



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



We had the pleasure of hosting Dr. Barbara Trueger for our first professional development workshop of the year. Barbara has extensive international teaching experience and joined us to guide our tutors in expanding their reading instruction by not only enriching their knowledge but also broadening their comfort zone and self-confidence. Thank you, Dr. Trueger!

## Literacy Volunteers of America, Essex & Passaic Counties

90 Broad Street, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Bloomfield, NJ 07003  
(973) 566-6200, ext. 217 or 225

195 Gregory Avenue, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Passaic, NJ 07055  
(973) 470-0039

Cristhian Barcelos	-Executive Director <a href="mailto:cbarcelos@lvaep.org">cbarcelos@lvaep.org</a>
Jorge Chavez	-Data Processing Coordinator <a href="mailto:jchavez@lvaep.org">jchavez@lvaep.org</a>
Sydney Eckerling	-Education Coordinator <a href="mailto:seckerling@lvaep.org">seckerling@lvaep.org</a>
Valeria Garrido	-Social Media & Newsletter Coordinator <a href="mailto:vgarrido@lvaep.org">vgarrido@lvaep.org</a>
Cheryl Locastro	-Tutor Support Specialist & ESOL Instructor <a href="mailto:clocastro@lvaep.org">clocastro@lvaep.org</a>
Marisol Ramirez	-Student Coordinator <a href="mailto:mramirez@lvaep.org">mramirez@lvaep.org</a>

## *The Insider*

Greetings LVA family!

February arrives with a distinctive mix of reflection and warmth, Presidents' Day reminding us of civic ideals and public service, and Valentine's Day inviting us to celebrate love in all its forms: family, friendship, community, and the quiet care we show through our time.

In that spirit, this month's newsletter centers on the kind of leadership and love that happens every day at Literacy Volunteers of America—Essex & Passaic Counties: a learner who keeps showing up, and a volunteer who helps make that possible.

First, you'll meet Rosa, an adult ESL student whose story reminds us that confidence is built one conversation at a time. Her progress is not just about vocabulary and grammar; it's about the freedom that comes with being understood at a doctor's appointment, at a child's school, or in a workplace meeting. Rosa's determination captures what adult literacy work looks like in real life: steady, brave, and deeply practical.

You'll also hear from Jamie, a member of our Board, who shares why this mission matters and how community-based programs like ours can change the trajectory of families and neighborhoods. Board leadership is often behind the scenes, but it is essential, helping sustain the partnerships, resources, and vision that keep tutoring relationships strong.

We're also featuring a timely article from *Fast Company* on the decline of reading and why it should concern all of us, because reading is more than a pastime. It supports focus, learning, informed decision-making, and long-term opportunity. In a world competing for our attention, choosing to strengthen literacy is a meaningful act of optimism.

Thank you for being part of this work, whether you tutor, donate, advocate, or simply share our stories.

## *In the News*

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

"Teachers turn to AI to help students learn literacy and language." 4KXFL. <https://bit.ly/3OjNihs>

"How to Improve Your Vocabulary as an Adult." New York Times. <https://bit.ly/4aCBiyW>

"Seven Books to Read When You Have No Time to Read." The Atlantic. <https://bit.ly/4rm7o9t>



## Getting to Know Us

Rosa, LVA student

Rosa still remembers the date she arrived in the United States: July 4, 2001. Independence Day, a holiday built around the idea of new beginnings.

She came from Ecuador speaking Spanish and, at least at first, only some English. The journey, she says, was very difficult. She does not linger on details. She does not have to. The phrase "many difficulties" is enough to tell you this was not a simple move from one place to another. It was a reshaping of life.

For years, English sat in the background of Rosa's days: important, obvious, and still out of reach. She was raising four children on her own. She was working. She was doing the constant problem-solving that adulthood demands, especially when you are the person the family relies on. Then she learned about LVAEP through Toni's Kitchen. Not a big announcement, just a community connection that mattered. One place that supports neighbors, pointing to another place that helps people grow.

Rosa has been studying English for about six or seven months, and the change is already evident in her daily life. She feels more confident talking with coworkers who only speak English. That kind of confidence is hard won. It is the shift from staying quiet to taking your place in the conversation.

Now she wants to go further, especially with reading and writing, the skills that can expand options at work and make daily life easier. Rosa is direct about why she is learning English. She wants more opportunities and more independence in a world that runs on language.

Back in Ecuador, Rosa completed high school and graduated in social sciences. She also trained in practical areas that helped her work and support her family. She once hoped to continue her education further. Life required a different kind of endurance: the steady work of showing up for her children.

Ask Rosa what accomplishment she is most proud of, and she does not mention a title. She says she is proud to be a mother, one son and three daughters, and to have raised them well.

Learning English, she says, is a challenge because it takes time and courage, especially the courage to lose the fear of pronunciation, each phrase, each word. But she insists it is not impossible. Her advice to other students is simple and fierce: do not stop dreaming. Do not stop when you have a purpose.

In her own journey, she credits the Bloomfield Library staff for helping her connect with classes, and she says her teachers and tutors have been among the best things that have happened to her here.

Rosa arrived in the U.S. on Independence Day, ready for a fresh start. As she raised her kids, she put her own priorities on the back burner, working hard to give them the opportunities she didn't have. More recently, she connected with LVA and began working on her English. She tells others to keep dreaming, and we hope she keeps on dreaming herself!

### Tutor Training Workshops

**Online Training**, by Ally Schmidt  
Platform: Zoom (sponsored by LNJ)  
Tuesdays, 6 to 8 pm  
May 19, 26, & June 2, 9 & 16, 2026

### Tutor Support Workshops

**"LVA's Approach to Adult Education,"** with  
*Cristhian Barcelos*  
*Bloomfield Public Library, Little Theater*  
*Tuesday, April 15, 2026, 11 am to 12:30 pm*

**"AI in Adult Education,"** with Jeff Arnott  
Platform: Google Meet  
Monday, March 23, 2026, 3:00 pm – 4:30 pm

### Tutor Study Circle Facilitator: Cheryl Locastro

Thursday, March 12, 2026, at 3pm  
(General in-person meeting)

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

*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>



### Why we should worry about the recent decline of reading, according to science

**Fast Company, January 15, 2026**  
**Written by: Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic**

Last year, various surveys, including reliable indicators, have highlighted a significant decline in reading habits over the past decades.

The most striking evidence is not simply that people read less, but that their capacity for deep reading is weakening. According to OECD data, the proportion of 15-year-olds who fail to reach minimum reading proficiency has now risen to nearly one in four across advanced economies, with sharp declines in tasks requiring inference, evaluation, and integration of information across texts.

In the United States, NAEP scores show that average reading performance among 13-year-olds has fallen to its lowest level in decades, reversing long-standing gains. Laboratory studies mirror these trends: experiments comparing print and screen reading consistently find that readers of digital texts score 10–30% lower on comprehension and recall, particularly for longer and conceptually demanding material.

Eye-tracking and cognitive load research further indicates that frequent digital readers engage in more skimming, less rereading, and shallower semantic processing. Crucially, these effects are not confined to weaker readers. Even highly educated adults now report shorter attention spans for long-form text and greater mental fatigue when reading complex arguments, suggesting that the decline of reading reflects not a loss of literacy, but an erosion of the cognitive endurance and attentional discipline that deep reading uniquely develops.

#### Not just children

To make matters worse, various robust data indicators show that adults are spending less time reading, especially for pleasure. For instance:

(1) A large time-use study analyzing diary data from over 236,000 Americans found that the share of adults who read for pleasure on an average day dropped from about 28% in 2003 to just 16% in 2023, a roughly 40% decline over two decades.

(2) That same research showed a steady annual fall of about 3% per year in the prevalence of daily leisure reading among U.S. adults. [...]

For the full story please copy and paste this link into your browser:  
<https://bit.ly/4aYNi2b>

*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>*

### Team Spotlight Jamie Steiger, Board Treasurer

At LVAEP's Annual Awards Ceremony, Jamie is the person you'll often find listening closely, taking in the student stories, the tutor tributes, the quiet bravery it takes to keep showing up week after week to learn or to teach. Jamie has been involved with

Literacy Volunteers of America of Essex and Passaic Counties since 2019, serving as Board Secretary from 2020 to 2022 and as Treasurer since 2023.



What drew her to the organization was mission, yes, but also a deeper connection to health. "Being able to read and speak English relates to our health too," she explains. As a public health professional, Jamie is keenly aware of health literacy, a person's ability to find, understand, and use information to make health-related decisions and actions. When people struggle to understand instructions, forms, or medical guidance, the impact can be real and immediate. For Jamie, adult literacy and ESL services do not just support career goals. They also support well-being and dignity.

Jamie brings that perspective, and a steady operational hand, to her work as Acting Executive Director and Director of Administration and Finance at Rutgers School of Nursing's Francois Xavier Bagnoud Center. She advises senior leaders at an organization dedicated to improving the health of vulnerable women, children, and families, including those affected by HIV.

On the LVAEP Board, Jamie is excited by the work most people never see. She helped design financial reports so board members can quickly understand the organization's current financial position. "A key responsibility of a nonprofit Board is to provide fiduciary oversight," she notes, and good reporting makes it easier to protect the mission.

She also served on the team that identified a new location for the Awards Ceremony. This year at the Montclair Women's Club, she loved the space's welcoming feel and the chance to offer refreshments and community.

When asked who has stood out most, Jamie points to everyone, the students' hard work and resilience, and the tutors' generosity and patience. Board work may be behind the scenes, she says, but it is all in service of the students, tutors, and staff, the heart of LVAEP.

One more detail: Jamie loves baseball. She didn't appreciate the game until her son started to play. Now she's a Mets fan, devoted to a sport where strategy matters and the clock doesn't get the final say.