

The Literacy Letter

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Why is Learning English Like Swimming?

LVSC Student Ismael Ismael Explains

"My name is Ismael Ismael. My two names are the same because I have nine siblings and my parents just ran out of ideas." This is how LVSC student, Ismael, began his very entertaining talk to a crowd of 125 guests at LVSC's signature March event, *Stars Shine for Literacy*.

Ismael came to New Jersey from Egypt in 1997. During his time in the U.S. he has advanced through many jobs: gas station attendant (winters were cold, especially for someone from Egypt), fast foods (Extra Crispy was his favorite), and as a clerk for Qualcare (he was turned down the first time, but had success with the second interview). After earning an Associate's degree from Middlesex Community College as a paralegal, he is currently working at the Somerville Court House.

Ismael is perseverant, determined, and optimistic. For the past decade he has been on a quest for English literacy instruction and has participated in many types of classes, never finding the right fit. He talked about a class he went to for pronunciation improvement. His classmates were adults from many different countries. By the time the class was over even the teacher couldn't pronounce English properly! Finally, Ismael discovered LVSC through his local library.

Diane Butler loves reading and writing and wanted to help others do the same. She first began tutoring with LVSC ten years ago for a short period of time. Just about a year ago, when she found that she



had more time to devote to a student, she began her LVSC tutoring journey with Ismael. While Ismael can read and understand English, he came to LVSC with the goal of reducing his accent. He felt it was important to strengthen his level of communication by improving his pronunciation and extending his ability

to utilize vocabulary. Diane and Ismael meet weekly and have made tremendous progress, as demonstrated during Ismael's flawless speech. Ismael validated the importance of LVSC's services by ending his talk explaining that, "Everyone should learn both how to swim AND how to speak English. And do you know why that is? Because both can save your life."

Ismael's speech was just one of many highlights of *Stars Shine for Literacy*. Celebrity entertainment was provided by Holly Faris, impersonating both Joan Rivers and Cher. Guests also enjoyed dancing and a robust silent auction. Another highpoint of the evening? A cameo appearance by Cher's late husband Sony (who looks suspiciously like LVSC Board Vice President Phil Armenio).



Stars Shine for Literacy

It was great to see so many new faces as well as many longtime supporters at our *Stars Shine for Literacy* event. We've gotten very positive feedback and hope everyone enjoyed the evening! Thank you to all who made *Stars Shine for Literacy* a tremendous success: the *Stars Shine* committee, event attendees, and silent auction donors. A special thank you to our event sponsors: Midwest Tape, PSE&G, PeopleCare Center, and Quest Diagnostics. Thank you also to Versatile Printing Applications for sponsoring the printing of our invitations and Jessica Ngo, graphic designer, for donating her time. If you missed this event, don't worry, we are already planning next year's signature event!



Want to see more pictures? Visit our website:
www.literacysomerset.org.



A Message from Jay Muldoon, LVSC Executive Director

I am happy to report that LVSC and our dedicated network of volunteers are making significant progress on many fronts which you will learn about in this edition of *The Literacy Letter*. As an organization, we are increasing our programs to serve the growing literacy needs of adults in Somerset County. We continue to offer ESL classes with Spotlight Learning, have five English Conversation Groups being held at local libraries, as well as tutoring sessions in Basic Literacy and ESL taking place daily. We're training more new tutors in our training classes which are offered three times per year. We've significantly reduced the waiting time for students to be matched to a tutor. Financially, we are in a stronger position as our efforts to increase fundraising through special events, grant writing, and donations are paying off. We've developed

collaborative relationships with other agencies and partners in Somerset County to build awareness of our organization, recruit volunteers and reach people who need our services. One collaboration has resulted in the filming of our first Public Service Announcement (PSA) with Cablevision. In April we taped the 30 second PSA at Cablevision's studio in Newark and were fortunate to use the "voice over" talents of Jennifer Kushinka, an LVSC volunteer, who is a reporter on *The Wall Street Radio Network*. Be sure to catch our PSA starting in June on all the Cablevision systems in Somerset County.

We received "rave reviews" for our *Stars Shine for Literacy* event held on March 22. This fun and entertaining evening was a big success due to the efforts of many people including our Board of Trustees and our event committee – Helen Venizelos, Su-

san Engelstein, Martha Davis, Kristen Sokol, Ken Strahs, Debbie Youngerman, and Alyssa Valenti. Thanks to all who attended or worked on the event. Plans are already underway for next year's event!

As you can see there's a lot going on at LVSC. The best way to keep in touch is to visit and "like" our Facebook page, and if you aren't currently but would like to receive our email communications, let us know at lvscprograms@literacysomerset.org. I hope to see many of our tutors and students at our upcoming Annual Meeting on June 18 which is a wonderful evening of fellowship and celebration of the great work done by the tutors and students of LVSC.

As always, thanks to our tutors, volunteers, Board, donors, and staff for helping to improve the lives of so many people in Somerset County through our adult literacy services.

Funding News

If tutoring is done by volunteers, then why does LVSC need to raise money? We hear this question from time to time, and the answer is quite simple. There are costs involved in running our programs, such as tutor recruitment and training, student outreach and assessment, and tutor-student matching and support. Not to mention, we have rent, phone, and internet bills to pay! Funding comes from many different places, including foundations, corporations, individuals, and event proceeds. During the past nine months we have seen a significant increase in grant funding and would like to extend a special thank you to all of our recent grant funders: Arnold A. Schwartz Foundation, Billian Family Charitable Foundation, Fred C. Rummel Foundation, Gannett Foundation and the Courier News, Gibson Family Foundation, Janssen Pharmaceuticals, Lowell F. Johnson Foundation, Macy's District Grant,

Magyar Bank Charitable Foundation, Pheasant Hill Foundation, Ullmann Family Foundation, United Way of Northern New Jersey Women's Leadership Council, and WalMart in Manville.

In addition to receiving grant funding, we held two enjoyable and successful events, and were grateful for outstanding support of our annual appeal. Thank you to our dedicated gift wrappers who wrapped for donations at Barnes & Noble during the holiday season, and to past president Judy Neustadt for honoring her special birthday with donations to LVSC in lieu of gifts. A friend of a friend of Jay Muldoon's donated his car and LVSC was the recipient of the proceeds. So many ways to give!

We have a very small office and staff, and our budget is lean, yet we manage to provide services to hundreds of students every year. This is only possible with the support of our volunteers and financial contributions from the community; we thank you all!

Clothing for a Cause

Did you know that through Carecycle, LVSC is able to raise thousands of dollars every year by placing clothing donation bins throughout the community. If you know a location that might be a good spot for a clothing bin, please let us know. If you have clothes to donate, please be sure to use one of our bins found in the following locations:

- Manville: Chester House - North Main Street
- Bridgewater: Twin City Markets - East Main Street & FINDERNE AVENUE
- Bound Brook: ShopRite – West Union Avenue
- Watchung: Sears – Route 22 & Terrill Road

If you'd like to make a donation to support the work we're doing at LVSC, we've enclosed a return envelope for your convenience. Thank you!

Thoughts from Martha Davis, LVSC Board President



Dear Friends,

Once again, it is time to say farewell to what has been a rewarding fiscal year and look forward to the next year's challenges. It is also that time, when once again we say 'thank you' to those special people, our volunteers, who devote their time and talents to LVSC as well as to our brave and determined adult learners who seek to better their lives through literacy.

While students, volunteers and donors are key components in keeping the organization alive, community awareness that allows for opportunity and growth is another. Initiatives embarked on during our 2013-2014 fiscal year such as membership in the Somerset County Business Partnership (SCBP) and our partnership with the Bridgewater Library for our soon to be third fall Soiree, have reaped good rewards and are on-going.

If anything, the pace of doing business is quickening and we are ready for its demands with the expert management of the Board of Trustees and the Executive Director.

During this fiscal year, the Board also has seen favorable growth. We welcomed three new members whose diverse backgrounds and skills will add to the strength and direction of the LVSC Board. Please meet -

Helene Sophia Venizelos: Some of Helene's volunteer experience has been gained through past and present affiliations with organizations in her hometown of Somerville, such as – Arts on Division, Leadership Somerset, Somerset County Educational Services Commission, and the list goes on. Helene is a knowledgeable and experienced event organizer, as evidenced by successfully chairing our March *Stars Shine for Literacy* signature event.

Eileen Havens Roan: Eileen comes from a corporate background having worked for 35 years at Johnson and Johnson in New Brunswick. During her tenure, Eileen supported the President of one of the worldwide operating companies for 15 years, and then rose with him to the position of Executive Assistant to the Vice Chairman, Board of Directors.

Alyssa M. Valenti: Our newest Board member is an Electronic Resources & Web Services Librarian at the Raritan Valley Community College in North Branch. Alyssa is presently working on her Master of Applied Science, Web Design and Development, and has co-authored a chapter in a publication called 'Virtually Embedded.'

Thank you for your continued support and participation in our great organization, and have a wonderful summer!

Martha Davis, Board President

Notes from our Tutors

Look at the life-changing literacy goals that our tutors and students have achieved!

- Rosa explained to me this week that one of her goals is to become a manager at her part-time job. She needs to work on answering the phone and talking to clients, co-workers, and vendors. She also told me that one of her co-workers told her she noticed Rosa's English improving.
- Fen has progressed from reading local sections of the Bernardsville News to the Sunday Times articles with great enthusiasm.
- Attended LVSC Annual Meeting and Recognition Event with Donglin.
- Within this week Amy will be able to read The Three Little Pigs in English to her 2-year old son.
- Sieglinde is working on some basic dialogues to assist her in an emergency situation with a doctor, 911 operator or hospital.
- Bibi is learning to read/write the words she needs to know for the citizenship exam. She is also learning to answer the 100 questions she needs to know for the exam.
- We read over the summer activities for children at the library so Shirley can register her daughter.
- Met at the farmer's market and learned vegetables words. Then to Starbucks to learn how to order!

Event Highlights

Second Annual Fall Soiree

Over 80 attendees enjoyed a wine tasting and chocolate pairing at our *Fall into Literacy Soiree*. Much appreciation goes to the Somerset County Library System and the Bridgewater Library staff for hosting this popular and successful event. Thank you also to our event sponsors: Brother International, Midwest Tape, PeopleCare Center, PSE&G, Affinity Federal Credit Union, and LaFontaine & Budd Inc., and to our food and beverage donors: Verve Restaurant, Soriano's at Parkside, Wegmans, Weis Markets, and MRB Bakery Distributors.



Independent Chocolatier, Victoria Welch, provides chocolate pairings from Dove Chocolate Discoveries.



A guest enjoys samples of fine wine provided by Discover Wine of Somerville.



Attendees relax at the Soiree while supporting a great cause.

Tutor Appreciation Tea

On a cold Sunday in February, tutors found warmth and good conversation at the annual Tutor Appreciation Tea hosted by the LVSC Board.



Board President Martha Davis speaks to a group of LVSC volunteers.

How's It Going

Sessions for tutors were held in December and April at the PeopleCare Center. Thanks to Jackie Flamm for facilitating these informative and engaging sessions where tutors share experiences, get tips, and leave with added confidence and enthusiasm.



Jackie Flamm shares words of wisdom and encouragement with tutors.

*Mark your calendar
now for the
Third Annual Soiree
at the Bridgewater Library
Friday, October 24, 2014*

Student Highlights from the Annual Meeting

At LVSC's 2013 Annual Meeting, two students spoke to a crowd of more than 50 guests – a true demonstration of their increased confidence and literacy skills!

Meet Bertha, LVSC 2013 Student of the Year

Bertha came to the U.S. from Ecuador where she had earned an advanced degree in chemistry. In the U.S. she was doing manual shift work, working the 3:30 p.m. to midnight shift. She had difficulty understanding colleagues who spoke fast and had to ask people to repeat themselves. She couldn't put together complete sentences, struggled to write emails in English, and needed her daughter to help with completing paperwork. When she came to LVSC, her main goal was to get a better, more suitable job in her field. Bertha knew she would have to improve her English skills in order to achieve this goal. Bertha's tutor, Nilam Verma, told Annual Meeting attendees that Bertha's enthusiasm and drive inspired Nilam to be a better tutor. The pair worked together for a year and a half when Bertha achieved her goal, obtaining a supervisory role at a local perfume company.



Student Bertha Heredia proudly displays her award with Tutor Nilam Verma (l), and LVSC Executive Director Jay Muldoon (r).

During her presentation, Bertha thanked her tutor and told fellow ESL students in the audience to "continue studying. It's hard, but you can do it." In the audience were Bertha's daughters, incredibly proud of their mom. Who wouldn't be?

Meet Chang

Tutor Cathy Lybeck and student Chang Sook Yoon have been working together for several years. In addition to achieving many literacy goals, they have become friends. During their time together the pair has adjusted their goals as Chang's life priorities have changed. At the start, Chang set the goals of obtaining a better job and obtaining U.S. citizenship. In 2012 she achieved the significant literacy goal of becoming a U.S. citizen. However, with the birth of a grandchild, Chang decided to retire and set a new literacy goal of writing her memoir while improving her verbal and written expression.

In Cathy's words, "This has been an exciting project to work on with Chang. We enjoy our discussions about traditions and how different her early life experiences were compared not just with American contemporary life, but also with contemporary Korean life. Chang has grandchildren who were born and are being raised in the U.S. I think we both suspect that her memoir will become a family treasure." Cathy recently noted that one of the most significant aspects of Chang's progress is the social confidence she has gained: Chang is much less isolated than when the pair first starting working together.

Following is an excerpt that Chang wrote for her memoir:

In winter my father woke up early. He put fire wood in the furnace. He set the fire to heat up the water to help his wife.

Gudeuljang: This is a heating system with a 3,000 year history in Korea. When a person builds a house, they make tunnels under the floor and lay a flat stone on top of it as the floor. The tunnels are attached to the stove. Warm air goes through the tunnels and heats the floor. The chimney is on the



Student Chang Sook Yoon addresses annual meeting attendees with moral support provided by Tutor Cathy Lybeck.

other side of the house. While food is cooking, the floor gets warm and heats the house. Three meals a day makes a warm house in the winter.

In the summer there is an outside furnace for cooking, like a barbecue, so that the house doesn't get too hot. I like this heating system because Gudeuljang air is fresh and clean.

Clay is spread on the floor like cement. After the clay dries, thick paper, chang ho ji, is glued to the floor. Varnish made from soybeans is spread on top of the floor. The varnish protects the floor and is easy to clean.

The Annual Meeting is back!

Long-time friends of LVSC may remember this popular event. Students, tutors, staff, and board members gather for a potluck of food from around the world. The Board of Trustees presents its new slate and budget for the upcoming year. Students, tutors, and volunteers are honored and recognized. Don't miss this year's annual meeting on Wednesday, June 18, at the PeopleCare Center from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. No fee to attend, just bring an appetizer or a dessert to share! You will leave this inspiring evening feeling energized and proud to be part LVSC.

Congratulations to 37 Newly Trained Volunteer Tutors!

Fall 2013 Graduates

Michael Balogun
Janet Bostwick
Sandra Cardenas
Jerry Cecil
Doris Chen
Lakshmi Devadass
Barbara David
Mark Davis
Ann Dorko
Elaine Farrand
Susan Fiorentino
Sandy Hockridge
Cathy Hollien
Linda LaRish
Eileen McGuinness
Barbara Millers
Jessica Ngo
Cyndy Reames
Catherine Vatter
Antonia Wheelwright

Winter 2014 Graduates

Michelle-Ann Charles
Bill Curtis
Anda Cytroen
Pat Dedert
Bob Hirschfeld
Janet Hirschfeld
Jane Kiernan
Vicky Madzey
Maureen Manos
Rick Nelson
Kathleen Reddan
Susan Rose
Gail Scales
Mary Senior
Kristen Sokol
Paul Stoddard
Lynn Taylor



**Literacy Volunteers
of Somerset County**

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Helene Venizelos

Staff

Jay Muldoon, *Executive Director*
Susan Engelstein, *Program Coordinator*
Aimee Lam, *Development & Communications Consultant*

✓ Save the Date

Annual Meeting and Recognition Night

Wednesday, June 18, 2014
7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

PeopleCare Center
120 Finderne Avenue
Bridgewater, NJ 08807

RSVP by June 13 to:
lvscprograms@literacysomerset.org

Third Annual Soiree at the Bridgewater Library

Friday, October 24, 2014

• Signature Event

Saturday, March 21, 2015

Tutors, Care to Share?

Are you and your student working on a goal you'd like to share? We are always looking to showcase the great work you are doing so please email us at: lvscprograms@literacysomerset.org.

Auto Donations

Donate your used automobile and get a tax deduction! It's quick and easy, and LVSC will receive a financial contribution as a result of your donation. To learn more, please call the LVSC office at (908) 725-5430.

Design for the newsletter provided by Jessica Ngo, freelance designer.

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