



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



*Another goal reached! Lissent Nelson, LVA's 2014 student of the year for Essex County, has passed his US citizenship test, the latest of our students to become a citizen. Read his story next month in **The Insider**.*

### *The Insider*

Greetings LVA family and friends.

We wish you all a safe, happy and healthy 2015. Now that the celebrating is over, it's a good time to reflect and look forward to all that the new year could bring. On our part, we're busy planning workshops and new offerings that could soon benefit our students, tutors and, hopefully, much of the local literacy community. Please stay tuned.

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Earlier this month it was our pleasure to host Perrine Robinson-Geller, Board of Trustees President of Literacy New Jersey, in a motivating tutor support workshop called "Reading Comprehension for Early Readers." The session was informative and interactive, with tutors breaking into small groups to complete exercises that dealt with the main components of reading. We have a few extra packets of handouts from the session, if anyone wants to view the material. First come, first serve. And more good news, Perrine will be back in May!

\* \* \*

**NJALL writing contest:** Have a student who's likes to write? The New Jersey Association for Lifelong Learning (NJALL) wants to recognize the writing skills of adult learners across the state through the NJALL 2015 Adult Learner Writing Contest. The organization will award prize money to adult learners who submit the best works in four categories - fiction, non-fiction, memoir writing and poetry – and will publish some of the works in a magazine that features writing by adult learners. All submissions must be original and represent the work of the student, not the tutor. They should be emailed to [njall@gmail.com](mailto:njall@gmail.com) by Feb. 6, 2015. You can find more information at [www.njall.org/](http://www.njall.org/)

**Scholarships:** NJALL also awards scholarships to adults who (1) have earned a high school diploma or high school equivalency through a New Jersey adult education program and (2) want to continue their education at a post-secondary institution. Information is available at <http://bit.ly/1CUU7pz>.

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**Citizenship test prep:** We have a limited number of US citizenship test prep flash cards, both for civics and vocabulary, that are available for loan to tutors with students who are preparing for the citizenship test.

#### Literacy Volunteers of America Essex & Passaic Counties

90 Broad Street, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Bloomfield, NJ 07003  
(973) 566-6200, ext. 217 or 225

195 Gregory Avenue, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Passaic, NJ 07055  
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*Asata, (right), shown here with her tutor, Mary O'Connor, has made steady progress as a basic literacy student since joining LVA a little more than a year ago.*

### *In the News*

**To read the stories below, just copy and paste the link into an internet search.**

**Majority of U.S. public school students are in poverty:** For the first time in more than five decades, a majority of US schoolchildren come from poor families, a finding that has profound implications, according to the author of this Washington Post piece. Many will start school trailing behind their more privileged peers and rarely, if ever, catch up. "You spend some time with little ones like this and it's gut wrenching. . . . These kids aren't thinking, 'Am I going to take a test today?' They're thinking, 'Am I going to be okay?'" – Washington Post  
<http://wapo.st/1ujSTol>

### **Illiteracy crisis - - your kids can't read**

"Every day I experience what it means to be illiterate in a high school classroom. Average students with average abilities can fervently text away, but they cannot read." Gloria Olson, retired teacher, community columnist, southernminn.com. <http://bit.ly/1wNr2so>

### **What is the Oxford comma and why do people care so much about it?**

[www.grammarly.com](http://www.grammarly.com) - It may be a simple matter of style and preference but omitting the Oxford comma (the final comma in a series of things) can sometimes lead to misunderstandings. <http://bit.ly/1Ki2rVV>

### *Getting to Know Us*

#### **Asata's Journey**

**Asata, LVA student  
Mary O'Connor, tutor**

Asata has been making steady progress as a student of English for more than a year now, and she does it one word at a time. A native of Monrovia, Liberia and mother of four, Asata has met at least once each week with a basic literacy tutor for the past 14 months.

Admittedly, the journey hasn't always been smooth, seamless or easy.

"When I started, oh my God, I didn't even know how to read," Asata said during a break in a recent lesson. "Today, when I see a letter, I'm able to read it," she added, noting that she now regularly reads correspondence from her children's teachers. "Before, I had to have someone help me to read my letter. Now I can understand what is inside."

Literacy Volunteers of America, Essex & Passaic Counties, has registered students from most of the world's nearly 200 countries, including Liberia. While English is the official language for commerce, Liberia is a multilingual nation where more than 30 languages are spoken. While Asata was well-versed in her mother tongue, Mandingo, she was unable to read and write English when she arrived in the US about 12 years ago.

She registered for LVA classes in the fall of 2013. Her start was a tough one. On her first day, she got on the wrong bus from her Newark home to the Bloomfield Public Library, where she was scheduled to meet with tutor Mary O'Connor.

Stranded in the cold on a Newark street corner, Asata called the LVA office in Bloomfield and tried to explain where she was. Mary, who was trying to locate Asata, was in the office when the call came in.

"I think I know where you are, let me pick you up," Mary told her over the telephone. Their meeting started less than an hour later. "And it's been a smooth ride ever since," Mary said.

The pair started out with sight words, employing sight word cards that Mary devised for vocabulary and parts of speech. Eventually, Mary shifted the focus of their sessions to reading.

"I really want her to get to a certain point in reading because that is one of her goals," Mary said.

Between lessons, they stay in touch through telephone texting, Mary said. That's a new skill for Asata, and one she takes pride in. A year ago, she couldn't write well enough to send a text message, she said.

Asata works as a home health aide but dreams of becoming a hospital nurse.

"The main thing, when you know how to read and write, you can go for a better job," Asata said.

\* \* \*

***"Children are made readers on the laps of their parents."***

**- Emilie Buchwald**

### Helping the Poor in Education: The Power of a Simple Nudge

*A New York Times opinion piece by Susan Dynarski, a professor of economics, education and public policy at the University of Michigan. Published January 17, 2015*

There are enormous inequalities in education in the United States. A child born into a poor family has only a 9-percent chance of getting a college degree, but the odds are 54 percent for a child in a high-income family. These gaps open early, with poor children less prepared than their kindergarten classmates.

How can we close these gaps? Contentious, ambitious reforms of the education system crowd the headlines: the Common Core, the elimination of teacher tenure, charter schools. The debate is heated and sometimes impolite (a recent book about education is called “The Teacher Wars”).

Yet as these debates rage, researchers have been quietly finding small, effective ways to improve education. They have identified behavioral “nudges” that prod students and their families to take small steps that can make big differences in learning. These measures are cheap, so schools or nonprofits could use them immediately.

Let’s start with college. At every step of the way, low-income students are more likely to stumble on the path to higher education. Even the summer after high school is a perilous time, with 20 percent of those who plan to attend college not actually enrolling — a phenomenon known as “summer melt.” Bureaucratic barriers, like the labyrinthine process of applying for financial aid, explain some of the drop-off.

While they were graduate students at Harvard, two young professors designed and tested a program to help students stick to their college plans. Benjamin L. Castleman, now at the University of Virginia, and Lindsay C. Page, at the University of Pittsburgh, set up a system of automatic, personalized text messages that reminded high school students about their college deadlines. The texts included links to required forms and live counselors.

The result? Students who received the texts were more likely to enroll in college: 70 percent, compared with 63 percent of those who did not get them. Seven percentage points is a big increase in this field, similar to the gains produced by scholarships that cost thousands of dollars. Yet this program cost only \$7 per student.

For the full story and related links: <http://nyti.ms/1BRc5uM>



*Perrine Robinson-Geller, Board of Trustees President for Literacy New Jersey, led “Comprehension Strategies for New Readers,” an informative, hands-on tutor support workshop on Jan. 14.*

### Tutor Support Workshops

Please RSVP

#### “How to Form Collaborative Tutor Study Groups” with Nora Devine

Bloomfield Public Library  
90 Broad St, Bloomfield, NJ 07003,  
2<sup>nd</sup> floor Boardroom  
Tuesday, Feb. 10, 2015, 1:00-2:30 pm

#### “Grammar Basics for You and Your Student,” with Elizabeth Salerno

Bloomfield Public Library  
90 Broad St, Bloomfield, NJ 07003  
2<sup>nd</sup> floor Boardroom  
Thursday, March 5, 2015, 1:00-2:30

### Tutor Training Workshops

Spread the word!

Montclair Public Library  
50 South Fullerton Ave, Montclair, NJ 07042  
Saturdays, 12:15-4:45 pm  
January 31, February 7, 14, 21, 2015

Bloomfield Public Library  
90 Broad Street  
Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10 am – 1:00 pm  
March 10, 12, 17, 19, 24, 26, 2015

### Donate and help us fight illiteracy

*Thanks in large part to you, we were able to aid hundreds of students last year. Please continue your efforts to improve the lives of others by giving the gift of literacy. You can contribute through our website – <http://www.lvanewark.org/donate/olva/> -*