

IN OTHER WORDS

The official newsletter of the Volunteer English Program



Photo Credit: Tutor Mark DeWitte: Sunrise over the South Pacific on the East coast of NSW, a few hundred miles north of Sydney, Australia

*"Do you know what
a foreign accent is?
A sign of bravery."*

— Amy Chua

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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. And VEP is here to help people walk through them.

Speaking for Myself, When It Mattered the Most

I have lupus, but I have been fairly well for seven years. Three weeks ago I thought I had flu, but it got worse and I felt very sick. I had to leave work. I went home and tried to rest, but my hands began to swell and I couldn't go to the bathroom. I called my son and asked him to take me to the hospital.

In the emergency room the nurses asked if I speak English. My son said that I only had a little bit of English, but I told him, "No. I am OK talking for myself." I could explain to the nurses what had happened and how many different medicines I was taking (and how often I had forgotten to take them).

The doctor came in and I was able to tell him my symptoms. The doctor said, "Your son told me you didn't speak English very well, but I understand everything you are saying." The doctor told me that this was serious and I would have to stay in the hospital and from now on I would have to take better care of myself. I understood everything he told me.

When my son came back in, the doctor said, "Your mom explained everything to me – even how many milligrams of medicine she was taking."

After three weeks, I finally went back to work today.

I am very grateful to VEP for helping me learn English well enough that I can take care of myself in an emergency.



-Anonymous, student



Need Help?
If you or someone
you know needs
English language
support, [contact us](#)

LEADERSHIP UPDATE

40 Years as a Community Benefit Organization

At a time when simply being born in another country puts someone at risk of physical separation from their home, work, and family, the response from our local residents to donate their time to weekly one-to-one English language and cultural instruction continues to exceed our expectations.

Our approach has always been student-centered, with an emphasis on respecting the life experiences, cultural backgrounds, and emotional vulnerabilities of adult learners. Confidential lessons are tailored to each student's level of English proficiency, educational background, and personal goals. Scheduled at times and locations mutually convenient for both student and tutor and available seven days a week, morning to evening, these one-to-one tutoring sessions uniquely accommodate the busy lives that often derail adult learners. Online curriculum options add further flexibility, reducing common barriers such as transportation, work demands, and the need for safe public places to meet.

Our community-based, non-classroom approach supports consistent participation and long-term success. We believe that English language education to adults—especially refugees, asylum seekers, and displaced populations—is a core strategy for reducing suffering, promoting dignity, and enabling self-reliance.

– Terri Potrako, Executive Director

Why English Proficiency Matters

Access to Essential Services

Language skills are essential for accessing health care, legal services, employment, and civic participation. Without them, individuals cannot fully exercise their human and civil rights.

Safety in a Crisis

Understanding the local language allows people to follow safety instructions, navigate emergencies, and communicate effectively in crises.

Community & Connection

Language is a bridge to community participation, social connections, and cultural integration, reducing isolation and stigma.

Economic Opportunity

Language proficiency opens doors to employment, entrepreneurship, and further education, which are critical for long-term personal and community stability.

Stronger Families, Ready for the Future

Parents and guardians who speak the local language are better equipped to support children's education and well-being, raising a generation that is multilingual and ready for a global economy.

VEP's Advisory Council: Celebrating 10 Years of Service

For the past decade, VEP's **Advisory Council** has helped to shape our work and strengthen our ability to serve our community. Each member - past and present - cares deeply about our mission and is willing to share their advice to help us fulfill it. Each brings something different to the table. Some offer professional expertise, others a deep understanding of the needs and perspectives of the people we serve. Many open doors to local, national, and international resources, colleagues, and peers. Members also help us recruit tutors, staff, and supporters, contribute philanthropically, and offer guidance to our executive leadership and board in many other ways. To everyone who has served on the Council over the past ten years: thank you. VEP is stronger because of you. [Learn more about our Advisory Council here.](#)

“I’ve spent my career in the nonprofit world and philanthropy at three different foundations. I love being a part of the VEP family. Our mission is vital to supporting the diversity of our community and promoting economic development by having people who are able to share our language and contribute fully to our community.”

– Lou Beccaria, PhD, Philanthropy & Non-Profit Consultant and Advisory Council Member

TUTOR SPOTLIGHT

Learning from One Another

I'm Ron and I've enjoyed this mentor experience with VEP for 10 rewarding years. A Mexican lady in her early 30's was my first student, then a Chinese man, another Mexican lady, a Guatemalan lady briefly, and, currently, an Afghani lady.

My first Mexican student presented some challenges. It's natural for recent American residents to live where there are more Spanish speaking people who share the same culture, same church, safe and accepted children. Within a year her parents separated and she lived with her father. Her siblings lived with their mother.

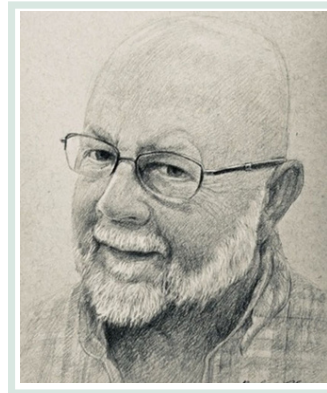
Within the next year, her father developed serious cancer and she needed help communicating with doctors and nurses, partly because she didn't have the confidence to ask/demand good questions. So we role played... she the daughter and me the doctor. (I also taught her to ask for written reports). Sadly, her father passed away within a few months. My wife Carole and I were honored to be invited to attend the viewing.

Now, the happy part: this same student was working in a restaurant kitchen preparing salads and making dressings. Seeing how proficient in English she had become, I encouraged her to ask to be a server. She was nervous. So we got the menu and being a pretty good cook, I could explain most dishes and how they were prepared. So we role played... she the server and me both the friendly and hasty customer. She asked her boss and he agreed to try. She became quite successful!

I often think about the old Native American saying, "You have to walk in my moccasins for a year to know me."

My Chinese student was an excellent photographer, artist and impressive cook. I learned about Chinese geography and political history. His wife was also a VEP student and their daughter was attending Temple University.

They bought a house with a nice yard. Come spring, he became concerned that the grass was getting long. Living in a high rise in Shanghai, yards were alien, so I took him and his wife to Sears to select the best mower. He opened a cap and asked if this is where you put gas. I said, "No, that's for oil. Don't mix." A few weeks later I asked - he admitted he bought an electric mower with a long cord!



Ron Hovis spoke about mentoring students during a Tutor Summit in 2022. He passed away on Aug 13, 2026.

He is greatly missed by the many people whose lives he touched.

My next student, a Mexican lady with a terrific family - husband and three children (all born here) and in 2nd to 4th grades. She came to the USA nine years ago on her husband's work permit. Working for a landscaper, he seriously injured his back, thus couldn't work. So we role played again communicating with doctors, nurses and lawyers, and also with her children's teachers. Often when people don't fully understand English, they hesitate to push for information and the teachers, doctors, etc., don't bother giving them important details. Role playing builds confidence.

After a year, she came to class exclaiming, "Ron! I don't need an interpreter anymore. The teachers and doctors understand me and I understand them." She was so happy and proud of herself. Me, too!

Carole and I were honored to be invited to attend their children's baptism, confirmation and first communion. We had a glimpse of what it feels like to be a minority at their church services.

I have only met my new Afghani student four or five times now, so I am just learning a different culture and not yet speaking Farsi.

Recently, Carole and I were enjoying the Gershwin Pop Music Award to Lionel Richie. During his acceptance remarks, he shared that he has performed in many countries all over the world and observed that we humans all over this tiny planet just want the same things in their lives.

He exclaimed, "This small planet is just one big family." Let's help to make it so!

BEYOND TUTOR TRAINING

VEP attracts talented volunteers who come from all walks of life and backgrounds, ranging from lawyers, medical professionals, and engineers, to homemakers, young professionals, and college students. All of our tutors are compassionate about welcoming new individuals into their local communities. During the last fiscal year, VEP volunteers donated close to 10,000 hours of service, for a non-cash value of \$320,000.

What sets VEP apart from other volunteer experiences is our commitment to ongoing, “opt-in” professional development that continues long after your initial **Tutor Training** ends. Informal **Tutor Meet-Ups** give tutors an open forum to stay in touch, swap ideas, and learn from one another. **Peer-to-Peer Workshops** tap into the professional knowledge of our own tutors, with an occasional outside guest. Our annual **Tutor Summit** brings it all together, reflecting what we’ve heard from tutors all year long, including their interests, their students’ needs, and topical roundtable discussions. When you volunteer with VEP, you become part of a community, and we support you every step of the way.

THEN AND NOW

A Chance Encounter, Two Decades Later

Longtime tutor Nancy Satinsky recalls a chance meeting with her very first VEP student, 20 years later.

This past winter, I was shopping in Costco in King of Prussia. I was wandering up and down the aisles, looking for items on my list, when I noticed a gentleman staring at me. He approached me and said, “Nancy?” I looked at him and wondered if he could be Orest!

Orest was my first Volunteer English student that I tutored back in 2006-2007. That was twenty years ago and I hadn’t seen him since! Back then, he and his wife had two young daughters in elementary school. We worked on his English the first year. The next year, he wanted to work on getting his American citizenship. We practiced the answers to these important questions. He became an American citizen on his first try! We were both very excited!

After that, Orest and I were not in touch with each other except with Christmas cards, and then once right after the beginning of the Russia-Ukraine war. I wanted to know if his extended family in Ukraine were safe. He recommended an organization to donate money to in order to help Ukraine. March of 2022 was my last contact with Orest.

Fast forward to 2026. We hugged in the aisle of Costco and tears filled my eyes! What were the chances of our unplanned meeting? Orest invited me to dinner at his home where we continued catching up. Orest is quite the success story.



Nancy & Orest,
Winter 2026

His two daughters graduated from Villanova University. One is a nurse and the other is in the business sector. Orest has continued to move up the ladder in his job. His wife works for a company online from their home.

My heart is full knowing I have helped a family to integrate successfully into our country, the United States.

- Nancy Satinsky, tutor

Available Evenings or Weekends?

Many new students on our waiting list are working & managing young families. If you are available to tutor evenings or weekends, **sign up today!**

YOUR INVESTMENT AT WORK

This past July, we sat down at a Town Hall with the people who know VEP best – our tutors and students – to talk openly about where the program stands as we celebrate our 40 year milestone. We thanked those who shared their “boots on the ground” perspectives, and looked honestly at where we are, what has changed around us, and what we need to do to remain strong.

Challenges We’ve Met

The past two years have brought plenty of challenges, but they have also shown us how adaptable our community can be. We’ve expanded fundraising efforts, created new opportunities for community support, adjusted our personnel capacity and relied on the generosity of our longtime supporters. This agility is an important part of who we are – and something we want to protect.

What We’ve Learned

Flexibility matters. Our students have jobs, families, transportation challenges, changing schedules, and many other demands on their time. VEP works because we can adapt. Our volunteers are incredibly committed and our community values what VEP provides. And we’ve learned that we need to think differently about how we build financial support for the future.

No Competition

VEP occupies a unique place in our community. There isn’t another organization doing exactly what we do, in the way that we do it. That’s both a strength and a responsibility.

Why Remain Independent?

We can respond quickly to student needs. We can make decisions locally. We can welcome students regardless of their circumstances. And we can preserve the personal relationships between tutors and students. These qualities are central to VEP’s identity.

Infrastructure

We are intentional about infrastructure. VEP is powered by people – to coordinate volunteers, communicate with students, manage finances, maintain technology, and build upon best practices to remain sustainable.

Philanthropy

A gift doesn’t simply pay for an hour of tutoring. It helps create the environment that makes that hour possible.



VEP tutors, students & staff gathered this past summer for a Tutor Town Hall at St. Francis-in-the-Fields Episcopal Church, Malvern

Small Reserves

VEP has been fortunate to receive legacy gifts from former tutors and longtime supporters. Those gifts have helped us build modest reserves and, when necessary, draw on them to maintain operations. That generosity has made a real difference. But reserves are not a long-term fundraising strategy. They give us breathing room to focus on our immediate needs.

A Shifting Landscape

The funding environment has shifted over the last several years. Many regional foundations have redirected their support toward organizations impacted by cuts in government funding. We are thoughtful about where we invest the time required to pursue foundation support and focus on opportunities where VEP’s mission and the funder’s priorities genuinely intersect.

Tutors, staff and our board regularly brainstorm solutions to identify revenue opportunities. Our long-term sustainability needs to come from a broad community of people who believe in our work.

Reaching the People Who Know Us Best

How do we reach the people who have been impacted by what VEP does?

The answer starts with all of us.

Our tutors, whose own lives have been enriched through their relationships with their students. Our students, who know what it means to have someone sit beside them, listen, practice, encourage and help them navigate a new community. Our donors, who know that a small organization can have a very large and personal impact. And our community partners, who see that impact every day.

We’re asking everyone connected to VEP to help tell our story. To reach out to the people who can help – and keep these opportunities open for the next student who walks through our door. After 40 years, that’s worth investing in.

YOUR INVESTMENT AT WORK



Row 1: Executive Director Terri Potrako & Anita Peberdy of Kimberton Whole Foods Malvern during KWF's September "Rounding up at the Register"; Tutor Jane Palestini & her West Chester Conversation Group at Gryphon Cafe; Dr. Peter Loedel, West Chester University Professor, Advisory Council Member & 6th Annual Chester County Open Tennis Tournament Emcee

Row 2: John Geiger, 3rd Annual Virtual Silent Auction winner, enjoyed a recent Philadelphia Union game courtesy of Hugh Burke of Pointe Solutions, Inc.; our Annual Tutor Summit brought together tutors, staff and community educators: Ana Zavala & Liz Maser; Martin McNeil & Lee Evans; Rachel Van Tassel, Maddie Geiger & Cecilia de Freitas



*Teaching English.
Transforming Lives*

At VEP, we make a promise
to every student,
however long it takes.

Help us keep that promise
through a donation today.

PARTNERS IN THE COMMUNITY

For a full listing of where we've been this past year, visit our website at www.volunteerenglish.org/news.

Kimberton Whole Foods' Rounding Up at the Register



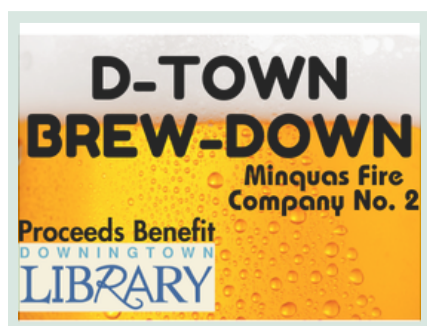
Customers shopping at **Kimberton Whole Foods' Malvern** location during the month of September will be able to round up to the nearest dollar at checkout, with the difference donated to VEP & 100% of those donations generously matched by Kimberton Whole Foods. Please shop, round up, and support VEP before September 30th! For directions, visit www.kimbertonwholefoods.com/malvern.

Whitford Classic Charitable Fund

We're incredibly honored to be recognized as a **2026 Whitford Classic Charitable Fund** beneficiary. This grant will fund the resources needed to sustain our model of free, one-to-one adult English language instruction by volunteer tutors. The 2026 Whitford Classic, which took place earlier this month, brought together members, supporters, guests and grantees for a weekend of golf, tennis, and pickleball tournaments, as well as their signature Gala. Since its inception in 2013, the Whitford Charitable Fund has granted over \$1.5 million to over 75 nonprofit organizations throughout Chester County.



8th Annual D-town Brew-Down



Tutor **Dr. Mark DeWitte** and VEP are proud to sponsor the **8th Annual D-Town Brew-Down**, a home-brewed beer competition benefitting the **Downingtown Library**. The Brew-Down takes place on **Saturday, October 24, 2026 from 1 to 5 pm at Minquas Fire Company No. 2**, 141 Wallace Avenue, Downingtown, PA. Attendees will taste a wide variety of high-quality, home-brewed beers, which will be professionally judged for cash prizes. Food will be available for purchase.

As an integral part of the Downingtown area community, library services are in great demand and growing. Libraries are vital to the success of our students, providing free instructional space and access through library cards to a robust network of information throughout Chester County. For details, visit downingtownlibrary.org/dtownbrewdown.

Thank you for your participation & support!

GET INVOLVED

At VEP, we witness how English language skills unlock access to opportunity: the ability to choose where to work, where to live, and 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, and listen in English. This work is not easy. But it is meaningful. And in these times, it is absolutely essential.

We have a particular need for tutors who can help during evenings and weekends. **If you are working full-time and can share your skills during those times with students who are also busy managing full-time work and families, [let us know!](#)**

Attend an 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.

Register for a Tutor Training Workshop

VEP's highly successful virtual, interactive Tutor Training Workshop, using our proprietary training materials, is designed to fully prepare volunteers. Workshops are held several times a year. Materials fee is \$40. To participate, [read more here](#).

Join Our Board of Directors

As we look ahead, we are also looking for new members to join our Board of Directors. If you want to help shape the future of VEP, we would love to hear from you. To express your interest, **email us** or [apply here](#).

PICTURE THIS

For English language learners, photography offers a powerful way to express thoughts, memories, and feelings that words alone don't always capture. We'd love to see the world through your eyes. Share a photo that means something to you, a place or a moment, along with a few words about it if you'd like, or none at all. Your photo may be featured in an upcoming newsletter. Email submissions to volunteer.english@volunteerenglish.org.



Tutors Mark & Karen DeWitte captured these photos during their recent visit home to Australia: Sunrise over the South Pacific on the East coast of NSW, a few hundred miles north of Sydney; Sooty Terns on Lord Howe Island in the South Pacific.



40
years
1986 - 2026

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