



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



Alisa Takeuchi has been in Adult Education for over 23 years, and we were so lucky to have her present during our December workshop. She introduced our tutors to an innovative, web-based instructional resource developed to support immigrant and refugee students. Another amazing tool to help us better support our students. We are grateful!

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

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## *The Insider*

Greetings LVA family!

With many preparing to celebrate the upcoming holidays, whether it be Christmas, Hanukkah, or Kwanza, we recognize it as a time of gratitude for family and friends. And it is in that spirit that we want to express our gratitude to each and every one of you involved with our work at LVA. Whether you are a current or past board member, volunteer, teacher, or student, we cannot make this happen without you.

Some of you have been generous enough to contribute your time or money through donations (or both!) throughout the years, and we are so thankful for your contributions. Please reach out if you or someone you know is interested in helping. Your support can make a difference in the lives of many. And thanks!

In this issue, we bring you the stories of Erika, a student from Ecuador dedicated to providing a better life for her daughters, and Stephanie, a first-generation American supporting others who are learning English in honor of her family's immigrant journey.

One of Erika's goals was to feel a little less afraid of engaging in a conversation with others. It is a common concern for many who are still learning that they will say something incorrectly or be misunderstood. And the work with LVA has helped her feel more confident.

For Stephanie, becoming a tutor has been about giving back and helping immigrants like her mother, who came from Germany, build new lives in the United States. "I wanted to be part of something that helps adults grow and adapt, much like my mom did," she said.

In our featured article this month, you will find a story from the University of Minnesota where they are blending an adult learning program that integrates English skills with U.S. civics and history seeking to provide a more efficient and coherent approach.

Enjoy the stories and resources in this month's newsletter and thank you for supporting LVAEP.

Happy reading!

### *In the News*

Copy and paste the highlighted website into an internet search bar to view the following stories.

**"30 Cozy Winter Books to Read This Season"** Forbes.  
<https://bit.ly/4gJ6dLw>

**"Sleep Boost Language Learning and Memory Consolidation"** Neuroscience News. <https://bit.ly/4iLxSgy>



Originally from Ecuador, Erika arrived in the U.S. ten years ago and has been striving to improve her English skills. Being able to help her daughters with their schoolwork has been a source of pride, and she continues to make progress in becoming more confident in her speaking skills.

### Tutor Training Workshops

#### Online Training, by TBD

Platform: Zoom (*sponsored by LNJ*)

Tuesdays, 6 to 8 pm

Jan. 7, 14, 21, 28, & Feb. 4, 2025

#### Online Training, by TBD

Platform: Zoom (*sponsored by LNJ*)

Wednesdays, 6 to 8 pm

Jan. 8, 15, 22, 29, & Feb. 5, 2025

### Tutor Support Workshops

#### "Comparative Grammar," with Steven Reid

Platform: Google Meet

Wednesday, January 22, 2025, 11 am - 12:30 pm

#### "Tips & Tricks: Basic Writing Skills II," with Dr.

Barbara Trueger

Platform: Google Meet

Wednesday, February 19, 2024, 11 am - 12:30 pm

#### Coffee Hour with Tutors

With Cheryl Locasto

Thursday, March 13, 2025, at 3pm (General in-person meeting)

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

## Getting to Know Us

### Erika, LVA student

Ten years ago, Erika left her home in Ecuador to start a new chapter in the United States. A fluent Spanish speaker and accomplished graduate with a degree in Auditing and Accounting from the Central University of Ecuador, Erika arrived in the U.S. ready to provide a better life for her daughters. Yet, she quickly realized that her inability to speak English posed a significant challenge.

Erika discovered Literacy Volunteers of America (LVA) three years ago through a friend. Since then, she has been steadily working to improve her English skills. For Erika, learning the language wasn't just about personal growth; it was a means to communicate effectively and help her daughters succeed in school. "It's important to be able to communicate," Erika shares. "I did it for my daughters, to help them with their homework."

Her journey hasn't been without obstacles. Erika admits that one of her biggest challenges was overcoming her fear of speaking. "When people spoke English, I didn't understand anything. I was afraid to go out and not be able to express what I needed," she says. But with the encouragement of her tutors and the structured support provided by LVA, Erika has slowly chipped away at that fear. "The tutors help me with pronunciation, reading books, and grammar," she explains. "By learning a little English, you can open up more goals for yourself."

Erika's favorite book, *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros, holds a special place in her heart. Its themes of perseverance and self-discovery mirror her own journey. She finds inspiration in its message to "not give up and keep going," a mantra she carries with her as she navigates her studies, work, and family life. Erika balances her responsibilities through careful organization, firmly believing that "what one starts has to be finished."

Today, Erika feels proud of her progress. "I have lost a little of the fear of speaking," she says. Her ability to communicate has significantly improved, allowing her to assist her daughters with their schoolwork and gain more confidence in daily interactions. Still, she dreams of reaching greater heights, hoping her improved English skills will eventually lead to better job opportunities.

When asked what advice she would offer to other students, Erika's response is simple yet powerful: "Keep going, never give up." For her, learning English is more than a skill—it's a path to empowerment and a reminder that perseverance can break down any barrier.

Erika's story highlights how education, determination, and support can create opportunities and transform lives in meaningful and lasting ways. At LVA, she's building the skills to shape her future with confidence.

*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.*

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



## Adults developing English skills while learning about U.S. history and civics

Written by Lissa Maki, UMD News Center  
November 26, 2024

Curricula for learning English as an adult in the U.S. varies widely by program. Lessons tend to focus on conversational English. Classes are held in disparate settings—from adult education centers to churches and nonprofits.

UMD Professor Aydin Durgunoglu and her colleagues from Georgia State University and Literacy Minnesota recognized the need for a more complete curriculum. “Adult English education is very fragmented,” Durgunoglu explains. “Our thought was to make it more efficient and coherent.”

Over the last few years, Durgunoglu, Erin Cary and other team members have developed a comprehensive curriculum for intermediate and advanced adult English language learners. The researchers secured a \$2.8 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education’s Institute of Education Sciences for this project.

Durgunoglu stresses the importance of lessons that extend beyond basic conversational skills for those who want to continue their education, advance in a career or embark on a path to citizenship. “Academic English opens doors,” she says.

The curriculum, called CILIA-T (Content-Integrated Language Instruction for Adults with Technology Support), helps participants build their academic vocabulary, comprehension and digital skills through 16 modules that cover U.S. history and civics topics. The modules encourage thoughtful analysis and discussion. The curriculum can be used in in-person, virtual or hybrid formats.

### Understanding society through academic English

CILIA-T builds on what students already know. Students are encouraged to discuss their home countries in class—to compare and contrast their personal experiences. “We make history relevant for understanding society as it currently exists,” explains Durgunoglu. “We don’t just talk about the Civil War. The lessons involve critical thinking activities and questions such as, ‘Why was there a Civil War?’ and ‘How do we still see the ramifications of the Civil War in today’s society?’”

For the full story please copy and paste this link on your browser: <https://bit.ly/3DhydYg>

*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.lvaep.org/students.html>*

## Getting to Know Us (cont.)

### Stephanie Nigito, Tutor

Stephanie, a first-generation American, draws inspiration from her family’s immigrant journey. Her mother, a German immigrant, faced the challenges of learning English and adjusting to a new culture, shaping Stephanie’s passion for education and community.



Today, she gives back as a volunteer tutor with Literacy Volunteers of America (LVA), helping immigrants like her mother build new lives in the United States.

Armed with a bachelor’s degree in history and education from Boston College and a master’s in history from Montclair State University, Stephanie began her career teaching high school history. After becoming a mother, she transitioned to docent work at the New York Historical Society, leading tours on historical exhibits. During the pandemic, she adapted to virtual tours, creating engaging presentations for audiences including seniors and international groups.

In 2022, Stephanie joined LVA, inspired by her best friend’s work in children’s literacy programs. “I wanted to be part of something that helps adults grow and adapt, much like my mom did,” she said. She now tutors a group of five students, fostering a supportive space where they connect and thrive despite being far from home.

Her students’ stories reflect their resilience: a Peruvian businesswoman who moved to the U.S. at 62 and married for love, adjusting to life as a housewife; a Dominican single father who works long hours as a pharmacy driver to support his son; and an Ecuadorian woman who earned a finance degree while working overnight shifts, even attending classes right after giving birth.

Stephanie customizes lessons to engage her students, using podcasts, Netflix with subtitles, and language apps. “Everyone brings something to the table,” she shared. Celebrating their milestones, like passing the citizenship test or mastering new vocabulary, is deeply rewarding. “It’s a privilege to work with them,” she said. “They inspire me with their determination.”

Outside of tutoring, Stephanie enjoys history, museums, and travel. She jokes that her kids will one day recall the “dustiest, oldest places” they visited together. But for Stephanie, those dusty places—and the stories they hold—mirror the rich narratives her students bring to class.