



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



Be sure to take a look at our featured story on page 3 to read about how our combined efforts resulted in restored funding. *"On June 30, the Trump Administration abruptly and unlawfully froze funding for six longstanding programs administered by the U.S. Department of Education just two months before the school year in many parts of New Jersey was set to start."*

The Insider

Greetings LVA family!

Back-to-school season is now in full swing, and with the first cooler days of fall settling in, we're reminded of how each new season brings fresh opportunities to learn, grow, and connect. At Literacy Volunteers of America, Essex & Passaic Counties, this time of year also reinforces the importance of our mission—supporting adult learners and tutors as they build skills that transform lives.

In this issue, we spotlight two inspiring journeys from our community. Megan, a dedicated tutor, has been with LVAEP for just under a year but has already made a lasting impact. Her enthusiasm for teaching, rooted in her background in math and Hispanic studies, reflects the power of volunteerism and the difference one committed person can make. We also share the story of Yovani, a student originally from Nicaragua who dreams of becoming a certified teacher or opening a business here in the U.S. Her determination to improve her English shows the resilience, courage, and hope that define so many of our learners' experiences.

Our featured article this month, Attorney General Platkin Secures Full Relief for New Jersey Schools in Lawsuit Challenging Withholding of Education Funding (Insider NJ), highlights the critical role funding plays in ensuring access to education for all. At the same time, recent headlines remind us of the urgent challenges that remain; be sure to read them below.

These stories echo what we witness daily at LVAEP: the ongoing need to invest in literacy, to champion learners, and to ensure that education remains a pathway to opportunity.

Finally, we want to extend our heartfelt thanks to our tutors, students, staff, and supporters. It is through your time, dedication, and generosity that LVAEP continues to thrive and make a lasting impact in our communities.

In the News

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

"Reading for Pleasure Has Declined by a 'Deeply Concerning' 40 Percent Over the Past Two Decades." Smithsonian Magazine. <https://bit.ly/46kDfPX>

"She Couldn't Read Her Own Diploma: Why Public Schools Pass Students But Fail Society." The Daily Economy. <https://bit.ly/48iqFS7>

"Advocates sounding alarm for declining adult literacy rates." Spectrum News 1. <https://bit.ly/4puWghd>

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Getting to Know Us Yovani, LVA student

When Yovani arrived in the United States from Nicaragua, she came with her husband and children, warmly welcomed by relatives already here. The journey itself was joyful, but soon she faced a quiet challenge: she didn't know English.

"I realized how important it was to speak with other people," she says. "It was necessary, not just for daily life but also for work, for opportunities, for growth."

Back home, Yovani had earned a university degree and built a career as a teacher, guiding children through their lessons and giving them tools to succeed. She is proud of the students she helped and the lives she influenced. But in the U.S., without English, she felt cut off from the profession she loved.

Determined to change that, she sought out classes. A visit to Bloomfield College eventually led her to Literacy Volunteers of America. She began working with tutors, carving out study time even when her work schedule shifted. "It hasn't been easy," she admits. "I study a little every day—listening to music in English, practicing with technology, even using artificial intelligence."

Her progress is steady. The moments she treasures most are those first sparks of understanding—when English sentences began to make sense and she could answer back with confidence. Her tutors, she says, have been invaluable. They gently correct her speaking and writing and encourage her to keep moving forward.

Still, Yovani approaches learning with humility. "In every area, I can improve. We are always learners," she says. She often reads books on personal growth, reflection, and motivation—finding inspiration in strengthening both her skills and her spirit.

Her dreams remain big. She hopes to one day return to teaching, this time in the U.S., or perhaps earn certification in computer studies. Another dream is to start her own business, one successful enough to support her family and her future.

Through it all, her greatest source of pride is her role as a mother of two. "My family is my biggest accomplishment," she says, "but professionally, it's being a teacher—helping children who didn't have knowledge and being able to influence their lives."

Her advice to other students is simple but heartfelt: "Keep going. Don't be afraid to make mistakes, because from mistakes, we learn."

For Yovani, English is not just a skill—it is a key, opening doors to possibility, confidence, and the next chapter of her life.

Yovani arrived from Nicaragua with her family, having built a career as a teacher back home. But without English, she could not get certified to teach here. She is now working hard and using all the tools she can find as well as the support of her tutors, in hopes of returning to teaching.

Tutor Training Workshops

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

Online Training, by Barb Hathaway

Platform: Zoom (*sponsored by LNJ*)

Wednesdays and Mondays, 6 to 8 pm

Nov. 5, 10, 12, 17 and 19, 2025

Tutor Support Workshops

"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

"USA Learns," with Alisa Takeuchi

Platform: Google Meet

Thursday, November 13, 2025, 11:00 am – 12:30 pm

Tutor Study Circle

Facilitator: Cheryl Locastro

Thursday, December 11, 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>



Attorney General Platkin Secures Full Relief for New Jersey Schools in Lawsuit Challenging Withholding of Education Funding

Insider NJ, August 25, 2025

TRENTON – New Jersey Attorney General Matthew J. Platkin today secured an agreement requiring the Trump Administration to release on time the full balance of remaining education funding that was previously frozen unlawfully by the Administration. Last month, Attorney General Platkin joined a coalition in suing the Trump Administration over its unconstitutional, unlawful, and arbitrary decision to freeze funding for six longstanding programs administered by the U.S. Department of Education just weeks before the school year was set to start. The agreement secured today, on the eve of the start of a new school year, will require the release of the remaining funding owed to New Jersey by no later than October 3, 2025.

In New Jersey, over \$158 million in federal education funding was frozen, jeopardizing key programs for after school and summer learning, teacher preparation, and to support students learning English. Days later, the Trump Administration released the first tranche of funding that had previously been withheld. The multistate coalition and the Trump Administration today jointly filed to dismiss the case under the terms of an agreement that ensures the remaining funding is released on time, providing New Jersey and the multistate coalition with the full relief they had sought in the lawsuit.

“From the beginning, we made clear that the Trump Administration’s freeze of funding for after-school programs, children with special needs, and other critical programs was blatantly illegal. In resolving this lawsuit today, we are proud to fully restore this funding and deliver a quick and favorable resolution for our state ahead of the start of the 2025-2026 school year” said Attorney General Platkin. “We will always stand up for students, families, and educators across New Jersey, and we will never let this Administration get away with clawing critical federal funding away from our best-in-the-nation education system.”

BACKGROUND

On June 30, the Trump Administration abruptly and unlawfully froze funding for six longstanding programs [...]

For the full study please copy and paste this link on your browser: <https://bit.ly/4mn3jP0>

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.)

Megan McFarland, Tutor

When Megan moved from Massachusetts to New Jersey in May 2024, she was eager to connect with her new community. A math major with a minor in Hispanic Studies, she had always enjoyed tutoring, beginning in high school when she worked with a middle schooler whose family had recently immigrated. Volunteering with Literacy Volunteers of America felt like a natural and meaningful way to continue that commitment.



By October 2024, Megan had joined LVAEP as a tutor. In less than a year, she has worked with four students, each with their own strengths, stories, and challenges. She quickly discovered that tutoring was about more than teaching English—it was also about helping students navigate everyday life in a new country.

One request early on shaped her approach. A student asked if she could explain “something random” each class—perhaps U.S. history, how insurance works, or even how our measuring systems differ. That moment showed Megan how obstacles extend well beyond language. What seems simple to a lifelong American can feel like a barrier for newcomers. Since then, she has made it a practice to add these mini-lessons, offering practical knowledge that helps her students feel more at home.

Her students also inspire her. One, a mother and avid churchgoer, speaks up clearly about what she needs in class. Megan admires her honesty and courage, which she believes lifts everyone’s learning.

Like many tutors, Megan finds challenges in meeting students where they are, since their English backgrounds vary widely. But the rewards are unmistakable. “When my students laugh during class—whether at something we’re reading or a spontaneous conversation—it’s beautiful,” she said. “That laughter at a mutual understanding, across so many different native languages, is my favorite part.”

Outside of tutoring, Megan works as an actuary at a workers’ compensation bureau and keeps busy running, playing pickleball, crocheting, decorating sugar cookies, cheering on Boston sports, and writing letters to her circle of pen pals.

For Megan, volunteering with LVAEP is about connection, resilience, and giving every student a real chance to succeed.

New Jersey Association for Lifelong Learning 2025 Adult Learner Writing Contest

Congratulations to our talented student authors who earned Awards and “Special Mention” in NJALL’s 2025 Adult Learner Writing Contest. Each year, NJALL (New Jersey Association for Lifelong Learning) holds a writing contest for adult learners throughout New Jersey. NJALL is a professional association that supports adult learners by promoting and representing students to fully develop to their highest potential. Our student authors will have their works published online and in a hard copy publication that will be on display in the LVA office. Again, congratulations. Those who entered and to those who have never entered, start sharpening your pencils for next year’s contest.



Blando studied Journalism, Literature and Philosophy at the University in Haiti. Was certified in Animation technique and mini library management, Microsoft Word and Nutrition. Was a literature teacher intern at a high school in Haiti and worked in several media as a journalist, presenter and editor. And now is studying Journalism online in the US. Blando's received **Third Place in Fiction** for his latest piece **One Meeting That Changed Everything**.

Harry was born in Haiti, son of a pastor, and grew up in an environment where responsibilities and unwavering faith shaped every moment of my life. Passionate about storytelling, pursued studies in social communication and public administration at the State University of Haiti, using music, photography, and words to capture the world around him. Harry received a **Spacial Mention in Memoir** for his piece **A Question of Survival**.



Smith was born in Haiti and lived most of his life there. He grew up in a large family with five sisters and four brothers. Married in 2021 with the love of his life Sophonie and they had two sons Joshua and Christina. Smith received a **Spacial Mention in Memoir** for his piece **I'm Very Outgoing Person**.

Ariana was born in Cucuta, Colombia and graduated as a Civil Engineer. Lives in Montclair and loves to spend time reading, exercising, cooking, and meeting new people. Ariana is a social and resilient young woman who enjoys taking new challenges head on. Ariana received **First Place in Non-fiction** for her piece **Cultural Differences**.



Rajpattie came to the US from in 2016 from Guyana. As a Bloomfield resident she she enjoys taking pictures of trees and flowers at the parks and any other chance she has. While she was not able to attend school in Guyana, she made sure that her daughter graduated from college. Rajpattie received a **Special Mention in Photography** for her submission **Seasons**.

Gladys was born in Bolivia and currently lives in Orange, NJ. She lives with her husband and two sons and hopes to one day gain her Nursing certification. Gladys receive **Special Mention in Memoir** for her piece **My Name is Gladys**.

