a different culture," Diane said of her students. "I think the most satisfying moments are when I'm silent and listen to the two of them helping each other to solve problems. Learning English has enabled them to help each other!"