



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



*Tutors pored over Perrine Robinson-Geller's collection of more than 300 books last month during her thought-provoking workshop on "Using Age Appropriate Books for Adult Literacy."*

### *The Insider*

Greetings LVA Family,

The new federal budget is still a proposal, yet to be approved by Congress. But, with its call for \$9 billion in cuts to the Department of Education, including \$95 million from Adult Education and Family Literacy grants, ProLiteracy is not waiting. It recently launched "Letters for Literacy," which provides the templates and materials needed for you to locate your elected officials, give them essential facts on adult ed and, finally, craft your letter to request that they reject the budget. <http://tinyurl.com/y7bobvxb>

"The Letters for Literacy campaign is a way for literacy champions to voice their concern and advocate against these deep cuts that will hurt adult literacy programs, learners, and their families," Kevin Morgan, president and CEO of ProLiteracy, said in a statement released three weeks ago.

The New Jersey Association for Lifelong Learning is also coordinating a letter writing campaign with COABE (Coalition on Adult Basic Education) and the National Council of State Directors of Adult Education. <https://goo.gl/RaL8qj>

Perrine Robinson Geller offered an informative tutor support workshop last month on "Using Age Appropriate Books for Adult Literacy," where tutors examined and discussed her amazing collection of illustrated books. Tomorrow, Cristhian Barcelos, CEO of Literacy Volunteers of America, Essex & Passaic Counties, offers a workshop on "The State of Literacy in New Jersey," the details of which are found on the next page

### *In the News*

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

**'You have this constant fear you'll be caught out,'** - Story of a taxi driver who learned to read and write at age 53.' The Independent. <http://tinyurl.com/y9quvfc4>

**'Becoming a bilingual teacher leads to a lifetime of making a difference.'** Star-Telegram. [goo.gl/tTDBIP](http://goo.gl/tTDBIP)

**'I'm not bilingual, but I'm still proud,'** The ordeal of a Mexican-American girl who's illiterate in Spanish. Huffington Post. <https://goo.gl/ZVviYc>

**'How music and songs boost language learning,'** MultiBriefs. <http://tinyurl.com/yew8fsam>

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

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(973) 566-6200, ext. 217 or 225

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(973) 470-0039

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*A physician in her native Ecuador, LVA student Jouseth is working to establish her medical credentials in the U.S.*

## Getting to Know Us

### Josie, LVA student

Vivid photos and stories of humanitarian work in Africa shared by a group of Catholic missionaries were enough to set Jouseth on a long, gratifying career path. 'Josie,' as she is known by friends, was still an impressionable Quito, Ecuador teen, at the time, devoted to aiding others. "Helping people was my desire," she said. "I was in Catholic school and they talked about missionaries going around the world and reaching out to others. I thought I could do my part by becoming a doctor."

Josie later spent eight tough years at Central University of Ecuador Medical School, in a program so challenging that only 17-percent of her class would graduate.

For the young medical student, that meant exhausting nights toiling away at the neo-natal infant care unit of a children's hospital, where she was responsible for 25 children, drawing their blood and performing spinal taps. "I never slept when I was in that department," Josie recalled. "I had to take blood from my little patients with their tiny arms. They are hooked up to lots of machines and you have to be very careful not to move anything. Every morning we had to report our results to the doctors."

Some of her best - and toughest - experiences came during her 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> years, when she was a student in the oncology department. "The oncology department has a lot of sadness and frustration," Josie explained, growing more animated as she spoke. "In that place, you form a short-term family with the children's parents. You have to give a lot of hugs and always be happy."

She graduated, specializing in pediatric oncology, and spent a year working in several departments of a Quito hospital. A recession eventually led Josie to the U.S. Here, she's an advanced ESOL student and one of many professionals who study vigorously with Literacy Volunteers of America in preparation to resume the careers they enjoyed at home. While she studies for her medical exams, Josie works as a writer for a newspaper and a companion for an older woman. She's married to a man she met in med school and they're raising two children, a 15-year-old boy and a girl, age 12. "This is a challenge," she said. "I have to organize studying, my family, my job. I have to do it. I have faith that I am going to pass the test. Nothing is impossible."

## Tutor Support Workshop

### "The State of Literacy in New Jersey – Part 2"

with Cristhian Barcelos

Bloomfield Public Library, 2nd Floor Boardroom

90 Broad Street, Bloomfield, NJ 07003

Tuesday, May 20, 2017, 1:00-2:30 pm

*Tutors please RSVP*

## Tutor Training Workshops

**Clifton Public Library** -trainer TBA

292 Piaget Avenue, Community Room A

Clifton, NJ 07011

Saturdays, 1:00-4:15 pm

June 17, 24, July 1, 8, & 15, 2017

**Bloomfield Public Library** -by Nina Peyser

90 Broad Street, 2nd Floor Boardroom

Bloomfield, NJ 07003

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 12:00-3:00 pm

September 7, 12, 14, 19, 26, & 28, 2017

**Montclair Public Library** -by Mary Kao

50 South Fullerton Avenue, Literacy Room

Montclair, NJ 07040

Saturdays, 12:15-3:45 pm

October 7, 14, 21, 28, & November 4, 2017

***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 through our website – <http://www.lvanewark.org/donatetolva/> or by mailing us a check.*



### “Learning to read can dramatically change the adult brain,” *Newsweek*

By Jessica Wapner, May 24, 2017

Scientists have long known that learning shapes the brain. Speaking multiple languages, accruing new skills or even just quitting a habit can forge new neural pathways. But a new study has brought a surprising twist to our understanding of how the brain molds itself to new abilities—in particular, learning to read as an adult. Literacy, it turns out, changes ancient regions of the brain that researchers never suspected played a role in reading. The finding expands not only our understanding of reading but also disorders that impair it, namely dyslexia.

Neurologists and psychologists from several institutions worldwide recruited 30 illiterate people, mostly women around age 30, from two villages near the northern India city of Lucknow, to their study. Over six months, a local school teacher taught the participants to read Devanagari, the alphabet used for many languages including their native Hindi. The researchers took MRI images of all the participants’ brains before the instruction began and at the end of the six months.

The villagers learned to read and write the 46 characters used in Devanagari during the first month and soon became adept with two-syllable words. By the end of the study, the participants could read complex words, knew basic grammar rules and understood tense and gender rules. Their literacy was tested at the beginning and end of the study, with a total of 21 participants completing the full study, which has just been published in *Science Advances*.

The images taken at the start and end of the six months showed stark differences in what neurologists refer to as the subcortical structures of the brain. These structures are located between the retina, where light enters our eyes, and the visual cortex, where our brains begin consciously perceiving visual information.

Reprinted from *Newsweek*. Full story at: [goo.gl/OsJUFs](http://goo.gl/OsJUFs)

*Learning a new culture is more than studying a language. Tutoring is more than learning techniques. Our ‘Resources’ page covers everything from legal matters, health care, & scholarships for immigrants, to professional development for tutors. Give us a look @:*

<http://www.lva.org/students.html>

### Getting to Know Us (cont.)

Ellen Martin, LVA tutor

As a news reporter and freelance writer for decades, Ellen Rooney Martin has seen it all, and covered it too, from Chicago’s rough and tumble political scene, to a Midwest earthquake, as well as feature stories on business and trade, food and health.



Yet she still finds excitement in meeting and helping adult learners from all over the world, among them her students from Nepal, Bangladesh, and other countries, she said.

“When I walk into the library, I see my students sitting there chatting in English because they have no common language,” said Ellen. “It is lovely.”

Ellen learned of Literacy Volunteers of America, Essex & Passaic Counties, a year and a half ago through a listing posted online by the Montclair Public Library. She signed up for a tutor-training workshop right away.

“Finding LVA was a little ironic,” she explained. “It was a way of traveling the world on a reporter’s budget. I get to meet so many different people from interesting places.”

Ellen’s first tutoring session was a bit unusual. Upon her student’s arrival, one by one, the student’s family members started trailing in. Ellen remembers, “I was a little overwhelmed because tutoring was all new to me.” She tactfully explained our ‘Only students allowed’ policy.

Since then, she has worked with a variety of ESOL students, using her friendly smile and gentle spirit to put even the most timid learners at ease.

“My personality type needs a lot of new things,” Ellen said. Along with tutoring, she has a keen interest in cooking for her family, writing, and exercising. Ellen has three young adult sons who appreciate her efforts in the kitchen. “I enjoy experimenting with new recipes,” she said. “My boys would like it to be steak every night, but that is not an option.” Ellen currently works as a freelance writer for *Healthline.com*, which combines her interests in food and exercise. Her work has also appeared in *The Chicago Tribune*, *LA Times* and *Parenting Magazine*.

### New Jersey Association for Lifelong Learning 2017

#### *Adult Learner Writing Contest*

Five of our students won awards for their entries in the 2017 NJALL Learner Writing Contest, in pieces that ranged from escaping the war in Syria to the intricacies of the mind, and several were selected to read their submissions last month at the organization's annual conference. Congratulations to all of our student writers, including these five recognized by NJALL:

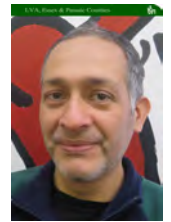


**Abir Alkousa**

*In a moving personal story about adjusting to life in the U.S. with two young sons, while filled with worries about her husband, parents, and relatives who remained in war-torn Syria, and the struggle to regain her strength, courage, and confidence, Abir won the first-place memoir prize for "I Would Become My Dreams."*

**Esteban Morales**

*Ever wonder about the things that anger us and how they seem uncontrollable? In "Anger: A Call for Healing," Esteban writes that anger is the result of an event where we suffered emotional pain that's stored away in our minds. His argument, that emotions like anger can be controlled by healing the stored away pain, earned the Peruvian native a second-place award for non-fiction.*

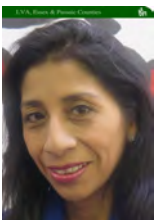


**Fernanda Contreras**

*Her gift for poetry is well-known and her writing stirs up the deepest emotions in readers. For the second-consecutive year, Fernanda took home a poetry award, this time a third-place prize for "I'm Waiting for You," the story of an expectant mother and her dreams for her soon-to-arrive son.*

**Jouseth Coba**

*It was August 2001 and Jouseth, a young doctor assigned to a children's hospital in Ecuador, took up her new post while a physician's strike over low wages raged outside the building. Her gripping account of a night where she and a handful of staff handled a hospital full of emergencies and trauma landed her a third-place memoir-writing award.*



**Maritza Chang:**

*In the enchanted world of Airam the fairy, only a select few receive an invite to the North Kingdom. But when Airam accepts the invite and relocates, she discovers that not all is good in the North. She loses her fairy power and is muted by her inability to speak the language. Maritza's clever analogy of life for a new immigrant such as she, a former child psychologist from Peru who arrives in the U.S. unable to fully communicate and work in her field, won the first-place award for fiction.*



### *Journeys Near and Far A Collection of Memoirs, Poetry and Intrigue*

For an aspiring writer, just putting your thoughts to paper can be an achievement. Getting them published can be a game changer, in terms of building a writer's confidence, especially for an ESOL or basic literacy student. Four of our students achieved that honor this year when their works were published in "Journeys Near and Far, A Collection of Memoirs, Poetry, and Intrigue." The book was edited by Judith Celestin and Ellen Ray and produced by Hard Ball Press. The writers are Essex County Consortium students, including LVA's own Barry Batts, author of "Life is Good to Me Now," a memoir about his tough upbringing in New York City; Beralia Briceno, who wrote about her carefree rural Honduras childhood in "My Free Life in Danli"; Fernanda Contreras, author of "A Christmas Letter," a poetic letter to her young daughter in Colombia, from whom she is separated; and Clifford Henry, whose fictional "Confused Young Man," tells of a family that struggles with a son's drug problem and debt to a violent drug dealer. Last month, Clifford and Beralia joined other authors in a public reading of their work at Essex County College. Photos of the event are included here; the book is available through Amazon and [hardballpress.com](http://hardballpress.com)

