

The Learning Connection

YOUR IMPACT REPORT | SPRING 2023

"I want to enjoy American life"

A little over a year ago, Literacy Network adopted its new, student-focused mission statement: *Literacy Network helps adults in Dane County build skills, reach goals, and connect communities.* With her hard work in English class, **student Mamiko is a perfect example of how this mission becomes a reality.**

Mamiko, originally from Japan, joined Literacy Network in January 2021 after she received a flyer about our free classes from the Middleton-Cross Plains Area School District, where her daughter attends school. She was placed in an intermediate Community English class, which she continues to attend weekly on Zoom. Her instructor, Bex Fabrizio, shares, "Even though her English was intermediate, her confidence and shyness were getting in the way of her using the skills she already knew."

Mamiko has attended class regularly for two years. In addition to moving up a level, Mamiko has also gained confidence in her English. "She is now a student who is the first to ask questions. Her curious personality shines through," says Bex. She has also started to work with a volunteer tutor through our Community Literacy program to further improve her English.

Since joining class, Mamiko shares that she has built skills, reached goals, and connected with her community. She was able to make a dentist appointment for herself, something she had relied on her husband to do in the past. She says, "I made a reservation by phone, which I'm not good at and avoid, but **I tried to communicate all by myself from the beginning to the end! It's a big step forward for me!**"

Mamiko has gained confidence to volunteer at her daughter's school and make friends with neighbors and other parents. At first, her conversations with friends were short. But now, "We were able to enjoy chatting in only English for two or three hours." She has made friends in English class as well, where she enjoys meeting people from a variety of backgrounds. "It's thanks to continuing English classes," she says.



Mamiko (right) and instructor Bex celebrated Mamiko's accomplishments.



Now that she is more confident about her English, Mamiko volunteers at her daughter's school.

Looking forward, Mamiko plans to continue to work on her English and build friendships in Wisconsin. "I want to stay here a long, long time," she says. **"I want to enjoy American life. For me this is an irreplaceable treasure in life!"** ■

ABOUT COMMUNITY ENGLISH:

Community English classes provide ESL instruction to hundreds of adults annually so they can engage in their family's education, advocate for their family's needs, and participate in their local communities. This semester, nine multi-level classes are supported by eight school and library partners throughout Dane County. Curriculum topics are based on students' goals and often include conversation, contacting a child's school, and scheduling appointments. This student-centered approach supports retention—a third of students attend multiple semesters of programming!

"At Literacy Network, you do your life"

CORINNE'S LITERACY NETWORK STORY

Literacy Network alumnus Corinne Ratsimihah is originally from Madagascar. She moved to Madison from France in 2010 and passed by our sign advertising free English classes while driving down Park Street. Although she had learned some English in her youth, Corinne knew that she needed help to be able to communicate with her children's teachers and in her community. She took English classes and worked with a tutor at Literacy Network to reach these goals, and later also took a citizenship class. Corinne describes Literacy Network as a place where everyone's roles combine to help flowers grow. Corinne met with board member Gabrielle Kelenyi to share her experiences. Below is an excerpt of their conversation, lightly edited for concision.

Gabbi: What did you like about your teacher and tutor at Literacy Network (LN)?

Corinne: They really push us to show what our capacity [...] I remember that time [...] we come back to the class for the Monday, and the teacher said, "What did you do for the weekend? [...] We're gonna write it and you're gonna read it in front of everybody." And I said, "Oh no, I can't do that." And she said, "You can do it, just do what you remember the most. And I'm gonna help you to rephrase it or to adjust it." I still have the paper with me because I was just like, wow, that was something. It was like challenging [...] And she said to me, "You have a really good detail to what you say." Everything we do, we have to make sure we got it in the right way to say it, and it's a very good class.

It's like if I see someone in my work actually now or before, I always say, go to Literacy Network because over there they can help you to go on your life. Because the class I got over there, it's not the class you go at school. [...] **At Literacy Network, you do your life. You show what you do, and they just help you.** You want to go to the grocery, I went with my teacher [...]. And if I said not in the right way, she can adjust a little bit like, "You can



CORINNE



GABBI

say that this way, it's fine. Don't go too far to try to find the right words. But just go in." And after that, we go sit down somewhere and ask me how am I feeling after we get that thing? Or she tells me if I did wrong or did right, or, you know, and from there, I can learn more...

Gabbi: What have you been up to since studying with LN?

Corinne: I got CNA class. I was successful on that [...]. And I got a job right away after that. [...] And yeah, now I changed my job, and I'm working at the UW Hospital right now. I was a CNA there for one year and a half, and I received some emails saying if you are interested in to be a medical assistant, you can be going to go to school, and I say how old I am now? I talk to my family because we never decide anything if nobody's agreed, and we talk to each other and my husband said, "It's your time. You have to do it." [...] I enroll in the class. It's three months now, and the three months was tough. I can say that, very tough. [...] I have to be a student. I have to be a mom. I have to be a wife. I have to be everything to make sure it works. But, thanks God, everything was doing well. I was not broken. But we have six months to go before I get a certificate. And let's see how that goes. But yeah, I am on the school right now doing to be a medical assistant if that will be okay.

We're rooting for you, Corinne! You can view Corinne's full interview here: bit.ly/studentcorinne ■

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YOU

students are building skills and reaching goals.
Your donation makes a difference!
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Sefer and Steve's tutoring journey

Student Sefer and tutor Steve are part of our ESL Personal Tutoring program. They meet weekly to practice English and have been working together for over a year.

Steve, how long have you been a tutor with Literacy Network?

I have tutored on and off for seven semesters, starting in 2019.

What program are you a tutor for?

Currently I do ESL Personal Tutoring, though I tutored for Community Literacy in the past. I've worked with several different people, though I've worked with Sefer the longest.

Why did you decide to become a tutor with Literacy Network?

It must be very difficult not to be able to communicate. It's such a basic human need to be able to get across a point, to be able to understand, and to be understood. Life is pretty difficult without it. We should go out of our way to make sure people are able to communicate.

What is something you have worked on with Sefer?

Sometimes we take a magazine from the library. He reads and we talk about what different words and expressions mean. He's become more comfortable with words, idioms, and expressions.

What do you like about tutoring with Literacy Network?

I like one-to-one contact. I like that things are improving for Sefer. He's more comfortable, which is great to see. He has a major talk he's prepared to give at work. He wants to get a four-year degree and wants to improve his English so he can enroll in college. My satisfaction is watching him progress. We've become friends.

What are you most proud of from your work with Literacy Network?

All the people that I've worked with have all shown some improvement and they recognize that improvement, and that's really the fun part.

Steve (left) and Sefer at one of their tutoring sessions



Sefer, where you are originally from?

I am from Türkiye.

Why did you decide to take classes?

I wanted to improve my English to interact with the people and be more practical at my work.

When did you start taking classes at Literacy Network?

I have started taking classes at Literacy Network about 3 years ago.

What do you like about your class and tutors?

About the class, it helps me to improve my English, which is good to reach my goals.

For the tutors, I had really kind and helpful tutor in the past. I cannot thank enough for their time and the things that they have done for me.

For my current tutor, he is also very kind and helpful, I feel comfortable when I talk to him. He helps to overcome my anxiety caused by my lack of English, also encourages me to speak more freely.

Describe your experience as a Literacy Network student.

I never felt strange or uncomfortable neither when I used to take in person classes at Literacy Network, nor now. The staff are helpful and warm, and the teachers also very giving. **I love being at Literacy Network as a student.**

How has it helped you to improve your life?

I have gained the ability to express myself in English. So, I feel more comfortable when I'm at work or going for shopping or when I need to interact with people in some other way.

What's next? What plans do you have for the future?

Even I have learned a lot, there is still a lot to learn. I'd like to be more fluent when I speak or write.

Is there anything else you'd like to share?

As I mention before, I love being a part of Literacy Network family. The whole organization is doing a really good job. I would like to thank all the staff and supporters of the Literacy Network. ■

Dear Literacy Network Family,



I am thrilled to join Literacy Network and look forward to working with you to advance the agency's mission. As friends and colleagues learn of my new role at Literacy Network, no one asks why I pursued the position—they just say, "Congratulations!"—because the appeal of serving as Executive Director of Literacy Network is clear.

Literacy Network attracted me for multiple reasons:

- The mission of supporting students in improving their skills and creating opportunities for themselves and their families has great impact in the community.
- Volunteers are an integral part of the agency's work, enabling us to provide one-on-one tutoring to a large number of students. My first volunteer experience in college was as a tutor for citizenship classes in Boston, and my husband volunteered as a tutor at Literacy Network.
- The quality of instruction and agency programming is excellent, grounded in research on best practices for adult education.
- Loyal donors trust Literacy Network to spend funds wisely to support students and improve quality of life in Dane County.
- Prior experience working in social services programs makes me particularly appreciative of the Literacy Network building, which is well-equipped to serve the needs of students, staff, and volunteers and provides such a welcoming environment.



Robin greets returning student Angel at spring class registration.

2023 will be a rewarding year at Literacy Network. Student numbers have reached pre-pandemic levels, with more people still registering. Literacy Network emerges from the pandemic proficient in both in-person and virtual instruction and, with your involvement, we aim to meet the rising demand for services. We are excited about expanding student support with a growing Student Services team, increasing student input with a new Student Advisory Board, and engaging with community partners on social justice initiatives.

Thank you for your role in building, sustaining, and innovating with Literacy Network. I hope to meet you in the coming months.

Sincerely,

Robin Ryan



Spring Open House

Tuesday, March 21

5:30 – 7:00 pm

701 Dane St, Madison, WI 53713

- Learn about programs
 - Learn about volunteer opportunities
 - Tour our building
 - Meet staff and new Executive Director, Robin Ryan
- Drop-in; no RSVP required

JOIN US!



"I never gave up and looked for opportunities to learn as much as I could during the time that I had."

– Mojgan, student speaker at 2022's Reading Between the Wines

ONLINE AUCTION: APRIL 13 TO APRIL 27, 2023

LIVE EVENT: THURSDAY, APRIL 27, 2023, 5:30–7:30 PM

Join us for our 13th Annual Reading Between the Wines! Students will share inspiring stories about their dreams and goals, including becoming U.S. citizens, earning their GEDs or HSEDs, securing improved job opportunities, and supporting their children's health and educational needs. Register to participate in the online auction, attend or stream the in-person event, or both! Event registration and more information available at litnetwork.org/RBTW2023.

LIVE EVENT DETAILS

Boardman Clark | 1 S. Pinckney St (US Bank Plaza on the Square)
Madison, WI 53703

Tickets: \$50 each for in-person attendance
Live-streamed, virtual attendance is also available

Online registration: litnetwork.org/RBTW2023

- Includes hors d'oeuvres, wine sampling, nonalcoholic beverages, and book of learner stories
- Registration closes April 20 at 5 pm

SCHEDULE

5:30-6:30 pm

Social time: Hors d'oeuvres and wine sampling

6:30-7:30 pm

Program: Student readings, volunteer and donor stories, and staff and Executive Director updates

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Questions? Interested in event sponsorship or donating an item for the online auction?
Contact Margaret Franchino at margaret@litnetwork.org or 608-268-6578.



MISSION:

*Literacy Network
helps adults in Dane
County build skills,
reach goals, and
connect communities.*

2022 at a glance

What a year! We're excited to share these initial numbers* from 2022. Watch for our full annual report in Summer 2023.

We served more than 1,050 students

39 people became U.S. citizens after passing the naturalization exam (the highest number since 2019!)

77% of employed participants said they improved communication on the job this year

105 refugees participated in programming to help them build language skills and become comfortable in their new community

A record number of people signed up to register for classes in Summer 2022. We added two sections of leveled group classes to our regular schedule to meet the increased demand. ■

In 2022, we welcomed students from 79 different countries to our programs! We highlighted students' internationalism with photos, including the ones shown here, during our GivingTuesday campaign.

**Preliminary data*

