

IN OTHER WORDS

The official newsletter of the Volunteer English Program



"The greatness of a community is most accurately measured by the compassionate actions of its members."

— Coretta Scott King

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STUDENT VOICES

Below is a story written by a VEP student about her experience as an immigrant. To submit a student-written story, essay or poem for future editions of the newsletter, email volunteer.english@volunteerenglish.org.



"IF WE CAN PICTURE
WHERE WE WERE,
WHERE WE ARE NOW,
& WHERE WE HOPE
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WE CAN BE PROUD
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THIS IS AN INDICATION
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WHO HAS INFLUENCED ME MOST by Yameilha G.

The person who has influenced me the most in my life is myself.

Is that a surprise? Tracing a path of my life, I have noticed that I like to compete and to be successful. In every opportunity that life brings me, I feel committed, encouraged, determined, and passionate. I am grateful for the deep fire that moves my whole body.

Many people say we should not talk about ourselves; we should allow others to talk about us. But what if others never talk about us? We need to be able to recognize our weaknesses and our strengths. We should never leave our responsibility to others.

I grew up looking for approval from others: at home from my mother, as a student from the teachers, doing sports from my coaches, and as a wife from my husband. I have experienced how motivated we are when someone is saying, "Hey, you are doing great." It is fantastic!

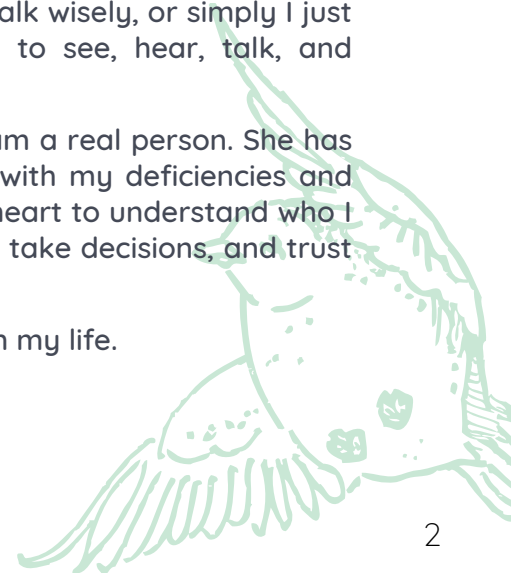
At some point in our life, we need to stop needing the approval of other people. We must motivate ourselves. If we can picture where we were, where we are now, and where we hope to be, then we can be proud of ourselves. This is an indication of how much we have grown.

I have not reached every one of my goals or dream list. I have struggled a lot. And I still struggle. But I know something; I have tried with my all strength. I think that what I am trying will impact my life. I have learned to criticize myself, not as I used to do it as failure, mistake, or victory. Now, everything that happens in my life is a possibility, alternative, opportunity or experience.

Before, I had eyes and I could not see. I had ears and I could not hear. I had voice and I could not talk wisely, or simply I just did not talk at all. Now, I am able to see, hear, talk, and comprehend everyday life.

The old Yameilha reminds me that I am a real person. She has taught me to value myself as I am, with my deficiencies and virtues. I admire her for opening my heart to understand who I am, and for helping me to mature, to take decisions, and trust in my instincts.

Yameilha has had a great influence on my life.



STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Alex Ionescu describes how his new English language skills have helped him manage his own business and negotiate new contracts.

Q: Tell us a little bit about yourself and how you began studying at the library.

A: My name is Alexandro Constantin Ionescu. I am from Romania. I am 31 years old. My family and I came to the U.S. in March 2013. We started in 2013 to work in cleaning. In 2015 my parents and I applied to VEP. After a few weeks they found us a tutor. When we applied for a tutor we lived in Thorndale but we moved to Downingtown. Our meetings in the Downingtown Library were close to our family and our tutor. The Downingtown Library director knew us because she saw us in the classroom. Our classroom in the library is next door to her office. I started thinking about library cleaning work. Mark introduced me and I talked with the Director to learn all about how they want the library to be cleaned. I told her our experience and abilities. I gave her references from other companies and offices we clean. After we talked about my proposal, I changed my bid price to win the job at the library.



Q: You were persistent and followed up often when the library director told you that they had a contract with another cleaning company. When that old contract expired, the library accepted your proposal. Tell us how you, along with your VEP tutor Mark DeWitte, used your new English language skills to work with the Small Business Administration and SCORE to learn how to write a business proposal and write your own invoices.

A: An important thing in business is to [be able to explain] exactly what you do. So it is important to have experience and to know the language to get new contracts. I like to make proposals for new contracts. The proposals have to be in writing, and the contracts, also, of course. People have to trust you to do good work. You have to talk with them so they know you and trust you because the places we clean are very important for all the workers. You need advertisements, such as business cards, brochures, and flyers. Opening a business means to create a name for it. Insurance and an accountant are necessary, too. The people at SCORE told me what I can do to be successful. I was surprised there is so much to learn. They gave me confidence to try to be a successful business owner. When my business grows I can learn from SCORE about management.

Q: Have you had to change your cleaning procedures during Covid?

A: They are very happy with me. I clean after hours and continued to do so even through Covid to prepare for reopening. It is important I have to read the health department rules [requirements] for cleaning the right way, very carefully. I disinfect everything that can be touched by hand. I have been cleaning for them for 5 years now. Now we are good friends. I enjoy my work, especially there.

TUTOR NEWS

SMALL ACTS OF KINDNESS

“Thank you to whoever was thoughtful enough to send me a birthday card. I really appreciate it.”

— Tutor Christa Scalise, speaking of one of the over 140 birthday cards* sent in the past year to tutors, handcrafted and donated by volunteer Irma Pomales Connors and personalized by board members Susan Pierson and Alan Lee.



*If we have your birthday in our database, we hope you've received one of these beautiful cards.

SEEKING NEW TUTORS

Recently approached by Sister Florence Enechukwu, mshr, Coordinator for African Catholic Apostolate of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia to help with tutoring students living in Philadelphia who are originally from various locations in Africa, we are getting set to match a Chester County VEP tutor with an African student in Philadelphia for virtual tutoring. It feels like kismet, as this tutor had just expressed an interest in being matched with a student from Africa due to having lived in many locales there for 14 years as a Foreign Services nurse. Holding English classes for these individuals has proved difficult. Sister Florence was referred by friends at St. Thomas of Villanova to the one-to-one program at VEP. Willing to embrace this opportunity, VEP plans to eventually open it to any tutor (current or former) who wishes to meet virtually, and/or eventually in person, with a lucky African student from Philadelphia. For more information about this outreach, contact [Donna Dello Buono](#).

RESOURCES

REDEFINING LEARNING DURING THE PANDEMIC

Students and tutors continue to “meet” for one-to-one lessons, via telephone, smartphone, computer videoconferencing, worksheets sent through the mail, and physically distanced. The following terms may be useful as we navigate the next few months of English language learning for students and tutors or volunteer training.

- **Synchronous:** When learners participate in an online learning course at the same time but in different locations, it is known as synchronous learning. Synchronous learning allows learners to interact with the instructor and other participants. This is done through software that creates a virtual classroom.
- **Asynchronous:** When learners participate in an online learning course at different times, it is known as asynchronous learning. Asynchronous learning allows learners to go through a course at their own pace and on their own schedule. (It can include activities such as viewing pre-recorded sessions or independently reading assigned materials).
- **Blended/Hybrid:** Blended learning is an instructional approach that includes a combination of online and in-person learning activities. For example, students can complete online self-paced assignments by a certain date and then meet on-site or online for additional learning activities.

DONOR NEWS

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



Donations of children's books provide a valuable resource to VEP. Over the last several years, tutor and donor Larry Jilk has taken the lead on selecting bilingual books on our behalf, in languages such as English/Spanish, English/Arabic, English/Chinese, English/Portuguese, and English/Korean. A lot of the books are popular children's books or folktales, many of which are easy readers and picture books. The books feature either a sentence in English followed by the native language, or the front of the book is in English and the back of the book is in the native language. "One of these book donations came in handy recently during a Student Intake. I was able to give a book on Penguins to the student's young daughter while she was waiting for her mom to take a test," says Donna Dello Buono, VEP Senior Program Coordinator. Once they get home, these books give parents and their children a relaxed way to spend valuable time reading and learning English together. If you have an adult learner who would benefit from one of these free children's books, please let the program staff know.

Larry has been a VEP tutor and major donor since 2016. He has also donated new workbooks to us for use with adults called Language Review - Student Practice Book, which students use as another resource. Thank you, Larry!

FUNDER NEWS



Recognizing the importance of the nonprofit sector to the high quality of life throughout Chester County, the Chester County Commissioners have allocated \$3.5 million to help nonprofits recover with innovation and resiliency. This funding is from the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. A generous award from this fund to VEP is enabling us to focus on strategic priorities of investing in professional development opportunities for tutors, integrating new virtual learning technologies for students while preparing VEP office space for a safe return to work environment. The generosity of the Commissioners' grant helps all nonprofits emerge from the pandemic stronger and for VEP, this translates to supporting adult English language learners in every Chester County community.



STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

In an effort to help new English language learners navigate current health guidelines and recommendations, VEP provides the following information:

WHEN IT'S YOUR TURN, GET YOUR SHOT!

According to the CDC, we need to use all of our prevention tools to stop the pandemic, including vaccines. These vaccines cannot give anyone the disease itself. Vaccines work with the body's natural defenses so it will be ready to fight the virus if exposed (also called immunity). Other steps, like wearing a mask that covers the nose and mouth and staying at least 6 feet away from people living in other households, also helps stop the spread of COVID-19. Studies show that COVID-19 vaccines are very effective at keeping people from getting the virus. Experts also think that getting the vaccine may help prevent serious illness even if someone does get COVID-19.

Even after receiving the vaccine, people will need to keep wearing a mask that covers the nose and mouth, washing their hands often, and staying at least 6 feet away from other people they do not live with. This gives everyone the best protection from catching the virus. Right now, experts don't know how long the vaccine will protect you, so it's a good idea to continue following the guidelines from CDC and state and local health departments.

For the full list of vaccine eligibility and links to make a vaccine appointment, visit these coronavirus-specific web pages at the [PA Department of Health](#) or the [Chester County Department of Health](#). Additionally, state-specific vaccine appointment information is available through a partnership with the CDC at [VaccineFinder.org](#).



VEP STILL ADVISES ALL ACTIVE TUTORS TO MEET VIRTUALLY UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE FROM PUBLIC HEALTH OFFICIALS. PLEASE REMEMBER TO WEAR A MASK, WASH YOUR HANDS, MAINTAIN SOCIAL DISTANCE, AND STAY SAFE!

VEP STAFF NEWS

Donna Dello Buono has been promoted to Senior Program Coordinator. After six years of dedication to developing our “VEP without walls” in Phoenixville, Donna is recognized for her many talents, including an innate ability to successfully match students and tutors, many of whom have developed long-standing relationships. She will continue in her part-time role to focus on direct student services, volunteer engagement, and program communications.

Rachel Van Tassel has been promoted to full-time Program Director. She will be the first person to fill these shoes since 2016. Rachel's responsibilities, in addition to direct student and tutor services, will include special projects such as the HeadStart peer empowerment circle and international collaboration with a school in Columbia, South America.



UPCOMING DATES

MARCH SCRABBLE MADNESS UPDATE



Join us from March 19 to 24 for VEP's first virtual interactive fundraising event of the year: our March Scrabble Madness competition! The concept is simple - you and another individual play a game of Scrabble, or you as an individual play a game of Scrabble on a computer, any time over the next week. Play your game as normal, keeping track of any spectacular plays and spring themed words. After the game, you take a picture or screenshot of your board and scorecard and submit them to us. Then, join us on March 25 at 7:00 pm for a live results show, featuring numerous awards and prizes (and not just for the best score)!

Cost of participating is \$20 per person. Participation is open to anyone and there is no limit to the number of participants - so share this information and encourage your friends and family to also play!

We're excited to have you join us for this competition and are looking forward to wonderful game nights from the comfort of our own homes. [Click here](#) to donate or register for the tournament.

VIRTUAL TUTOR SUMMIT

Save the date for VEP's sixth annual Tutor Summit, which will be held virtually on Saturday, April 17 from 9:00 am to 11:30 am. Invitations and a registration link will be sent to tutors via email by the end of March.



VIRTUAL TUTOR TRAINING WORKSHOP

VEP's next [Tutor Training Workshop](#) will be held virtually on June 7, 10, and 15 via Zoom. Change Someone's Life and See How it Changes Yours. Online registration will be available approximately one month in advance. Please invite friends and colleagues to be part of the VEP experience and help one of the over 100 adults waiting for a 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 would like to contribute a topic or article for an upcoming issue, please [email](#) us ("IOW" in the subject line).