



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



*Cindy Castañeda and Christopher Castro led a unique and informative workshop last month on "Mediation and Conflict Resolution".*

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## *The Insider*

Greetings LVA Family,

We hope that you and your families are healthy and safe during these extraordinarily stressful times brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. We've all seen incredible changes to our lives in recent weeks, including closed institutions and businesses, cancelled events, and regulations that limit public and private gatherings, even family gatherings, in order to reduce the spread of the coronavirus.

As always, our priorities lay with the well-being of our students, tutors, teachers, and staff. We recommend that we all do our best to comply with the statewide stay-at-home order, as well as other state and federal recommendations issued to mitigate the impact of COVID-19.

With libraries closed and gatherings risky, we are putting our energy into finding new and creative ways to stay in touch with you and to keep tutors and students connected. Possibly the best alternatives to face-to-face instruction are a variety of distance learning techniques that include instruction via telephone, text messaging, and video conferencing applications such as Zoom, WhatsApp, Skype, Google Hangouts, FaceTime, and others.

For more information, please visit our new distance learning web page at:

<http://www.lvaep.org/distance-learning.html>

The page includes links to sites that explain how to obtain and use distance learning applications, as well as important sites that contain reliable health information on the coronavirus.

We hope that you remain patient and stay flexible, keeping in mind that many of our students and tutors work in industries that have been devastated by the crisis and are dealing with multiple pressing life issues.

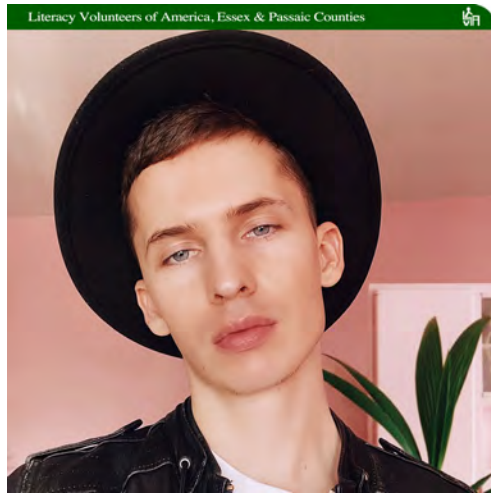
## *In the News*

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

**"Left behind: Immigrant communities try to navigate COVID-19 with language barriers, lack of resources,"** NC Policy Watch, <https://bit.ly/34czr1n>

**"Why adult learning can thrive through distance,"** Education Technology, <https://bit.ly/3aM4NOR>

**"ESL program helps Bayonne immigrants find their voices,"** Hudson Reporter, <https://bit.ly/2wuZjJw>



## Getting to Know Us

### Ilia, LVA student

Ilia arrived in New Jersey with a film and music lover's knowledge of U.S. culture and language.

And while he'd learned much, the reality of life for this young, newly-arrived Russian immigrant was nothing like the movies.

"I cried a lot," said Ilia, who quickly became flustered with his inability to communicate like he could at home in Rostov-on-Don, a port city in southern Russia. "I 'Googled' how to say 'I need to find a bus' in English. I went outside and just said 'Help, help'."

It was a challenging period of his life, just four years ago, that Ilia would later describe as 'super stressful'. But it didn't last.

Ilia continued to learn from English language television and films and enrolled in a language school in New York City. But he left the school a short time later, feeling it wasn't a good fit for him, and researched other programs, including LVA, where he enrolled.

"LVA has changed my life because I feel very confident," he explained. "I feel like people can understand me. Before I started classes, I couldn't even order at Starbucks. Now I can call Verizon. I can call my bank and don't need to ask for a Russian speaker."

The support that he felt was missing at the New York language school, he found in LVA tutors Rosalee Blumer and Daniel Mevs.

"Rosalee is worried about immigrants and tries to help them," Ilia said. "Her mother was an immigrant. She is not only a good person, she has some skills. I can feel it. Daniel is really good and kind too."

Ilia, who studied design in Russia and Chicago, works as a freelance designer and is able to communicate easily on the job, thanks to his language lessons. He studies twice each week with his tutors, now through distance learning – by email, phone, and Apple's FaceTime – due to the COVID-19 pandemic. He also uses Rosetta Stone, a computer assisted language learning software and, of course, continues to learn through English language movies.

"I'm obsessed with HBO", he said with a smile.

*Ilia's confidence in English has been boosted with the help of two tutors who now meet with the young, Russian immigrant through distance learning.*

*Please note that Tutor Training and Support Workshops have been cancelled through June 30, 2020 due to concerns over the COVID-19 pandemic.*

### Upcoming and Archived Webinars

#### Pearson

##### Archived webinar videos

- *Goals for contemporary adult English learners*
- *Personalized, flexible teaching: helping adult language learners*
- *Motivating the adult language learner*
- *Developing skills that adult language learners need*

<https://www.pearson.com/english/catalogue/general-english/startup/webinars.html>

#### Coalition on Adult Basic Education (COABE)

*Teach digital literacy standards using a new app-based course*

DATE: Wednesday, April 22, 2020

Time: 2:00PM (Eastern Time)

\*Fee for non-members

<https://coabe.org/pdwebinars1/>

The New Jersey Association for Lifelong Learning plans to announce its free spring webinar series in coming weeks

<https://www.njall.org/articles/category/conference>

***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.lvane Newark.org/donatetolva/> or by mailing us a check.*



## “New effort aims to provide Covid-19 resources to non-English speakers in U.S.”

*STAT News*

By Shafaq Zia, April 1, 2020

Covid-19 is impacting lives across the U.S., and health officials are racing to provide communities with important information about the illness. But language divides are likely to put non-English speakers at greater risk. While some health information is being translated into commonly spoken languages including Spanish and Chinese, the U.S. is home to non-English speakers who speak any of more than 350 other languages.

A new initiative from medical students and physicians at Harvard Medical School aims to help members of these communities by translating fact-based Covid-19 information. The initiative, known as the Covid-19 Health Literacy Project, has already translated essential Covid-19 information about prevention and possible treatment options, among other issues, in over 35 languages, including Navajo, Oromo (spoken by an ethnic group in Ethiopia), and Swahili.

Pooja Chandrashekar, a first-year medical student at Harvard, said she was inspired to start the project after she and her colleagues noticed a general lack of information was easily available to non-English speakers. The few resources that are available in non-English languages don't offer as much information about the nature of the disease, Chandrashekar said.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has made essential information on Covid-19 available in Spanish and Chinese on its website. And individual states have taken steps to offer Covid-19 resources in various languages.

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

<https://bit.ly/34hDBoP>

*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.lvae.org/students.html>*

## Getting to Know Us

### Carl Sommers, LVA tutor

Carl Sommers approaches tutoring like he does editing, and that's a job he knows more than a thing or two about.



In fact, for some three decades Carl worked as an editor and writer for the New York Times, one of the nation's largest newspapers. Along the way he wrote and edited pieces about travel, handled the paper's Q&A column, even wrote an account of his twice-per-week bicycle commute from his Essex County home to his Manhattan job, an arduous 29-mile trek each way.

And he continues to edit pieces for the newspaper every month, even though he retired five years ago. Carl earned a bachelor's degree in journalism from Northwestern University and a master's degree in social work from Smith College.

So it seems fitting that he would use the literary skills he's mastered to help adults who dream of mastering the art of speaking, reading, and writing English. And so far it's worked.

His tutoring sessions based on a local restaurant menu had students chatting like hungry customers at a Jersey diner. Even his former students are motivated to keep in touch, including two who send Carl text messages from Vietnam.

“I don't want to be a teacher with a workbook, homework and quizzes,” Carl said. “I want to be who I am, which is an editor and somebody who wants to help out. I think that editing is teaching. You are correcting English, asking questions, having conversations about people's thinking and experience.”

Today those experiences are largely shaped by the pandemic coronavirus disease, COVID-19, and the statewide stay-at-home order, closure of businesses, and loss of jobs that followed. So Carl keeps his students engaged through text messages, teaching while all remain in place in their homes.

“I start with what they produce,” he said, citing a method he learned during his tutor training course. “The other students go over it with me and get to see what I have suggested and what other people have suggested. If it is a wonderful paragraph that the student has just produced, we all applaud.”

Outside of editing and tutoring, Carl spends his time caring for his poodle, Mimi, practicing the cello, and participating in road bike events that are hundreds of miles long.

## *Adult Literacy & Community Library Partnership Pilot Program Hilton Branch, Maplewood Memorial Library*

For Aida, an English for Speakers of Other Languages student, the incentive to leave her native Dominican Republic for the U.S. was clear: She was convinced that her family would fare better here, particularly her autistic son for whom she struggled to find educational, medical, and financial support at home in Santo Domingo.

“I am very happy and I am lucky, because I can see how my son’s health improves every day and everything it is, thanks to this country,” said Aida, who has lived in the U.S. with her husband and three children since 2014.

Aida is one of dozens of students who registered for English classes, offered for six hours each week at the beginner and intermediate levels, at the Hilton Branch of the Maplewood Memorial Library. The effort at Hilton and other libraries, including two library branches in Passaic, was funded by grants through the state Department of Labor and Workforce Development’s Community Library Adult Literacy and Career Pathway program. It was designed to provide an additional avenue for literacy & career pathway training throughout New Jersey libraries.

Students who enroll in these classes are looking, generally, to improve their lives and hope that becoming better English speakers will lead to initial or better jobs, enable them to help their children adjust to new schools while they communicate with their children’s teachers, and become more involved in their communities.

Grace, a Hilton student from Beijing, China, said she arrived in the states a year-and-a-half ago, in search of a better education for her son and daughter. She was a secretary back home but has struggled to find work here.

“I didn’t have a job because my English language is not good,” said Grace, adding that she reads and writes English at a higher level than she speaks and understands the language. “So I studied English with my teacher on Tuesdays and Thursdays. If I do well, I hope I will have a new job.”

For now, Grace is a housewife, a job that’s demanding enough.

“In my family, every day is like this: My son comes home and says, ‘Mom, I’m hungry’, or ‘Dad, where’s my mother?’,” she said. “My daughter comes home and she says, ‘Mom, what’s to eat?’ or ‘Dad, where’s my mother?’ My husband comes home and he says, ‘Oh, Where’s your mother?’ So I know I’m very important in my family.”

The Hilton Branch classes were scheduled to meet from January 7<sup>th</sup> to March 26<sup>th</sup> but ended days early due to safety concerns over the spread of the coronavirus. Final class ceremonies that normally feature pot luck meals, farewell speeches, music, and group photos, had to be cancelled. An additional 10-week session, scheduled from April to June, is also cancelled.

Jean, who attended the beginner level class at Hilton, shared his story as follows: “My name is Jean. I am from Haiti. In my opinion there is a big difference between the USA and my country. Things are different on every level because Haiti is a little country and the USA is the first in the world. I have four years in America with three and a half in New Jersey. For a beginning, my town is one of the best places to live in New Jersey because you can do many things by yourself like your laundry and many other things alone. So, you can find everything near you. It’s really different, so they think different and act differently. My dream is to speak English like a native born American, have a family, and after become an American citizen. I am taking English classes and learning now.”

### *Passaic Public Library and LVA Partnership*

In Passaic, students who attended ESOL classes at the main library branch, as well as the city's Reid Memorial Library, most often said their families or job opportunities were the reasons they left home.

Lilliam, for example, was a doctor and the head of internal medicine and nephrology at a hospital in the Dominican Republic. She had money and was well-respected. But her children were in the U.S., pursuing degrees and working in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, and she missed them. "The decision to move was obvious," said Lilliam, a first-level, language student at Reid Memorial Library. "My family was more important to me."

Khadija, who holds a college degree in marketing, enrolled in the class at Reid Memorial within a month of her arrival from Morocco. "Some people live here for years and don't speak the language," she observed. "That surprised me. I'm looking forward to a great future for my kids in this beautiful land of opportunity!"

Vanessa, a student from Venezuela who studied at Passaic Public Library's main branch, noted that life in the U.S. is challenging. "This is a country where you work hard to live comfortably and, in some circumstances, you may live a somewhat very demanding and limited life to obtain the results or lifestyle you want for the future," she said.

