

IN OTHER WORDS

The official newsletter of the Volunteer English Program

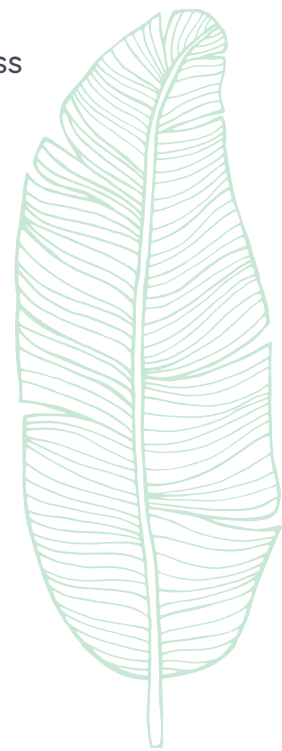


"I slept and I dreamed that life is all joy.
I woke and I saw that life is all service.
I served and I saw that service is joy."

— KAHIL GIBRAN

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HOW STUDENTS DEFINE SUCCESS

Learning a new language changes everything. A new job. A conversation. The confidence to speak up for oneself. English opens doors - & VEP is here to help people walk through them.

Success takes many forms— VEP tutors know this perhaps better than anyone. Whether it's the everyday accomplishment of remembering that word they can never seem to get or passing the US citizenship test after two years of studying, the gains our students make, both large & small, are equally worthy of celebration.

VEP understands that evidence of learning can not always be contained in a test score. While the standardized reading assessment & timed writing test that students take after every 70 hours of tutoring offer valuable insight into the progress they are making in their lessons, it doesn't tell the whole story. Our **Functional Gains Survey** gives students the opportunity to describe in their own words all the successes that don't show up in their test scores. Below is just a small sampling of the amazing accomplishments our students share with us every day!

Hanna's Success Story

Hanna began working with her VEP tutor in the summer of 2025. When she joined the program, she wanted the English skills to be able to talk with neighbors, get a job, & help her children. Like many of our students, it was the crucial link Hannah needed to connect to the community around her. Hanna shared that she felt isolated from the people around her because of her difficulty with the language, & this caused her anxiety. Before she connected with VEP, Hanna says, she was afraid to go outside her house—she felt nervous that that if neighbors would greet her in English, she wouldn't be able to respond.

After nearly a year of meeting with her VEP tutor, Hanna's life has changed in many ways. Weekly lessons have helped her to gain confidence & not feel as nervous about interacting with others in

her community. Now, she is able to drive, go to the supermarket by herself, & has even made American friends.

"I still have a long way to go, but I study English every day. I feel more confident with my tutor's help."

Ariana's Success Story

Ariana is a student with big goals. Between studying for the citizenship test, searching for a job, & applying to college programs, she & her VEP tutor keep busy with her drive to learn. After being matched with her tutor in the winter of 2024, Ariana has been committed to using their time together to improve her communication skills—both in the community & at home. Alongside her other learning objectives, it is important to Ariana to use her English lessons to help her connect with her family.

During her most recent visit to the VEP office, Ariana shared with staff that her English lessons have helped her communicate better with her two daughters. Having grown up here in the US, they are both experts at "code switching"— switching between English and Spanish in the same conversation—& they often think in English. Ariana said that she felt most proud of her progress the first time her daughter complimented her English.

"My daughters speak in Spanglish very fast at home. Before I met my tutor, I did not understand what my daughters were saying. Now, I can follow everything. As a mom, this is very important."

Maddie Geiger,
VEP Program Outreach Coordinator,

Teaching English. Transforming Lives

Did you know it takes 12 to 20 uses of a word to truly learn it?

At VEP, we make a promise to every student: Your goals. Your needs. However long it takes.

Help us keep that promise.



BOARD UPDATE

We are thrilled to recognize our newest Board Members– **Dr. Fred Akl, Mike Cawley, Lisa Hesse, Esq. & Myla Kaplan, Esq.**– who joined the VEP Board of Directors just a few months ago & have already made an incredible impact.

From day one, they have brought energy, creativity, & dedication to our mission, quickly becoming active leaders in fundraising, development, & governance efforts. They have facilitated meetings with local corporations, fostered valuable relationships with community partners, secured new sponsorships, & helped expand our fundraising initiatives.

Their enthusiasm for & commitment to VEP's mission & growth stem from their active roles as tutors, in addition to their service on the board.



VEP Tutors & Board Members Dr. Fred Akl, Mike Cawley & Myla Kaplan, Esq. at VEP's Tutor Summit. Not pictured: Lisa Hesse, Esq.

“Please do not underestimate your impact on the lives of your students. You are not only teaching them language, but you are an oasis of hope in what feels like endless chaos. You are to them proof positive that there is plenty of kindness & humanity in this great land. The time you spend with them inspires them & builds their self-confidence.”

– Dr. Fred Akl, VEP Tutor, Board Member, & Widener University Retired Dean of Engineering, reflecting on his own immigrant experience during this spring's Tutor Summit

THEN AND NOW

VEP Celebrates Ron Hovis

Ron Hovis, a longtime tutor & retired chemist, holds a truly special place in the hearts of the VEP community. Since joining VEP in 2012, Ron dedicated more than a decade to supporting English language learners, tutoring 10 students from diverse linguistic backgrounds, including Spanish, Chinese, & Arabic speakers.

Known for his patience, kindness, & unwavering encouragement, Ron became not only a beloved tutor but also a passionate ambassador for VEP's mission. He frequently invited his students to share their personal learning journeys at new tutor trainings, inspiring future volunteers & highlighting the transformative impact of the program.

Ron's continued compassion & belief in his students continue to leave an indelible impression within the VEP family.



Ron with one of his students during a Tutor Training; Pictured on right, at VEP's 2024 Tutor Summit

Listening to a student share their personal story in front of an audience of strangers is incredibly brave. First-hand perspectives are invaluable for volunteers preparing to become tutors. Inviting a student & tutor to share their experiences is one of many traditions that makes VEP unique.

TUTOR NEWS

*Cherie Wright was recently nominated for **Phoenixville Community Health Foundation's Board Champions of the Community Award**, which recognizes local individuals who voluntarily give their time, talent, & leadership to enhance the health & well-being of greater Phoenixville. Cherie was VEP's **2022 Tutor of the Year**.*

Cherie Wright has served VEP & Phoenixville for close to 20 years, contributing over 1,000 hours of instruction to 16 students & close to 130 hours of advocacy & outreach support. She has changed the course of her students' lives, & the lives of those people her students have impacted in turn. These new English speakers are valuable multilingual members of our community, with native fluency in Portuguese, Spanish, Chinese, French, & Arabic. All now speak without relying on translators to navigate their day-to-day communications.

Cherie's innovative approach to broadening her understanding of each person's goals & capabilities provides a customized, student-centered approach to helping adults learn. She respects her students' wide-ranging life experiences & allows these to inform her 365-day lesson planning. She exemplifies the VEP approach by meeting each of her students wherever they are in terms of native & English language literacy, academic experience, age, & their personal journey to & within the United States. Her professional background & lifelong approach to learning accelerate her students' growth in ways a traditional classroom could not.

Cherie's most recent students are good representatives of the immigrant dynamic we are experiencing in Phoenixville. A person on asylum status from their home country was matched with Cherie two years ago. While working multiple jobs to make ends meet, they lost their apartment & were forced to live in a car. The car was burglarized, & the student lost everything they owned, including transportation required for work. Through Cherie's guidance & problem-solving, her student connected with community friends who offered a place to live. The student is now safely housed, working again, & continues to attend English sessions regularly.

In another example, just months before the pandemic, VEP received an urgent request from a young, soon-to-be mother. Her husband was employed in Phoenixville, but she was isolated, home alone, unable to speak English, & trying to navigate the health care system & upcoming child care without an extended family for support.



Cherie Wright, VEP Tutor & PCHF Champions of the Community Award Nominee

With Cherie's support & five years of language instruction, this family is thriving – both parents are fully employed with meaningful work, their children are multilingual students in the Phoenixville Area School District, & they have become naturalized U.S. citizens. In a full circle moment, this student has recently trained to become a VEP tutor & is ready to express her gratitude through service.

Cherie has also been instrumental in supporting VEP's growth as an organization. Through her HireOne business network in Chester County, Cherie opened doors for VEP to establish corporate & business opportunities for students & for VEP funding partnerships. As a fellow tutor, she serves as an ambassador during tutor training workshops & has referred many Phoenixville residents who have been inspired to become tutors themselves.

Cherie Wright is truly & deeply committed to VEP & our local Phoenixville community. She loves to talk about VEP's mission & amazing achievements to everyone she knows, but she doesn't stop there. Cherie enthusiastically & consistently encourages all of her friends & neighbors to volunteer as tutors for VEP. She describes how meaningful & uplifting it is to help adult members of our community learn to speak English or improve their English, & how important it is for both the student & the community. Cherie's enthusiasm & commitment to helping others through the VEP program are contagious!

– Lisa Hesse, Phoenixville resident, Attorney, Tutor, & Board Member

EVENTS

Third Annual Virtual Silent Auction

Thank you to everyone who participated in our **Third Annual Virtual Silent Auction**. With your generous support, we raised over \$15,000. We are deeply grateful to the bidders, donors, sponsors, & others whose enthusiasm & commitment made this event such a success. Your participation helps ensure we can continue providing meaningful opportunities & support to the community we serve.



VEP Tutor Jen Coffey with Righteous Felon Gift Basket; Dr. Fred Akl with Original Painting by Anette Bartolomei-Lee

Eleventh Annual Tutor Summit

VEP tutors, staff & board members gathered at **Calvary Lutheran Church** of West Chester for our **Eleventh Annual Tutor Summit**. The event provided professional development & networking for tutors, including a fully interactive language immersion experience, speakers, roundtable discussions, & access to instructional resources. VEP featured seven different roundtable topics & time in the day for tutors to attend five different sessions in small groups. Volunteer tutors left the Summit feeling refreshed & equipped with evidence-based teaching techniques & problem-solving strategies to best serve their students & increase the quality of their weekly tutoring sessions.



Community experts & tutors exchange ideas at the Annual Summit. Clockwise, Nancy Satinsky, Gabby Plazola, Kathy Murphy, Sabrina Benkenouf, Ana Zavala, Mark DeWitte, & Joan D'Allesandro



*Change someone's life
& see how it changes yours!*

There are 70 individuals on our waiting list to be matched with a tutor. Learn how you can [help](#).

GET INVOLVED

At the Volunteer English Program, we **witness how English language skills unlock access to opportunity**: the ability to choose where to work, where to live, & how best to raise a family. Our students—newcomers from around the world—gain confidence and agency through language. With each lesson, they grow their ability to speak, read, write, & listen in English. This work is not easy. But it is meaningful. And in these times, it is absolutely essential.

Attend a Volunteer Information Session

Interested in learning more but not yet ready to commit? Join us for a virtual, interactive information session led by our program staff. Sessions are held several times a year. [Email us](#) for more information or [join our mailing list](#) for future invitations.

New Date & Location! Chester County Tennis Open



The **Chester County Open Tennis Tournament** returns for its sixth consecutive year this summer! A passionate group of tennis aficionados, proud residents of Chester County, & dedicated players with over 20 years of experience on the court, the Chester County Open offers club-level players a competitive tournament experience while raising funds for local nonprofits.

This year's tournament will be held at the **Westtown School** from **Thursday, August 13th through Sunday, August 16th**. The tournament will include men's singles, men's doubles, women's doubles, & mixed doubles. All registrations & donations directly benefit **VEP** & the **West Chester Food Cupboard**. This year, the committee's goal is to raise \$20,000 & collect 3,000 pounds of non-perishable food items. For more information, email info@ccopen.org or [click here to register](#).

Kimberton Whole Foods' Rounding Up at the Register



Kimberton Whole Foods has selected VEP as its September **"Rounding Up at the Register"** recipient. Customers shopping at the market's Malvern location will be able to round up to the nearest dollar at checkout, with the difference donated to VEP & 100% of those donations generously matched by Kimberton Whole Foods. For directions, visit kimbertonwholefoods.com.

"When you donate from your retirement account the money is tax free. If you write a check after you have taken your RMD you have to pay local & federal taxes. We automatically withdraw & donate monthly to the Volunteer English Program. It is easy to do & the organization puts it to immediate good use to support students and tutors. Speak to your financial advisor & find out how you can help."

- Norman Feinman, VEP Tutor



IN THE COMMUNITY

WCASD Strings Festival



It was great to be back for our 14th year in a row as the beneficiary of **WCASD's Annual Strings Festival!** Thank you to Katrina Kelly, Senior Strings Music Director, Dr. Sarah Graham, East High School Principal, Dr. David Christopher, WCASD Superintendent, & all of the ELD teachers throughout the district for their ongoing support. This year, families donated over \$1,200 to VEP - our largest amount to date. This long-standing partnership is a natural fit, as VEP tutors know well the many benefits of using music as an ESL tool.

Rustin Culture Club Potluck Benefits VEP

Students from the French, Italian, and El Puente clubs at **Bayard Rustin High School** recently hosted a multicultural potluck fundraiser in the Rustin cafeteria to celebrate & share cultures from around the world. The event brought together students, families, & community members for an evening of food, learning, & connection. Proceeds from the fundraiser were donated to VEP in support of our mission to serve English language learners in the community. Thank you to all who participated!



VEP Tutor Kristi Crum & Rustin High School's Culture Clubs Students

VEP Conversation Groups: Building Community Through English

VEP's weekly Conversation Groups offer a warm, informal space where VEP students & other new adult English language learners can practice their speaking skills — no formal classroom, just real conversation & community. Groups are facilitated by qualified VEP tutors & community partners & held in person in Berwyn, Paoli, Phoenixville, Wayne, & West Chester, with a Zoom option for participants in Coatesville & Downingtown. The group is best for learners who already speak at a high beginner through advanced level of English.

View the full [Conversation Group schedule](#) & reach out to a Group Leader to learn more or get involved.

Here's a recent example of one of the many fun topics students can expect to discuss at a Conversation Group:

Happy Star Wars Day! May the Fourth be with you! (Sounds like "May the force be with you)."

Star Wars Day is an informal commemorative day observed by fans on May 4 to celebrate the Star Wars media franchise. Did you know about this already? Are you a Star Wars fan? Let's talk about it!



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A text version of this newsletter is available for translation in 50 languages on our website:
www.volunteerenglish.org