



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



Our Executive Director, Crishtian Barcelos, took time out of his busy schedule to help discuss the selected processes and steps taken to improve our students' learning experience while maximizing our tutors time, experience, and available resources. As well as concerns and challenges we face as an organization and community

The Insider

Greetings LVA family!

If you are familiar with us, you know that each month we highlight one of our many amazing students, and the tutors, teachers, and team that support them. We could not do this without them, and without all who support our work.

Adult education and literacy are at a critical juncture, with the President's proposed budget eliminating funding for programs like ours. Now a proposed budget still needs congressional approval, and this is where your voice counts. Please help support our program and the many others who support adults in gaining literacy skills, learning English as a Second Language, and obtaining certifications to support their growth and their families by contacting your federal representatives and senators. Together, as a community, we can come together to support the future of adult learners. You can use this link from COABE <https://www.votervoicenet.com/COABE/Campaigns/126080/Response> as a starting point: and don't miss our featured article for more information on a bill that could address some of these concerns.

While she's currently taking a break, Ruth has been hard at work trying to improve her communication skills. She arrived from Colombia with her husband in 2014, and having received a degree in accounting, she found herself so isolated here unable to converse in English. At LVA, she found the support to both acquire formal language skills and practice speaking in everyday conversations.

Cindy is now lending her love for English and her years of experience in writing to helping adult ESL students become more confident every week. "I feel strongly that unless your ancestors were Native American, we're all descended from immigrants or are immigrants ourselves," Cindy says. "Starting over is hard, and I wanted to help people brave enough to do it. They add so much to our communities."

Thank you for your ongoing support, for helping us support more students by referring others who need the assistance to our program, for referring volunteers willing to donate their time, and for sharing our newsletter with others so more can learn about this important work.

In the News

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

"Georgia's ongoing battle with literacy and its impact on incarceration." Atlanta News First. <https://bit.ly/3S71Xex>

"Use it or lose it: How cognitive skills change with age." CEPR. <https://bit.ly/3GWqele>

Literacy Volunteers of America, Essex & Passaic Counties

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Getting to Know Us Ruth, LVA student

When Ruth left Colombia in 2014, she was determined to build a new life in the United States alongside her husband. An experienced accountant with a professional degree from the Universidad Central de Bogotá, Ruth was no stranger to hard work. Yet, in her new country, she faced a challenge that her education and experience had not prepared her for: navigating life without knowing English.

“For everyday things—at the supermarket, bank, or on the bus—not speaking English made me feel isolated,” Ruth recalls. Relying on others to translate was not always possible, and the language barrier left her feeling disconnected from her community.

A friend introduced Ruth to Literacy Volunteers of America at the Passaic Library, where she found accessible English classes for adults. Ruth enrolled in October 2024, motivated to gain the skills she needed to feel more independent.

“The most important thing is being able to communicate,” she explains. “You can’t always depend on someone else to translate for you.” Since joining the program, Ruth has made steady progress. She can now confidently share her personal information and understand more of what she hears in movies, on the news, and in everyday conversations. “I’ve lost a little of the fear of speaking,” she shares.

Ruth’s instructors have been instrumental in her journey, providing correction, conversation practice, and sharing vocabulary beyond the textbook. She appreciates how they help bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-life situations.

Learning English has given Ruth more than language skills—it has given her confidence. “Being able to express myself without needing help gives me satisfaction. It shows my efforts are paying off,” she says. She often shares new words and phrases with her family, turning her learning into a shared experience.

Beyond the classroom, Ruth uses technology—videos, reading materials, translation apps, and even AI tools—to reinforce her learning. Her advice to fellow students is simple: “Dedicate yourself. Do the exercises, participate in class, and use every resource you can. Effort brings results.”

Looking ahead, Ruth plans to continue studying to improve her conversational skills and deepen her understanding of American culture. For her, English is not just a language—it is a vital key to feeling connected, independent, and fully engaged in her community.

Ruth arrived from Colombia in 2014 and while she had completed an accounting degree, she found herself challenged by the language barrier and feeling isolated. In LVA, she found support and the confidence to communicate and practice both traditional language learning skills and real-life scenarios.

Tutor Training Workshops

Online Training, by TBD

Platform: Zoom (sponsored by LNJ)
Mondays & Wednesdays, 9:30 to 11:30 am
May 19, 21, 28, Jun. 2, & 4, 2025

Online Training, by Barb Hathaway

Platform: Zoom (sponsored by LNJ)
Mondays & Wednesdays 9:30 to 11:30 am
Jun. 2, 4, 9, 11, & 16, 2025

Online Training, by Jo Krish

Platform: Zoom (sponsored by LNJ)
Tuesdays, 6 to 8 pm
Jun. 3, 10, 17, 24, & Jul. 1, 2025

Tutor Support Workshops

"ESL Listening Comprehension: The Least Understood and Most Overlooked Language Skill," with Dr. Jan Adversario

Platform: Google Meet
Wednesday, May 28, 2025, 7:00 pm – 8:30 pm

"Teaching Vocabulary and Grammar Through Pictures," with Mary Kao

Bloomfield Public Library, Conference Room
Tuesday, June 17, 2025, 11:00 am – 12:30 pm

Coffee Hour with Tutors with Cheryl Locastro

Thursday, June 12, 2025, at 3pm (Themed online meeting)

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>



Trump's budget would abolish funding for English learners, adult ed, teacher recruitment

Lake County Record-Bee, May 9, 2025
Written by Diana Lambert

President Donald Trump would maintain funding levels for students with disabilities and for Title I aid for low-income students while wiping out long-standing programs serving migrant children, teachers in training, college-bound students, English learners and adult learners in the education budget for fiscal 2026.

Trump's "skinny budget" (see pages 6-11) which he released on Friday, would cut \$12 billion or about 15% of K-12 and some higher education programs administered by the U.S. Department of Education. It contains sparse, sometimes dismissive, language explaining why he is eliminating programs and offers no details about plans to consolidate \$6.5 billion in 18 unspecified programs into a single \$2 billion grant program.

"K-12 outcomes will improve as education returns to the states, which would make remedial education for adults less necessary," according to the one-paragraph explanation for the full \$729 million cut to adult education.

"I don't think the budget request reflects a deep understanding of what the programs are and what they do. The language is designed to capture headlines, not hearts and minds," said Reg Leichty, founding partner of Washington, D.C.-based Foresight Law + Policy, which advises education groups, including the Association of California School Administrators, on congressional education policies.

"(Trump) has eliminated programs that it's taken decades to build," said U.S. Rep. Mark DeSaulnier, a California Democrat serving the East Bay. "There's been no analysis of what the financial assessment would mean to the communities served. You can always find more efficiencies, but just cutting everything is just mindless."

Only charter schools would receive more money — \$60 million to bring the total federal spending on charter schools to \$500 million. [...]

"It's not a budget reflective of the perspectives of many Republicans on Capitol Hill. We'll see how they try to accommodate the administration," said Leichty. "It's a different Congress, it's a different moment, but still, cuts of this scale and scope are hard to imagine how even the House (with a tiny Republican majority) would pass them."

The two largest federal K-12 programs — Title I grants of \$18.4 billion and \$15.5 billion for the Students with Disabilities Act — reach every school district nationwide and have bipartisan support, but Trump has proposed reshaping both programs as block grants administered by states with less oversight and more local control — actions requiring congressional approval.

"With a budget that cuts the Department of Education by so much, we're really pleased to see it does not cut funding for IDEA," said Kuna Tavalin, senior policy and advocacy adviser for the Council for Exceptional Children, referring to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. "Of course, the devil is in the details."

For the full study please copy and paste this link on your browser:
<https://bit.ly/4j4fyhO>

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.) Cindy Handler, Tutor

Cindy has built her life around words. As a professional writer and editor, her work has appeared in The New York Times, The Washington Post, Newsweek, and more. This spring, she adds "author" to her resume with the publication of her first book, A German Jew's Triumph: Fritz



Oppenheimer and the Denazification of Germany, from McFarland Books..

Despite her long career in publishing, Cindy found herself drawn to a new kind of storytelling—one that happens in a classroom, not in print. Since June 2024, she has been volunteering as a tutor with Literacy Volunteers of America (LVA), helping adult learners improve their English skills and navigate life in a new country.

"I feel strongly that unless your ancestors were Native American, we're all descended from immigrants or are immigrants ourselves," Cindy says. "Starting over is hard, and I wanted to help people brave enough to do it. They add so much to our communities."

Currently, she tutors four students. Two of them, Francisco and Ana, have been working with her since last summer. "What stands out most is their kindness, openness, and enthusiasm. They inspire me every week." The experience has been eye-opening. Students often notice things native speakers overlook. "One pointed out how sometimes the 'ed' ending of verbs sounds like a 't,' other times like a 'd.' Another asked why Americans don't always say 'You're welcome.' These questions make me reflect on my own language."

Cindy acknowledges that tutoring isn't always easy. "There's a lot of turnover. Students' lives are busy and unpredictable. You get attached, and then they might have to move or take a new job with conflicting hours." Still, the cultural exchange and meaningful conversations make it all worthwhile. What lifts her most is her students' dedication. "Some of them walk 30-40 minutes to get to class. That effort means so much."

Outside of tutoring, Cindy has returned to another passion—playing classical piano after decades away. "It's good for the soul," she says.

For Cindy, it all comes down to connection—whether through writing, teaching, or music, helping others find their voice brings her joy.