



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



Mary Kao, one of our longest serving volunteers at LVAEP, joined us to provide a workshop on teaching vocabulary and grammar through pictures. She shared strategies on how to use these for various types of lessons and how tutors could start building their own picture packet. Thank you, Mary!

### *The Insider*

Greetings LVA family!

As July draws to a close, many of us are finding ways to stay cool, stay connected, and stay curious—whether through travel, time with family, or the simple joy of reading a good book. It's also a moment to reflect on the journeys we take, especially the ones that involve perseverance, learning, and transformation.

NJALL shared that on June 30, 2025, the State of New Jersey was informed by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE) that funding for the Adult Education Basic Grants to States grant program was still under review and that they will not be issuing Grant Award Notifications obligating funds for these programs on July 1. New Jersey was due to receive nearly \$20,000,000 to support adult education in the state and the state budget does not address the gap. We are committed to our students, but we need your help reaching out to your federal and state representatives to request funding support for adult education programs like LVA.

You'll meet Alvaro, a determined student working hard to strengthen his English so he can achieve his dream of better job opportunities. You'll also hear from Jun, a lifelong educator and language learner who now gives back as a dedicated volunteer tutor. Their stories remind us that learning English is never just about grammar—it's about building confidence, finding your voice, and creating new possibilities.

In our featured article, a new study offers insights into how long it takes to become proficient in English—spoiler: there's no one-size-fits-all answer, but motivation, support, and consistency matter more than we often think. We've also included three additional resources this month that speak to the broader context of language learning and inspiration. Take a look below!

Whether you're a learner, tutor, or supporter, we hope these stories and tools fuel your commitment to literacy and community. Thank you for being part of the journey.

### *In the News*

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

**"She struggled with English growing up. Now she's going to Harvard."** The Cap Times. <https://bit.ly/40r9jhy>

**"AI for Multilingual Learners."** National Education Association. <https://bit.ly/45bRp58>

**"The Must-Read Books While You're Traveling This Summer, From Professors Who Study the World."** Georgetown University. <https://bit.ly/4nYFdvX>

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

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## Getting to Know Us

Alvaro, LVA student

When Alvaro left Ecuador in July 2021, he stepped into a new world full of hope—and uncertainty. Back home, he had completed high school and was in his fourth semester studying economics at a local university. He left all of that behind, along with his family and community, to pursue greater opportunity in the United States.

“Leaving my family and everything familiar was not easy,” Alvaro says. “But I believed the United States had a future for me if I was willing to work hard.”

His first and most difficult challenge was English. Though highly motivated, Alvaro found everyday situations in the U.S. intimidating. “I remember going into a McDonald’s in Maryland,” he says. “I was nervous and couldn’t make my order. I left with an empty stomach. That moment stayed with me.”

Determined to improve, Alvaro discovered Literacy Volunteers of America through the Passaic Public Library. It was there that he found the community, resources, and encouragement he needed. “My teachers at LVA have been patient and always answer my questions,” he says.

Now, after more than a year and a half of consistent study, Alvaro has made significant progress. He dedicates time every evening to practicing his skills, reading books, and having conversations with coworkers and online friends. He even participates in English-speaking communities on platforms like Discord. “It’s not easy,” he admits, “but it’s worth it. I feel more confident every day.”

That confidence paid off in a big way: Alvaro recently got his first job in the U.S., a milestone he considers one of his greatest achievements so far. “That job showed me that I could adapt, learn, and succeed,” he says.

He still has goals. He wants to improve his pronunciation, expand his vocabulary, and enroll in technical training workshops. Eventually, he hopes to find a better job that matches his skills and education. Inspired by the book *Rich Dad, Poor Dad*, he’s committed to personal growth and financial independence. “It’s about investing in yourself,” he says. “That’s what I’m doing.”

To other learners, Alvaro offers this advice: “Don’t be afraid to make mistakes. They help you learn. Keep studying, ask for help, and stay focused.”

For Alvaro, English is more than just a new language—it’s the foundation of a new life, and each word brings him closer to the future he imagined.

Alvaro arrived in the United States in 2021, motivated to build a better future for himself. But he found English quite intimidating and once even left a McDonald’s hungry because he couldn’t order food. He’s now gaining confidence as he continues to study English and hopes to get a better job as his fluency improves.

### Tutor Training Workshops

**Online Training**, by Laura Pistoia  
Platform: Zoom (sponsored by LNJ)  
Tuesdays, 6 to 8 pm  
Aug. 19, 26 & Sept. 2, 9, 16, 2025

**Online Training**, by Barb Hathaway  
Platform: Zoom (sponsored by LNJ)  
Mondays & Wednesdays, 6 to 8 pm  
Sept. 3, 8, 10, 15 & 17, 2025

**Online Training**, by Jo Krish  
Platform: Zoom (sponsored by LNJ)  
Tuesdays, 6 to 8 pm  
Sept. 30 and Oct. 7, 14, 21, and 28, 2025

### Tutor Support Workshops

**"Pick Your Battles: Best Practices for Helping Students with Pronunciation,"** with Steven Reid  
Platform: Google Meet  
Thursday, September 18, 2025, 11 am - 12:30 pm

**"Getting Started with Writing Prompts,"** with Dr. Erik Jacobson  
Location: Bloomfield Public Library, Conference Room  
Thursday, October 9, 2025, 11:00 am – 12:30 pm

**Tutor Study Circle**  
Facilitator: Cheryl Locastro

Thursday, September 18, 2025, at 3pm (General in-person 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>



## New study reveals how long it takes to learn English

The Educator Australia, June 23, 2025  
Written by The Educator

It can take multiple years to learn the language to the level required to do well at school, a groundbreaking new study reveals.

For the study, researchers from the Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) conducted an analysis of longitudinal data collected from more than 110,000 students learning English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D).

They found that those starting school with beginning levels of English took at least six years to become proficient to the level where they could participate fully in the school curriculum.

Students starting school with more developed English language skills still required three years to catch up to their English-speaking classmates.

Dr. Jenny Donovan, CEO of the Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO), said this study highlighted the diverse needs within Australian classrooms, where a quarter of students, on average, could be learning English as an additional language.

“We know from NAPLAN data that students from diverse language backgrounds can thrive in Australia’s education system and, in many cases, outperform students from English-speaking backgrounds,” Dr Donovan said. “However, for those learning English, further support is needed. [...]”

AERO’s research also identified how various background factors and life experiences influence language development. It found that students facing socio-educational disadvantage, on average, took 22 per cent longer than advantaged students to learn English, and students from refugee backgrounds took 14 per cent longer than non-refugee students.

The study drew on nine years of data from 110,000 NSW public school students.

For the full study please copy and paste this link on your browser: <https://bit.ly/44CLp5c>

*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.)

Jun Matsuyoshi, Tutor

Jun’s journey with language began early. Born in Tokyo and raised in Hawaii, she spoke Japanese at home but learned English quickly in pre-kindergarten. That early shift in language gave her a lifelong awareness of how differently



children and adults experience language learning—a perspective that now deeply informs her work as a volunteer ESL tutor with Literacy Volunteers of America (LVA).

Though Jun briefly taught English in a middle school setting, her professional career was spent in mental health services. But teaching never left her heart. In September 2024, she joined LVA, drawn to the opportunity to work face-to-face with adult learners. After years of online meetings, she relishes the return to in-person interaction. “It’s wonderful to see students in person again,” she shares.

Her decision to volunteer is also deeply personal. Teaching is a way to honor her late mother, a Tokyo native who studied English throughout her life. “She was proud to become a U.S. citizen and get her driver’s license within seven years of arriving in this country,” Jun recalls. “Her perseverance continues to inspire me.”

Currently, Jun works with four women students, all balancing motherhood, work, and family obligations while studying English. She’s moved by their dedication, particularly because several come from countries where education is costly—and often reserved for boys. One student especially stands out. As a teenager in West Africa, she financed her own schooling and training as a seamstress, eventually launching a successful clothing business. After immigrating to the U.S. with her husband and children, she became a citizen, raised four sons, and worked full-time—continuing her education all the while. “Her resilience is extraordinary,” Jun says.

Jun approaches teaching with empathy and creativity. “Some students struggle with reading comprehension or remembering facts, and I remind myself that their lives are filled with challenges outside of class,” she says. To keep lessons engaging, she connects them to real-life events. One class used a news story about sinkholes on Route 80 as a springboard to discuss Revolutionary War history and George Washington’s army mining iron for cannonballs.

“I try to make learning relevant and cultural,” Jun adds. She encourages discussions about American holidays and invites students to share traditions from their home countries, which makes the classroom a richer, more inclusive space.