

# IN OTHER WORDS

*The official newsletter of the Volunteer English Program*



“There is no better exercise for your heart than reaching down and helping to lift someone up.”

— BERNARD MELTZER

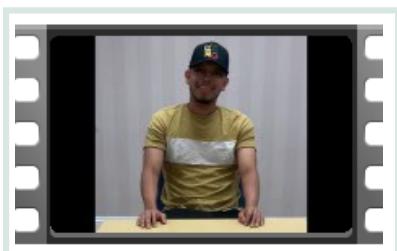
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## STUDENT VOICES

Recently, a VEP student and his tutor, Bruce Lindeman, spoke about the progress he has made learning English over the past ten months.



[Watch the video](#)

**Click here to watch a time-limited video about learning English with VEP! (Transcript below).**

Hello, everyone! I am 22 years old. I am from Guatemala.

I need to tell how is my progress. I have one year and a half in this country.

Bruce and I have been working together for 10 months.

My first 4 months in this country were very difficult because I don't speak English.

Now I feel better. I can talk to friends, co-workers.

I learn English when we went to [Devon] horse show, Valley Forge Park.

Also, I learn when we hit golf balls and play tennis, enjoy listening to music.

So, thank you Volunteer English for your help!

### Bruce Lindeman is a VEP tutor.

Initially, [my student] was apprehensive, as he only spoke about 10 words. We agreed that speaking English would be our #1 Goal.

For my part, there are many, many tools available to help in this day and age. And the staff at VEP are supportive with ideas as well as being easy to communicate with. To get started, for the first few days, like many VEP colleagues, I went to his main interests... soccer... food... music!

As he became more comfortable, he would speak more... sharing family news... his work... highs and lows... his dreams even. In fact, last week, we had a conversation that lasted almost one hour. Listening to music together on YouTube with words in English on the screen has been a mutual interest regularly.

Since we began working together, he has been promoted twice. He is a very respectful, responsible, reliable, caring, hard-working young man. He is tech-savvy and very good at communicating/texting. And, I tell him, he is helping me also... giving me a worthwhile purpose... which gets my mind off of the blues I get in winter.. .and off my medical issues.

So - we hope to continue to learn together! We hope [others] will think about helping VEP anyway you can!



VEP tutor Bruce and his student

### Become a Volunteer Tutor!

We are grateful to the numerous seasoned tutors who have accepted new students and others who have returned to active service. VEP's virtual **Tutor Training Workshops** continue to fully prepare volunteer tutors to teach English to our 100+ person waiting list of non-native speakers who live or work in Chester County. We are experiencing higher demand in Phoenixville, West Chester and Coatesville, specifically for evenings and weekends.

2024 workshop dates will be announced soon. Registration opens online about one month prior to the workshop. Please note that while workshops are virtual, a hard-copy Tutor Training Guide will need to be picked up at the VEP office in West Chester the week before training starts. Pick-up dates will be provided after registration. To learn more, [click here](#).



## TUTOR SPOTLIGHT

### Touch a Life - Change the World

by Shannon Almquist

During any month, close to 200 tutors work twice a week with their students, and there are always 100 eager folks on the waiting list. The student might be a Mexican mushroom worker in Kennett Square, the wife of an Egyptian doctor newly employed at Penn, or an Iranian grad student. In my twenty years of tutoring, it's been clear that everyone has a story, often with a common theme... conflict.

ShanShan was from China and had been a Russian physics professor at the university in Beijing, as was her husband. When the Cultural Revolution came, they and their two children were sent to live in the countryside with peasants, to learn how to be good farm workers and loyal communists. Thousands of educated people were affected in this way, as they were seen as elite enemies. In the process, an entire generation of children received no education. (When I met ShanShan, her children were 18 and 22 and had not attended school since the age of 8 and 10.) Somewhere along the way, she heard that in America you could be a learner your entire life. (Ask the parents of some long-term grad students!)

Because she had an uncle/cousin in West Chester who would sponsor her, she was allowed to emigrate, although her husband and children had to remain in China. She hoped one day they could join her, and the children could go to school. So she lived in the basement of the relative's Chinese restaurant in West Chester, arose at 4 am to prep restaurant food for the day, worked all day, and fell into bed each night after cleaning the kitchen. The uncle paid her nothing, and she survived on the dream of the arrival of her husband. I tutored her twice a week, and each time she would say, "Shannon, my husband come America."

Verb tense in China is tricky. She would say, "I eat ice cream today" or "I eat ice cream next day," or "I eat ice cream other day," and you can't tell the WHEN of the event through the verbs eat or ate or will eat. Every week she repeated her hope: "My husband come America."

One cold winter day, after we had worked together for about a half hour, ShanShan said, yet again, "My husband come America." I went through my usual routine.



"ShanShan, he is going to come?"  
 "Yes!"  
 "That's wonderful. Is he coming soon?"  
 "Yes!"  
 "When is he coming?"  
 "Yes!"  
 "ShanShan, where is your husband right now?"  
 "Outside."

Yes, her husband had been standing in the snow on High Street in West Chester for almost an hour before I learned enough English to ask the right question! She was my first VEP student. She taught me a lot!

My task with my  
students transcends  
English tutoring.  
For three hours  
each week,  
I listen. I learn.  
And I gain  
appreciation  
and give thanks for  
my free country."

--Shannon Almquist

## EMBRACING THE POWER OF DUAL LANGUAGES

Over 60% of VEP students are parents, and VEP recognizes the challenges that come with raising children in a new country while preserving the cultural heritage and language that make their families unique.

Language is not just a means of communication; it's a bridge that connects generations and cultures. Whether it's reading a book to their children in their native language or navigating a new book in English together, embracing both languages allows parents to offer their children the gift of bilingualism—a precious tool that opens doors to broader opportunities and a deeper understanding of the world around them.

VEP is constantly adapting our tutor training methodologies to incorporate new best practices in adult language learning. Every step our students take toward mastering English while maintaining their native language is an investment in their family's future. Here are just a few ways that fostering fluency in dual languages impacts learning for the whole family:



Investing in a family's future

### Cultural Enrichment

By speaking their native language at home, parents are preserving their heritage and sharing their unique cultural values with their children. This enriches their children's worldview and helps them appreciate the beauty of diversity.

### Academic Success

Research shows that children who are proficient in their home language often perform better academically. Being multilingual enhances cognitive skills, problem-solving abilities, and even boosts standardized test scores. Immigrant parents who learn English are able to more actively engage in their children's education – helping them with homework, projects and extra-curricular activities.

### Parent-Teacher Communication

Feeling confident in both languages facilitates effective communication with teachers and school staff. Learning English ensures parents can actively participate in their child's education, stay informed about their progress, and collaborate on their growth.

### Emotional Connection

Interacting in their native language with their children creates a strong emotional bond. It helps them connect with their roots and understand their identity, fostering a sense of belonging and self-esteem for both students & parents.

### Global Perspective

In our interconnected world, being bilingual opens doors to opportunities. Children of emergent bilinguals are better equipped to engage with people from different backgrounds and contribute to a global society.

## EVENTS



### Save the Date: Global Gathering

Students, tutors, staff and board members and their families are invited to gather together on **Sunday, November 12** for an afternoon of fun, friendship and food. Everyone is encouraged to bring a potluck meal to share from their country or heritage. This annual event is free to attend but registration is required for seating. [Contact VEP](#) for more details.

### Join us in January for VEP's Online Auction!

VEP will be hosting an online auction **January 15-26, 2024!** Exciting items and experiences will be offered, and all proceeds will benefit VEP. You won't want to miss this! Please mark your calendar and look for more details in the months ahead.



## FUNDER NEWS

VEP reaches deep into every Chester County community. Through the support of foundations, we are actively involved in the following efforts:



### Alliance for Health Equity

Using evidenced-based solutions to assess and engage adult learners, VEP's TESOL professional staff are expanding on ways to demonstrate students' impact as immigrants on the health and vitality of the greater community. Through a two-year pilot program, VEP students will actively participate in demonstrating their achievements through an asset- rather than a deficit-based approach to learning English. Beginning with the growing number of Coatesville-area student tutor pairs, we anticipate that AHE's funding support will be a catalyst for incorporating this new approach to all students in the years ahead.

### Phoenixville Community Health Foundation

Language and literacy are social determinants of health and they also influence one's health literacy. Some of the greatest inequalities in health occur among those who do not speak English as a first language. Individuals with both low health literacy and limited English proficiency are twice as likely to report poor health status. Similarly, non-English speakers are more likely to experience feelings of loneliness, isolation, and decreased self-confidence. By offering one-to-one tutoring as part of current services, VEP students living and working in one of the fastest growing immigrant communities in Chester County will, as a result of continued PCHF support, acquire the English language, communication, and health literacy skills needed to be successful.

### Connelly Foundation

The Connelly Foundation has been a generous supporter for many years. Through general operating funds, VEP is able to focus on our core program efforts. During the past 10 years, VEP has increased mobilization of essential services within the community whenever possible and wherever needed. This includes hosting new tutor recruitment and training in hybrid and community locations, scheduling prospective student intakes and ongoing student progress assessments in confidential spaces that are public as well as private for high-risk students. A Connelly Foundation Grand award will directly assist us in keeping tutor training costs low for new volunteers and instructional materials free for all new student-tutor pairs resulting in our ability to remain a viable, accessible, and achievable option for any of the 20,000 individuals in our county who share that they do not speak English well.

## PHILANTHROPY NEWS

VEP is fully funded through philanthropy and grants. We are grateful for all the supporters who believe in our mission.

### 3rd Annual Chester County Open

The **3rd Annual Chester County Open Men's Doubles and Mixed Doubles Tennis Tournament**, in association with **Tennis Addiction** and **Pennypacker Country Club**, returned to play the weekend of August 18th, 2023. Thank you to **TT Krishnagopal**, **Anthony DeCecco**, and the entire Tennis Tournament Committee for their hard work in organizing the tournament, which brought together community members to benefit the **Volunteer English Program** and the **West Chester Food Cupboard**. This year's tournament raised \$5,011 in cash contributions to support free, adult English language instruction through VEP and 350 pounds of non-perishable foods to the Chester County Food Bank.



### Board Match Challenge

As we approached the close of the fiscal year in June, VEP experienced one of the most significant challenges in its 38-year history - meeting its annual operational budget. Seventy-two (72) individuals responded to the inaugural Board Match Challenge appeal in just six weeks. Through these contributions, large and small, we narrowed the gap in funding by exceeding our \$24,000 goal and raising a combined \$36,851. Thank you!

THANK  
YOU!

The Volunteer English Program offers a vital link to success for adults from around the world whose native language is not English. Through the eyes of our tutors and staff, we witness the impact that our students and the extended VEP community of friends make within every Chester County community. The need for what we do is greater than ever. The immediate response and commitment of financial support to our challenge was a testimony that VEP makes a difference! Thank you for supporting a philosophy of openness, compassion, and inclusion.

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### Coming Soon to VEP's Website

VEP staff is hard at work on a new section of the VEP website. Tutors and students will soon be able to access timely news, alerts and information regarding immigration and citizenship via a live RSS feed. Information will be compiled from several organizations, and we will add resources as we discover them. Let us know what you think!



## BENEFITS OF VOLUNTEERING

### Giving Someone a Voice While Volunteering Improves Mental Health

Word of mouth, referrals from friends, and social media are the most successful means for attracting new VEP volunteers. Last year 220 of 269 volunteers contributed over 10,000 hours of tutoring instruction.

With busy lives, it can be hard to find time to volunteer. However, the benefits of volunteering can be enormous. Volunteering offers vital help to people in need, worthwhile causes, and the community, but the benefits can be even greater for you, the volunteer. The right match can help you to find friends, connect with your community, learn new skills, and even advance your career.

Giving to others can also help protect your mental and physical health. It can reduce stress, combat depression, keep you mentally stimulated, and provide a sense of purpose. While it's true that the more you volunteer, the more benefits you'll experience, volunteering doesn't have to involve a long-term commitment or take a huge amount of time out of your busy day. Giving in even simple ways can help those in need and improve your health and happiness.

\*Source: [Volunteering and Its Surprising Benefits](#), By Jeanne Segal, Ph.D. and Lawrence Robinson

Giving someone a safe place to learn and practice their emerging language skills promotes confidence and good mental health. VEP adult students' self-directed instruction encourages them to focus on goals that extend beyond weekly lessons into all areas of their lives. Students, in turn, volunteer themselves at their children's schools, local food pantries, green preservation projects, and as hosts for small groups of VEP students, just to name a few opportunities.

"I have worked with many corporate teams in my career, and the way VEP [staff] works together, demonstrating joy in something you truly believe in, was a breath of fresh air! I am impressed with the personalized approach of VEP's instructional model, especially how [you] embrace flexibility. It is too easy to cave to outside pressures to streamline and become transactional... props to VEP for staying true to its mission."

- Daniel Kerkel, VEP tutor

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A text version of this newsletter is available for translation in 50 languages by visiting the VEP [website](#).

If you'd like more information about any of the articles in this newsletter, please contact [volunteer.english@volunteerenglish.org](mailto:volunteer.english@volunteerenglish.org).