



VOLUNTEER ENGLISH PROGRAM  
IN CHESTER COUNTY

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# ANNUAL REPORT

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FY2020 / FY2021

Never were we so aware of what immigrants face when coming to a new country. They come here because the United States has been a shining beacon for liberty and freedom. They come here to fulfill dreams and aspirations that are not within reach in their native lands. Yes, we teach English literature, writing, and grammar to our students - but we tutors also learn so much from our students. How do you live with little or no identity? Why is there no governmental path to legitimacy? Why is one of our dinner discussions about deportation? How does the rest of our community support immigrants and refugees?

We learn from our students how much more complex their lives are compared to our own. They have to blend native and American culture while keeping alive their heritage for their children. One of my students started out in an adobe hut with a sand floor and no electricity or indoor plumbing. How far he has come. I remember when I went to college, my father bought room air conditioners, a powered lawn mower and a powered snow blower. What an easy life I had compared to his.

We are from different generations, cultures and languages and yet we have become great friends. He is my teacher also.

**Dr. Norman Feinman, VEP Tutor**



Dr. Norman Feinman & his wife, Marla Feinman, have been VEP tutors since 2016 and were recipients of the 2020 June Hamilton Tutor of the Year award.



## WHERE WE ARE NOW

We celebrate our volunteers and tutors and recognize that VEP can only fulfill its mission and purpose with everyone's participation. Throughout the pandemic, when meeting in person was not always possible, tutors have worked virtually with our professional staff to welcome newcomers from around the world and advance the efforts of the many immigrant adults who already consider Chester County home.

Adjusting to distance learning followed by hybrid meetings, adapting to the availability of public space, and balancing other work and personal commitments have not gone unnoticed. Thank you for meeting the challenges of every adult learner who sought help from VEP.

Together, we have tried new approaches to VEP's 36-year model, introduced state-of-the-art instructional software, and relied heavily on our own life- and work-skill sets to make learning possible during these difficult months. Community members have witnessed these efforts and continue to volunteer and financially invest in VEP's mission.

Thank you for the difference you are making to create a more equitable place for all who live or work in Chester County.

**Terri Potrako, Executive Director**



Terri Potrako

## WHERE WE ARE GOING

By any measure, the need for the work of the Volunteer English Program continues to grow. The 2020 US Census showed that 12.6% of households in Chester County speak a language other than English at home. VEP students are certainly included among them.

My favorite VEP success story – and every tutor could insert a similar win – is about a former student whose boss wanted him to learn to drive a forklift at the company that does custom marble and granite countertops. But the manager told him that he'd have to watch a training video and pass a safety test – in English. He said, "I think I can do that." And he did! He watched the video, passed the test, and got a promotion! And a raise!

Numerous small wins like that, impossible to quantify, occur every day: a student who can get medical care for a sick child, attend a Parent-Teacher conference with confidence, or apply for a job. Those who ace the interview, arrange repairs with a landlord, or navigate a retail exchange independently. These are some of the kinds of successes that all of us at VEP – tutors and supporters, board and staff – enable all the time.

My colleagues on the board and I look forward with you to envision the next 35 years of service to the community.

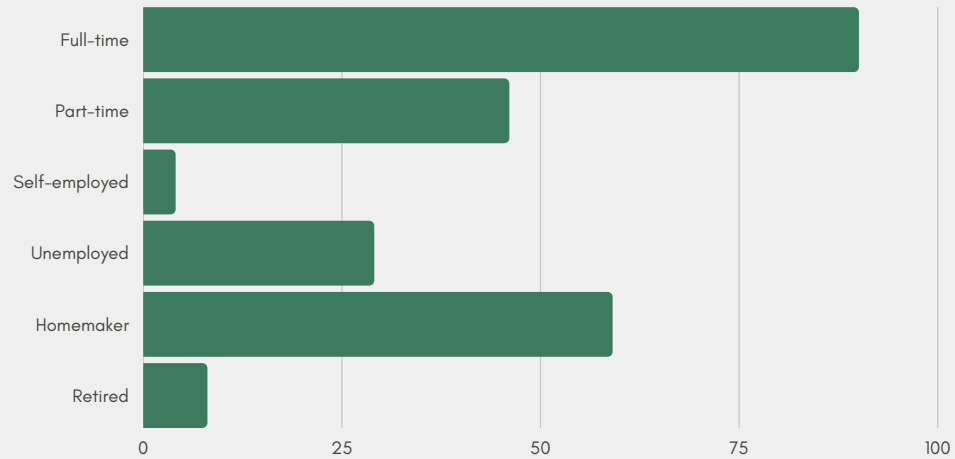
**Theresa Marran, Board President**



Theresa Marran

# STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

## EMPLOYMENT STATUS



**195**

Active Tutors

**269**

Active Students

**18-80+**

Student  
Age Range

**24**

Languages  
Represented

**6,876**

Instructional  
Hours

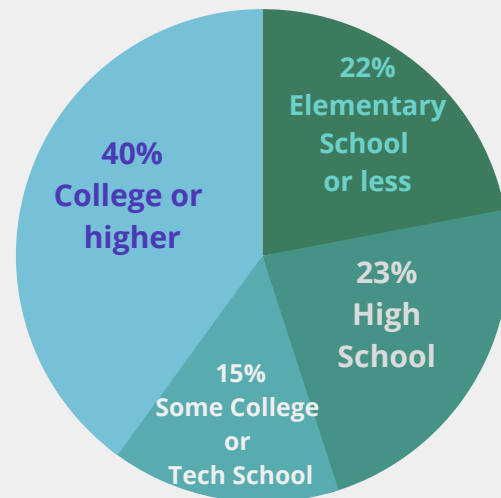
**156**

Students on  
Waitlist

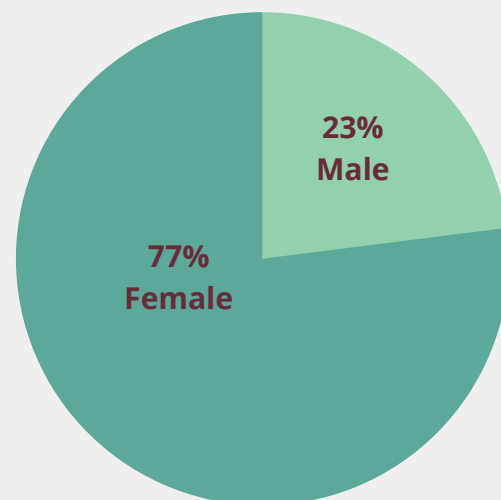
**35**

Unique Zip Codes

## EDUCATION



## GENDER



# FINANCIALS

The following figures represent fiscal years July 1 through June 30.

Umbreit, Wilczek & Associates provided an independent accountant review for fiscal years 2020 and 2021.

## STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

**2021**

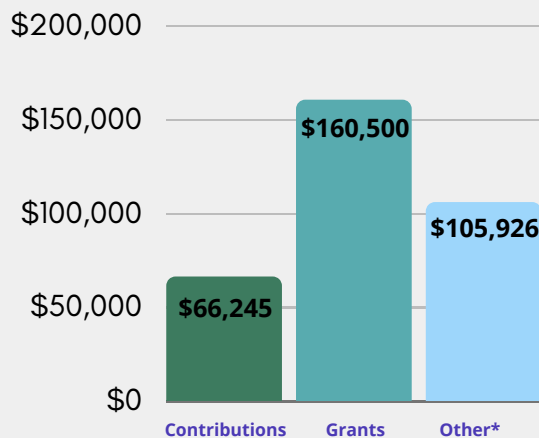
Total Assets	\$409,580
Total Liabilities	\$39,231
Total Liabilities & Net Assets	\$409,580

**2020**

Total Assets	\$426,737
Total Liabilities	\$58,817
Total Liabilities & Net Assets	\$426,737

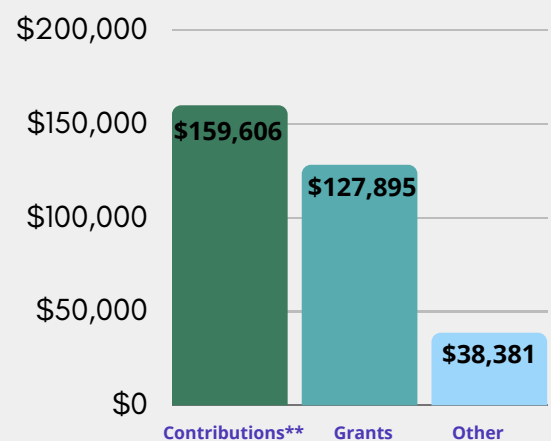
## STATEMENT OF ACTIVITY

**Income: \$332,671**



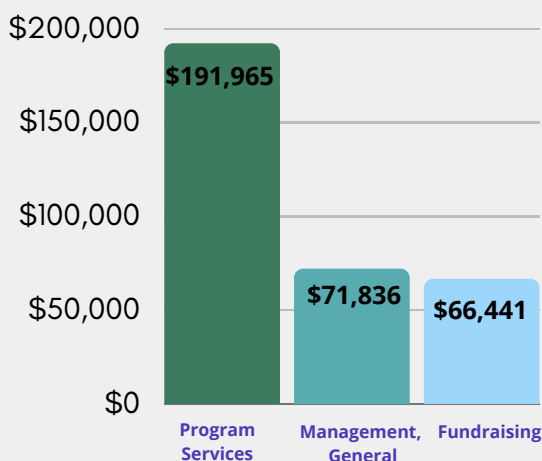
\*Includes Paycheck Protection Program and Employee Retention Credits

**Income: \$325,882**

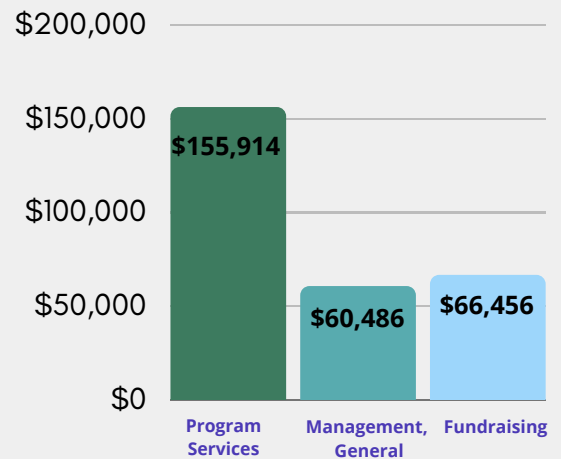


\*\*Includes a one time legacy gift

**Expenses: \$330,242**



**Expenses: \$282,856**



VEP receives a significant amount of donated services from unpaid volunteers who assist in fundraising, special projects and tutoring. In 2021, we received an estimated 8,974 volunteer tutors totaling \$239,346. For fiscal year ending June 30, 2020, we received an estimated 8,827 hours totaling \$224,302.

## OUR STUDENTS

As life gives us both, bad and good, to balance better, so my VEP gathering woke me up wonderful feelings. I met with VEP staff, tutors, and students online last Sunday. VEP organization which supports non-native English speakers in Chester County, is my best American experience. Woven of great people who with their generosity, heartiness, kindness, and knowledge along with teaching us English, give us always more. They give us some of their other knowledges as they create our special feelings which only those who received their help can understand.

Our gratitude to them is so special, like to life itself. When on Sunday I looked and listened to them through the Zoom application, I suppressed my feelings of not crying. It was not something new that I realized regarding my feelings, I often react that way on people's greatness.

In one hour so long, how our meeting lasted, I lived another world. A world of love, respect and understanding of diversity. The world of connections and togetherness where only human's great things count. We were a mix of white and black, native Americans and immigrants. We came from different countries around the globe. We have different kinds of educations and knowledges. We belong to different religions or not belong to anyone. We look different, but no one cared about. We all have one thing in common, to be human, our best version, and to help each other the best way we can. Do we not all like to give rise to these feelings in others? And if that's not our greatest value, I don't know what is! It's never enough words to express my gratitude to them, to VEP, and my extraordinary tutors, Richard, Tom, and Martin. Such great people on my American journey.

**Student Fikreta Redzepagic Duzic, speaking about November 2020's annual tutor-student Global Gathering, which was held online due to the Coronavirus pandemic.**



Fikreta Redzepagic Duzic became a naturalized U.S. citizen in June 2020.

## STAFF PERSPECTIVE: LIFECYCLE OF A STUDENT

The life-cycle of a Volunteer English Program student has no end-date. It is intentional and research-based, while naturally flowing. Even after concluding their participation in our program, students often stay in touch through their tutors or personally to update us on their continued progress, ask advice, and volunteer in the office or as guest speakers at VEP events, such as Tutor Training Workshops, Global Gatherings, and VEP Galas. They also continue their relationships with us by referring (and sometimes interpreting for) family members and friends who are newly-joining students.

Program coordinators see the process through from the initial contact to Prospective Student to Student Intake to Wait Listed Student to Active Student/Tutor Match and beyond. Although students and tutors then meet independently, program staff remain in the background providing answers to questions, giving advice or simply lending an ear, offering referrals as needed, and checking on student progress. Even when the tutor and student have completed their work together, program coordinators often maintain these relationships.

VEP's methodology is continuous, fluid and student-centered. Our tutors and students enrich our roles as program coordinators way beyond expectation. Students take wing and soar with confidence and skilled communication with family, employers and community. Tutors share, in amazement, how volunteering in this capacity adds unanticipated value to their lives. Witnessing the magic of 'giving back,' 'paying it forward' and ongoing friendships are what brings us, as staff, our moments of joy.

**Donna Dello Buono, Senior Program Coordinator**





## LEGACY GIVING

Legacy gifts enable individuals to create a powerful philanthropic legacy by making a direct impact on the causes important to them. We honor the following individuals who provided legacy gifts to VEP in 2020 & 2021.

### BOB & BETSY HAWKES

Elizabeth H. ("Betsy") Hawkes embodied the life of VEP. In 1991, Betsy became a volunteer tutor. Until her death on April 24, 2008, she served VEP in many capacities, teaching and mentoring students from all over the world. In 2018, her beloved husband, Robert Hawkes, passed away suddenly, leaving many friends throughout Chester County. His legacy gift to the Volunteer English Program sustained the organization leading up to and including the pandemic of 2020. We will forever remember Bob & Betsy and share our appreciation annually with many others who selflessly share their time, talent, and passion to ensure success for our shared immigrant friends and neighbors. The annual Betsy & Bob Hawkes Memorial Award honors their memories and service by recognizing an individual or individuals who best represent the Volunteer English Program's core values, goals and philanthropic efforts. Nominations are always welcome.



Robert and Betsy Hawkes



Ruth Passo

### RUTH PASSO

Long time tutor Ruth Passo traveled extensively, visiting 46 countries and working in multiple international careers throughout her life. In addition to tutoring, she served VEP as a conversation group leader, Treasurer and President of the Board. Her legacy of volunteerism spanned several other nonprofit organizations, including the United Way, the Association of Fundraising Professionals, the National Association of Credit Managers and the Agency for International Development, for which she held numerous leadership and management positions.

Prior to retiring, she had several careers that took her around the world: teaching English teachers in Honduras as a Fulbright Scholar, working for a nonprofit agency that assisted foreign exchange students in VT, obtaining multiple master's degrees in Latin American Studies and English as a Second Language, and ultimately working her way up to multiple leadership and management positions within the global financial services industry. According to her brother, Larry Passo, "On a trip back to Indianapolis to visit our parents, [Ruth] managed to talk her way into the office of the head of International Banking of the largest bank in town. During that meeting, she discussed her extensive international experience and how she wanted to put it to use. The person that she met with was impressed with her experience and chutzpah but he informed her that he couldn't hire her since she didn't have any business experience. However, he offered to work with her as a mentor and gave her a suggested list of courses that she should take. Ruth worked on those classes and kept in touch. A couple of years later, her mentor moved to a different bank in Louisville, KY and he was able to hire her as an employee working with accounts throughout Central and South America. Keep in mind, this was the land of machismo and she would usually be the only female in large meetings and she was barely over 5 feet tall. From this point, she advanced through her career in banking and lived in a number of different states before she ended up in the Philadelphia area."

Once Ruth retired, she continued to enjoy traveling around the globe, even as she was challenged at the end of her life by ALS. "Ruth Passo's constant work for VEP over many years is a legacy that will continue long into the future," reflects Bill Lalicker, Board Emeritus. "We will miss everything delightful about Ruth that she shared with us when she was here; but even after we are all gone from this world, her good work will live and continue to change lives for the better."

## WORKPLACE GIVING

Corporate donations and sponsorship are a vital source of year-round, general operating support. Each organization may structure their employee giving program differently, such as automatic payroll deductions which make charitable giving more convenient without losing tax benefits. Having a smaller amount of money deducted from your paycheck throughout the year can be easier for you to budget and allows you to donate a larger amount of money while making a greater impact overall.



Martin McNeil

As an employee of Quest Diagnostics, I noticed how their commitment to social justice, diversity, inclusion and community service had increased in recent years, to the extent that this year they introduced an extra holiday dedicated to a “service day,” a day that could be taken off work at a time of the employee’s choice to do something of service for their community.

To further encourage community service, they also introduced a “dollars-for-doers” program whereby the company would donate money to eligible organizations for voluntary work done by employees. VEP was not originally on the list of approved organizations, however I was able to propose our inclusion and after a few simple steps we were added to the list. I was then able to request a donation to VEP based on my volunteer tutor hours, and a couple of months later Terri confirmed receipt of the check.

It felt so rewarding to have my volunteer hours recognized by my employer, and that VEP (and ultimately our students) are able to benefit financially from work that I was already doing. Employer matching or gifting programs, such as Quest’s dollars-for-doers, are a great way to increase the value of time or donations to non-profit organizations. If you have a connection to a company that offers such an opportunity, I encourage you to participate and to be surprised how easy it is to tap into this additional source of income for non-profits such as the Volunteer English Program.

**Martin McNeil, tutor & board member**

## FOUNDATION GIVING

Foundations have provided consistent, steadfast support over the years, making a significant difference in our ability to remain available. When other challenges have met funders, organizations such as the Phoenixville Community Health Foundation have continued to understand our mission and align with our funding priorities, allowing us to be agile and responsive as we welcome new students and tutors.

The Phoenixville Community Health Foundation (PCHF) launched a new strategic plan this year. A key finding in our research was those whose first language is not English is the most underserved population in our area. And we know this population is on the rise in greater Phoenixville, with new residents coming from Guatemala, Brazil, and Egypt.

Being able to speak English is critical to navigating day-to-day activities. Imagine being unable to receive appropriate medical treatment for an illness because you cannot communicate with your doctor. And this is one example among countless others.

Our Foundation has supported the Volunteer English Program for many years, helping them expand to serve more in the Phoenixville region. Their services are fundamental to ensuring our friends and neighbors who speak a language – or multiple languages – other than English can achieve and sustain good health and a great quality of life for themselves and their families.

**Tamela Luce, President/CEO of PCHF**





## BECAUSE OF YOU

### MEREDITH HUFFMAN LOVING CONNECTIONS FUND

Meredith Huffman was a passionate supporter of VEP, as was her mother and former tutor, Sharyn. Meredith's philanthropic vision included championing organizations and people who focused on community service and charity. Through her professional guidance, Meredith helped VEP to think far into the future, to prepare for ideas that had not yet been conceptualized. In 2016, she asked VEP to "think beyond ourselves and envision ways in which we could ensure that VEP would be available for new English speakers 30 years out, in the year 2046."

The Meredith Loving Connections Fund was established in 2017 upon Meredith's final battle with cancer through a seed gift from Capacity for Change. Since then, VEP has received many single and recurring contributions with the intention to share such funds with students. We are now able to extend support beyond tutoring to adult learners in their search for meaningful employment, citizenship, professional credentialing, and other personal goals that result from their commitment to learning English. Active students who have been meeting with a tutor for at least 12 months may learn more about this financial opportunity on our website.



Tom Buchanan

### PRO BONO LEGAL AID

Tom Buchanan, a former Federal Government attorney and prosecutor with 30 years of legal experience, is co-leading the effort to connect adult VEP students with affordable and reliable pro bono legal services. With the support of the Chester County Bar Foundation and VEP's bilingual staff, VEP students are interviewed and referred to one of several partnering agencies in Chester County for free expert counsel related to their needs.

Legal services focus primarily on immigration issues such as visas, residency status, naturalization, and DACA, as well as unemployment, housing and evictions, contract disputes, and personal injury concerns. The project will continue to include workshops for active VEP tutors about legal matters related to immigration or the immigrant experience so that tutors can help promote education, knowledge, and awareness of the law within the larger VEP community. This project creates a safe haven for individuals to step out of the shadows and resolve legal issues that currently leave them at a deep disadvantage.

### 35TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

VEP's signature spring fundraising event, An Evening of Inspiration, was held virtually on Thursday evening, June 24, 2021 to commemorate 35 years of service to the Chester County community. Leon Spencer, Jr., Board Chairman of the Franklin Mint Federal Credit Union and former Mayor of Kennett Square, emceed the evening which featured a live interactive conversation with Helena Ku Rhee, a corporate attorney and author from Los Angeles. Ms. Rhee, author of the children's book, "The Paper Kingdom," shared how she was inspired by her immigrant parents as well as her travels around the world.

Guests joined the event early for an informal Zoom meet-and-greet with other participants and listened to the accomplished WCASD Senior Strings, conducted by Katrina Kelly, performing the symphonic work "Perseus," by Soon-Hee Newbold, a female composer who was born in South Korea and grew up in Maryland. The virtual event also featured remembrances of friends Betsy and Bob Hawkes and a celebration of Shannon Almquist, Lifetime Achievement Award recipient for her 35-year commitment to VEP. Proceeds benefited VEP's general operations.



# BECAUSE OF YOU

## SHANNON ALMQUIST

Shannon Almquist was awarded VEP's first-ever Lifetime Achievement Award in June 2021. She speaks about what the organization means to her and to our community.

"Things always have a beginning— and most good things begin with somebody's dream. June Hamilton had the dream that we ought to be able to help newcomers to America learn English. Many of us at Calvary Lutheran Church enthusiastically answered her call and that was the genesis of the Volunteer English idea.

You might well ask, why don't students just go to the local community college and take an ESL course? And that brings me to what I treasure about Volunteer English— that it is one-on-one, personal mediation and intervention to change the life of an individual. What could be more of a privilege to be a part of than that? I can't think of anything. The idea that students decide what their goal is, and we choose materials based not only on their skill level but their goal, means that every tutor is fashioning an individualized education plan for their student. So, for the Japanese woman who wanted to get her driver's license, we used the driver's manual. Nobody in ESL says "Oh, the perfect textbook would be the driver's manual." But if that's your goal, that can be your textbook.

That kind of thing thrills me; that we are tailoring what we do to the individual. In this day and age, when people sometimes feel like they're not seen, or they're not heard— for them to be with a person who says 'I see you, I hear you, I see your need, I'm lucky enough to be in a position to help.' I don't think it gets much better than that."

**Shannon Almquist, VEP tutor since 1986**



Reverend Roy & Shannon Almquist

## TUTOR WORKSHOPS & INTERNATIONAL SUMMIT

Tutors come from all walks of life and while they often come with an abundance of goodwill, the first question many ask is "Can I really do this?"

The initial seed that is planted in every student/tutor pair is the human-to-human and life-to-life connection that compels our volunteers to reach out into the community to find their student, who may often be their own neighbor.

VEP strengthens each pair with training in proven, state-of-the-art language instructional techniques that helps tutors bridge the gap between the desire to help the student in front of them and their new endeavor as a language guide and teacher.

In addition to a solid foundation in the best instructional practices, VEP maintains a wide variety of programming for the continual support of tutors throughout the year which takes the form of anything from informal gatherings where tutors can bring their own unique challenges and hear their peers' solutions, to more formal day-long workshops, typified in our yearly Tutor Summit which collects formal presentations of new ideas and new ways of tutoring in a day of professional development and rekindling the volunteer spark.

At the advent of the coronavirus pandemic, VEP pivoted these in-person support structures into a virtual model. Instead of withdrawing from supporting our tutors, we doubled down on our efforts and hosted Tutor Summits which not only kept the spirit of in-person gatherings but leveraged the virtual medium to invite speakers from various institutions, both locally (The University of Delaware) and farther afield (The Graduate Center of the City University of New York; Soka University World Language Center, Tokyo, Japan).

When many organizations waited with breath held to see how the pandemic would play out, VEP built rewarding, enriching, and engaging programming that helped keep our tutors in the organization's orbit and likewise brought the world of experts to them, here in the comfort of our local community. This is undoubtedly a hallmark of our program and a mark of distinction that sets VEP's training and tutor engagement apart.

**Greg Lindeman, Community Engagement Coordinator**

# BOARD OF DIRECTORS

## Executive Committee

Theresa Marran: President  
 Valerie Rozek: Immediate Past President  
 Carol Robinson, 1st Vice President  
 Alan Lee, Ph.D.: 2nd Vice President  
 Carol Recupero: Secretary  
 Tom Travers, CPA: Treasurer

## Slate of Members

Sree Kunnath  
 Patrick Luckner  
 Kevin McFarlane  
 Susan Jacques Pierson, Ph.D.  
 Leigh Ann Ranieri  
 Janet Zeis

## Emeritus Members

Shirley Warren, Retiree, IBM  
 Paul Keogan, President, BackOffice Thinking  
 Bill Lalicker, Ph.D., Professor, West Chester University of PA

## Advisory Council

Lou Beccaria  
 Dave Garrison  
 Terry Kenworthy  
 Michelle Kichline  
 Peter Loedel  
 Chuck Maser  
 Meghan McVety  
 Leon Spencer  
 Jane Tang

## STAFF

Terri Potrako: Executive Director  
 Donna Dello Buono: Senior Program Coordinator  
 Greg Lindeman, Community Engagement Coordinator  
 Anne Ryan, Program Coordinator  
 Rachel Van Tassel, Program Director  
 Kimberly Walters, Development Associate

## MISSION

The Volunteer English Program connects volunteers with adult English language learners to provide one-to-one tutoring and cultural enrichment that empowers immigrants to be successful.

VEP fulfills an unspoken mandate in the Chester County community to welcome any and all immigrants and refugees who seek to empower themselves through English language skills and understanding American culture. VEP's one-to-one, student and goal-centered approach supports all language speakers, upwards to 30 of the 50 plus spoken in Chester County alone.

This community-based, non-classroom program meets students wherever they are on the path of literacy and proficiency, regardless of income or residency status, and is available seven days a week, morning to evening, including weekends. The 365-day approach to learning provides consistent engagement which helps to ensure student progress.

Concurrently, VEP staff recruit, train, and prepare approximately 100 new community volunteers as tutors each year. The nine-hour workshop has been transformed into a virtual course where tutors learn the evidenced-based techniques for teaching English and strategies for tutoring remotely.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

In all of our work and interactions, we seek to be welcoming, compassionate, understanding, and inspired. These guiding principles shape our work.

**Welcoming:** We welcome newcomers from all countries.

**Compassionate:** We work in solidarity with immigrants to achieve their goals and aspirations.

**Understanding:** We enhance the understanding and acceptance of diverse cultures and people.

**Inspired:** We are inspired by the idea that we can change the world one person at a time, starting within our own communities.

## Volunteer English Program in Chester County

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A text version of this report is available for translation upon request.