



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



Thank you Erik Jacobson, shown upper left, for leading a workshop on how a story, written and shared in installments, can be used for a number of classroom activities.

The Insider

Greetings LVA family!

Our community is vast. And for that we're thankful. It goes beyond our tutors and students, although certainly they are the backbone of our organization. It includes the teachers and instructors who lead our large ESOL classes, the educators who present our workshops, the public libraries that we partner with, the staff and volunteers who keep our office open, the Board of Trustee members who keep our lights on, donors, grant-providing institutions, and many more. In coming months, we hope to profile some of those community members in our newsletter. We couldn't complete our mission without you.

It's a good idea to save the date for "Literacy for Life," the annual conference of Literacy New Jersey. This year's event takes place online from April 27-29 and, if prior years are any indication, it will again be full of exciting and interesting workshops and presentations that will aid your tutoring and teaching efforts. You can register online at <https://literacynj.org/> beginning March 31st and, if you do, shoot us an email so that we can keep you in the loop on any updates we receive.

Here's an inspiring story of an adult who is learning to read while sharing his journey on TikTok, a short-form video sharing app on which he's gained hundreds of thousands of followers. You can read the story of Oliver James on Page 3 of this newsletter and hear him describe his journey in the following YouTube video: <https://bit.ly/310673O>

Last chance for students to enter the Adult Learners Writing Contest offered by the New Jersey Association for Lifelong Learning. The contest offers adult students cash prizes and, more importantly, the chance to have their work published in NJALL's annual magazine, INSIGHT. Deadline for entry is March 17, 2023; you can find more information here: www.njall.org

In the News

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

"Losing my Spanish feels like losing part of myself." Chalkbeat. <http://bit.ly/40hFZZ2>

"Poor literacy linked to more mental health problems: Global study." The Federal. <http://bit.ly/3Hr7N19>

"We should not have to live in fear" | Opinion." NJ.com <http://bit.ly/3js6Gty>

Literacy Volunteers of America Essex & Passaic Counties

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Mabel, from the Dominican Republic, has studied English in a Passaic Public Library and LVA joint program, through Duolingo, and through Netflix movies.

Getting to Know Us

Mabel, LVA student

Learning English was more than an assimilation goal for Mabel when she arrived in the U.S. last year from the Dominican Republic. It was a medical urgency.

Her mother, who lived in the states, had become severely ill and Mabel became her primary caretaker and advocate.

"The most difficult thing for me was not being able to communicate with my mother's oncologist, since she did not speak Spanish at all," Mabel explained.

Latinos make up about 19% of the U.S. population but only about 5.8% of the physician workforce, according to the American Medical Association. Studies have shown that the lack of English fluency leads to disparate health outcomes for members of the U.S. Latino community, particularly recent immigrants and older populations.

To enhance her role as a health advocate, Mabel enrolled in an English class in Passaic in a program run by LVA and the Passaic Public Library and soon made advances.

"The class is important for me because I can read, I can write, I can speak more English today," Mabel said. "The class is excellent. The teacher is very qualified. It feels more like family. I love my class."

Sadly, Mabel's mom passed away in December. Mabel opted to remain behind to handle her affairs and, while here, apply for work in customer service, the field she'd worked in back home. Her ideal job, since she loves to sew, would be to launch her own clothing design company.

"Taking English classes has helped her overcome her fear of speaking in public, and given her hope that she actually might make her dream of owning her own business a reality," wrote Karen Cardell, Mabel's teacher at the Passaic library.

Mabel was born into a large family in San Francisco de Macoris, in the northeast of the Dominican Republic, and grew up in Santo Domingo, the nation's capital. She earned a college degree in marketing and, for fun, played volleyball on school and club teams.

Tutor Training Workshops

Online Training, by Nancy Lama

Platform: Zoom

Tuesdays, 6 - 8 pm

March 14, 21, 28, April 4, 11, & 18, 2023

Tutor Support Workshops

"Using Health Data in Adult Literacy Instruction,"

with Antonio Brugnoli

Platform: Zoom

Thursday, March 16, 2023

11:00 am – 12:30 pm

"Understanding LVA's Role in Adult Education,"

with Cristhian Barcelos

Platform: Google Meet

Monday, April 17, 2023

5:00 pm - 6:30 pm

Coffee Hour with Tutors

with Catherine Angus

Thursday, May 11, 2023 at 4:30pm (Themed meeting)

Thursday, September 7, 2023 at 4:30pm (General meeting)

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

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>



Meet the man learning to read and charming fans along the way on TikTok

Good Morning America

By Yi-Jin Yu, GMA, January 30, 2023

"I just went out and read one word. One word turned into two, two words turned into three. That turned into a page," James said.

Oliver James is on a mission to learn to read.

The 34-year-old may be functionally illiterate, but he's determined to change that -- with the help of hundreds of thousands of fans on TikTok.

James has been filming himself with his cellphone from the front seat of his small van for the last year and a half as he reads page by page.

"I usually ... push play and just do a couple of my lives or a couple of my videos and that's pretty much it," James explained to "Good Morning America" of his simple setup at a parking garage in Costa Mesa, California.

James, who is a personal trainer and aspiring motivational speaker, has been sharing his life on TikTok as "oliverspeaks1," but it's his literacy goal that has made him a star of the "BookTok" community. He now has a following of over 125,000 and is closing in on nearly 1 million likes, with people tuning in to his video posts (cont.)

Reprinted from goodmorningamerica.com For full story, paste the following link into your favorite web browser address bar:
<http://bit.ly/3WPTA6U>

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.lvacp.org/students.html>

Getting to Know Us (cont.)

Cheryl Locastro, LVA Board of Trustees member and ESOL Instructor

It was a casual encounter to start, the kind when a teacher runs into a former student and her family and they spend time catching up.

But it ultimately surprised Cheryl Locastro, a former K-12 art teacher, now a librarian and ESOL instructor for adults.



And, as they chatted at the Bloomfield Public Library, where Cheryl is the head of Children's Services, the young girl wore a huge smile and suddenly blurted out "You're my dad's teacher," Cheryl recalled.

"And then it clicked, that her father's in my session," she explained, a reference to the online English for Speakers of Other Languages class she teaches which the girl's father, a native of Ecuador, attends.

"And her mom chimed in and said 'Thank you so much for everything you do to help our family' " Cheryl added. "And it just knocked me off my feet. It was amazing. This little girl was so happy, so proud. I told her what a great student her father is. It's a circle. Everything is connected."

Cheryl joined LVA last year, first as an instructor in one of our online ESOL classes, which are offered evenings and days in cooperation with public libraries in Maplewood and Passaic, then as a member of our Board of Trustees. As a proponent of lifelong learning she found our mission in line with her beliefs.

"To be honest, I had no idea I would enjoy it as much as I have," she said of her adult class, where her students have reported making advances that have helped improve their lives. "I had no idea how rewarding it would be."

Cheryl, a Nutley native, earned a bachelor's degree in art education, a master's degree in art history and a master's degree in library and information science. As the head of Children's Services, she supervises and manages all workers in the Bloomfield Public Library's Children's Department, builds partnerships with local organizations, and creates and oversees programs for children from birth to age 12, including the library's arts and crafts programs and the popular Storytime program.