

The Learning Connection

YOUR IMPACT REPORT | SUMMER 2022

Learning Together book of student writing is now available!

We celebrate Literacy Network's annual collection of student writings, *Learning Together*. This amazing compilation features writing from more than 50 adult learners about their hopes and dreams. We would love to share copies of the book with you — we guarantee you'll be inspired by the words of adult learners!

In the following excerpt from the book, Gloria Ramón from Literacy Network's Transitions ESL Class shares with readers about learning to kayak and how the activity brought her outdoors and into the community during the pandemic. With improved English language skills, Gloria can write her personal story, and we are happy to share it!

"Kayaking against the difficult times," Gloria Ramón

During the pandemic, we needed to stay home to protect ourselves but one of the problems was that some people got depressed and anxious because they couldn't do anything. In my case, I had to work and after work I spent most of the time inside and alone. I lived alone so it was hard for me, especially because I had just arrived from Mexico and I missed my family a lot.

Then my friend Sally told me that she was bored and that maybe we should find something to do outside that would keep us busy. Close to my place, there was a small lake and we thought that getting a kayak would be a great idea. She loves riding bikes but because I'm not as good as her, we couldn't do that together. The idea about getting a kayak was perfect because I had never done that before and she hadn't done it in a long time.

As you may know, Wisconsin has several places for kayaking whether you are a beginner or an expert, so that was a good reason to start with this activity.

The way I learned was basically following my friend's instructions and trying in a small lake. Paddling in a small lake wasn't really hard and that helped me a lot and gave me more trust in myself. After a couple of days of practice, we went to the Pine River. That was a little bit difficult because



there were branches and big rocks. However, Sally never gave up and she tried to encourage me. She always told me "“you just need more practice””".

Finally, after three months and a lot of practice, we went to Northern Wisconsin and we kayaked in small and big lakes and also we kayaked in the Brule River. In this river I had to deal with rapids. It wasn't easy but I did a good job.

Even though the pandemic is almost over, I want to continue kayaking next summer. This summer I would like to try bigger rapids but for that I need to practice more because that would be more difficult. I am also still learning and hopefully this summer with my friend's help I will become better.

Learning how to kayak was something really important in my life because that helped me with my anxiety and put me in contact with nature.

To get your copy of *Learning Together*, contact Margaret Franchino at margaret@litnetwork.org. *Learning Together* is also available online at bit.ly/2022RBTWbook ■

"Literacy Network was one big blessing for me"



Marisol Gonzalez Rodriguez, originally from Mexico City, Mexico, started taking basic English classes at Literacy Network in 2006. Now, she is a writer, storyteller, and teacher passionate about giving back to her community. Marisol got together with board member Gabrielle Kelenyi to talk about the impact learning how to speak, read, and write in

English with Literacy Network has had on her life so far. Below is an excerpt of their conversation lightly edited for clarity and concision.

Why did you decide to take English classes? And why were the classes that you took at Literacy Network important?

Well, it was important because I wanted to learn how to communicate. And so, when I was taking the classes with Mr. Gregg, he was a very wonderful teacher. I love the way that he teaches, and I love the way he interacted with us and made us feel confident. And then I continued taking classes there on Saturdays. Caitlin was one of the tutors, and she always helped me with things that she knew were a struggle, and she pushed me to do a little bit more. And I see the difference from them really caring about each individual student because they even did evaluations and tried to get you with the person that best fit your interests. I feel like they made an individualized program for me, and I benefited a lot from it.

What did you like about Literacy Network?

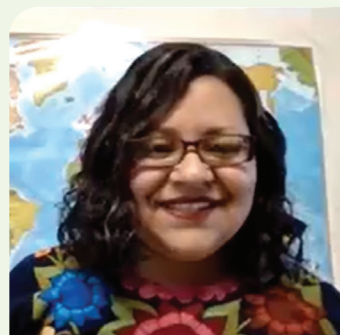
...When I was there in Literacy Network, it was walking in the room and seeing familiar faces and welcoming and just giving you the opportunity also to bring your children [...]. And so, there were no excuses to not go to the classes. So, I took my kids. I knew they would be safe, and they would have fun there while I was learning. So, I think it was a mix of everything, and then thinking of the evaluation and making individualized lessons for me, it was beyond what I was expecting or what I was experiencing in the other places where I tried to learn English.

How has Literacy Network helped you to improve your English and life in general?

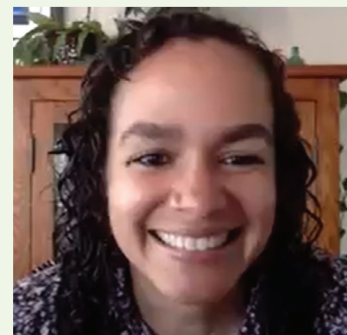
... [Literacy Network] gave me confidence because I had tutors, and I was able to communicate, and they were always saying like, "Wow, this is perfect. You are improving, look now Marisol you can say this and that." [...] And I think that really gave me the confidence [...] because if I didn't have that confidence that Literacy Network gave me, I wouldn't apply to continue my education.

What have you been up to since taking classes at Literacy Network, and what plans do you have for the future?

So, after I took the classes with Literacy Network, I applied to the UW-Odyssey Project, and [...] I found my passion for writing. [...] And so, since then, I have been keeping in my head that I want to be a writer, and I took as many classes as possible with Odyssey. And I actually just finished a poetry book that I want to publish. So, I feel like Literacy Network was one big blessing for me in order to achieve that and find that passion that I have for writing. Last year, I won a grant with some friends to develop my skills as a storyteller and provide training to people who want to do storytelling. [...] I want to keep performing and storytelling, and I want to keep teaching people how to do storytelling. Really, my dream right now will be to have a storytelling event monthly in Spanish. I want to give back to my community, and I feel like it will be so cool to have something like that in Madison.



MARISOL



GABBI

You can listen to their entire conversation, which includes Marisol's favorite Literacy Network memory, here: bit.ly/learnerMarisol ■

Volunteer Jessica Doyle talks about her experience tutoring

"I am really enjoying the tutoring. First semester I was a sub, and now I tutor a learner of Community English on Thursday mornings. I didn't know if I could do virtual tutoring, but Lilly and Kristine have been very helpful and made it easy for me."



Living in Madison I have always been aware of Literacy Network, but you have been instrumental in getting me more involved. Your words in newsletters and communications are very inspiring, and they really bring home the importance of the work. We are all lucky to have your excellent work and dedication."

— Jessica Doyle, volunteer tutor in Community English, started in 2021.

We are grateful to the hundreds of volunteers, like Jessica, who make free adult literacy education possible. Volunteers work with Dane County adults to help them reach their goals by working together on reading, writing, speaking English, basic computer skills, or GED prep. Learn more about current volunteer opportunities by visiting www.litnetwork.org/volunteer. ■

Epic celebrates 20 years of support for adult learners



Beginning in 2002, Epic Systems and its staff has provided consistent financial and volunteer support of Literacy Network programs. Epic has contributed more than \$230,000 over the past 20 years. The annual contributions of Epic and its staff have been a big part of the impact Literacy Network makes with adult learners and their families.

Tim Thompson, of Epic Charitable Contributions and Donations, shares, "Literacy Network's impact has been impressive and sustained, helping to offer their beneficiaries the security and stability that comes with reading and writing. **Their goal to improve the lives of Dane County adults and their families is shared by Epic and we are proud to support their hard and important work.**"

We are grateful for these many contributions, and send a huge expression of gratitude for Epic's continued commitment to supporting good work in our community! ■

Community English adds two new partners

Literacy Network's Community English program is pleased to collaborate with two new partners, Meadowridge Library and NewBridge Madison, to serve more learners. Community English classes teach English as a Second Language at schools, libraries, and community centers throughout Dane County. Students learn reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills to help them support their families' education and engage with their community. One hundred percent of students surveyed after the Spring 2022 semester reported improved English language skills and 98% reported increased confidence communicating in English.

Both Meadowridge and NewBridge reached out to Literacy Network with the goal of better serving English language learners. Meadowridge classes will be taught mostly on Zoom, with three in-person classes held at the library, and will include an introduction to Madison's library resources. Classes with NewBridge will be taught entirely in person, per learner preference. The class will reach older adults and is funded by UW's Wisconsin Alzheimer's Institute. Both locations hope to serve 15 basic through intermediate level learners per week.

"We're excited to add these two new partners," says Literacy Network's Director of ESL Group Instruction, Bex Fabrizio. "Demand for Community English classes continues to grow, and we look forward to working with new adult learners at these additional locations to help them reach their goals." ■



Celebrating “Learning Together” at first in-person event since 2019!



Thank you to everyone who helped to make Literacy Network’s 12th Annual Reading Between the Wines event a success!

We’re grateful for the more than 300 learners, volunteers, donors, sponsors, staff, and other supporters who contributed stories for our *Learning Together* book, participated in the online auction, and/or assisted with or attended the live event at the Aldo Leopold Nature Center on April 28. Special thanks to Bea and Lau Christensen and Diane Ballweg for providing a matching gift. **With everyone’s support, we raised more than \$33,000 to support free adult literacy education!**

If you missed the live event or want to rewatch some of the wonderful stories, a video of the program is now available at bit.ly/2022RBTWvideo. Listen to Julio share how “Literacy Network gave [him] the confidence to believe that [his] skills would improve,” to longtime volunteer Ruth describe her experience working with 82 new U.S. citizens, and much more!

Learning Together, 2022’s book of learner stories, is also now available online at bit.ly/2022RBTWbook. Read stories from more than 50 adult learners on how and what they’ve learned over the past year.

Thank you to those who helped to make the in-person event a success, including board member Gabbi Kelenyi, who served as our event emcee; Yahara String Quartet, for providing music for our social hour; and to our event speakers: Gregg Williard, Bryson Lewis, Ruth Robarts, Max Nguyen, Ebtissam, Mojgan, José, and Julio.

We would also like to thank our generous sponsors for their support: Boardman Clark, Park Bank, Summit Credit Union, Wegner CPAs, Alvarado Real Estate Group, CG Schmidt, Hausmann Group, Pines Bach, Tandem HR, UW-Madison, Community Relations, Findorff, American Family Insurance, Garver Feed Mill, and Left Bank Wine + Spirits. ■



Learner Ebtissam shares her story.

SAVE THE DATE!

**GROWING
THROUGH
Literacy
— BREAKFAST**

SEPTEMBER 29, 2022

Welcome new citizens!

Twelve students have achieved their citizenship so far this year! We are pleased to share photos and stories from three of these new citizens: Hassna, Evelyn, and Samuel. Congratulations to each new U.S. citizen who participates in Literacy Network’s citizenship class and achieves their dream.



HASSNA

Hassna came to Literacy Network in January 2020 to begin studying for the citizenship test. **She attended classes for 3 semesters and then continued her learning with the individualized support of a tutor, Pati.** Over the past two years, Hassna was a hard worker and a dedicated student. She learned the English and U.S. civics needed to pass the citizenship interview and test in January 2022. In March, she made her Oath of Allegiance at the naturalization ceremony.



EVELYN

Evelyn comes from Ghana. Growing up, she learned to speak local languages and English, the official language of her country, without the benefit of education in schools. **The biggest challenge for Evelyn was learning to read and write English in order to pass those two parts of the citizenship interview.** We provided help in citizenship classes and a tutor to work with her in reading and writing. She passed her reading and writing tests and easily passed the oral parts of the interview, showing knowledge of U.S. history and civics and her ability to communicate in spoken English. In February, Evelyn passed her citizenship test and took the Oath of Allegiance. She is now interested in taking English classes at Literacy Network.



SAMUEL

In March, Samuel passed his citizenship test and interview. He had been studying at Literacy Network since September 2021, attending citizenship classes and meeting with a tutor weekly. After passing the test, Samuel came back to class to share his experience with the instructors and other students. Samuel says **“I couldn’t have done it without you guys. I am so happy now! I tell my friends they can do it too.”** ■



MISSION:

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

THANK YOU

to the generous foundations, corporations, and
 organizations that supported adult learners and free
 literacy education during the first six months of 2022!

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*(Note: Reading Between the Wines sponsors and
 in-kind are not included in this list. Please see insert.)*

We are also very grateful for the many individual donors who have given over \$70,000 during this time! ■