

# IN OTHER WORDS

*The official newsletter of the Volunteer English Program*



"As you grow older, you will discover that you have two hands — one for helping yourself, the other for helping others."

— AUDREY HEPBURN

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## STUDENT VOICES

Below are stories written by VEP students about their experiences as immigrants. To submit a student-written story, essay or poem for future editions of the newsletter, email [volunteer.english@volunteerenglish.org](mailto:volunteer.english@volunteerenglish.org).

### Remembering Our Loved Ones on Dio de Muertes

**Dorli F. writes about the second anniversary of her mother's passing. "Cordeles" refer to the paper cuttings trimming the grave site. The blue and white colors symbolize heaven.**

My Father and brothers in Guatemala went to the cemetery. My sister-in-law cooked for them. She cooked fried chicken and salad. They ate in the cemetery at my mother's grave. They put flowers in little boxes on the corners of her grave. My father made *los cordeles* for my Mom. He hung the *cordeles* on the portico. My father painted the grave white and sky blue. It is traditional. I'm sad when I see these pictures because my Mom and brother are no more.



Dorli's father, brother, sister-in-law, nieces and nephews at her mother's grave in Guatemala.

"I think I give more value to the small things of life than I did previously. Whatever experience I have gained due to that decision [to move to the USA], in my opinion, it makes me strong and helps me to move forward in life."

- Saheli S.

### My Decision to Move to the USA

by Saheli S.

We have to make a lot of decisions in our entire life. We have to be very careful and cautious before making any decisions because sometimes our way of life depends on the decisions that we make. I make some decisions very easily while other decisions are not so easy. Before making any difficult decision I have to think about the consequences and pros and cons of it.

In my life one of the toughest decisions I made was to move to the USA. My husband lived in the USA. I lived in India. My whole family is in India. My roots are there. I am an introvert. It is hard for me to come to a new country where I don't know anyone except my husband.

My husband wanted to settle in the USA. My son was going to start school. He also needs his father. Maintaining a long-distance relationship was becoming more difficult day by day. I also faced challenges from society. Though I was not bothered about that, I was worried about my son. So I had to make the decision to move to a new country.

My life was not smooth after making the decision and coming to the USA. Although I made the decision, I couldn't adjust to it. After I arrived, I was constantly thinking about how to get back to India. I recognize that it's a kind of immaturity. I couldn't control everything in my life. Even though I knew that, I couldn't put it into practice at that time.

Eventually I realized that I had to come out of that mindset. If I couldn't, my life would be worse. I made the decision myself. Nobody forced me to make it. And it was already made. I started to find positive outcomes of the decision. It is a new challenge to me.

As a result of making the decision I am learning many new things such as chopping vegetables, cooking and driving. I can learn about new cultures, meet new people and face new challenges. I also think I give more value to the small things of life than I did previously. Whatever experience I have gained due to that decision, in my opinion, it makes me strong and helps me to move forward in life.

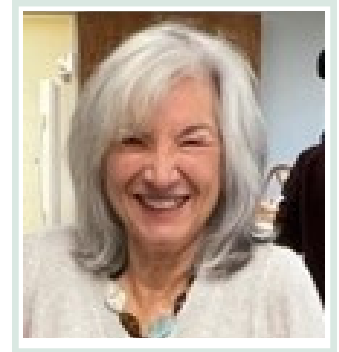


## TUTOR NEWS

### Beginner or Advanced?

Tutor Sue Drummond reflects on teaching both a beginner and an advanced student.

I worked with my beginner student for 2-1/2 years. When we started, although she had taken a couple of introductory classes in English, she was very reluctant to speak. I've heard that called the silent stage, and it's intimidating for a tutor. What I found is that she understood some of what I was saying though, and I built on that as if she were a very shy friend who needed me to be very patient and take the initiative in conversation. I should say right off that I am a major proponent of ordinary conversation in teaching. I tried lots of topics until I found what she was interested in (business and sports, NOT food and family). I was careful to speak clearly, slowly, using synonyms and lots of gestures, hoping that she would understand 80% of what I was saying. Once I had a topic that she wanted to talk to me about, the broken sentences started coming out. I responded enthusiastically to every effort she made, often repeating what she tried to say in a more accurate form of English and adding on, but not in a critical way. ("I like play volleyball." "You like to play volleyball. You are tall. I bet you are a good player. Did you play on a team?") As she became comfortable talking with me (it took months!), we both relied on Google translate quite often to express more complicated thoughts. I used my laptop because I type faster on a keyboard than on my phone. She used her phone.



Tutor Sue Drummond

In the second year, I began using Off2Class exercises over Zoom in addition to our usual conversation. It was challenging, but she liked the structure and she would do the homework assignments. Each lesson took about 30 minutes of our session. I also encouraged her to listen to English on her phone while she worked, and she often did. And I pushed her to talk to other English-speakers, but she has little contact outside her community and very limited opportunities to speak to Americans.

I think we made very good progress in our time together. When we met with Donna a few months ago, she fully participated in a friendly conversation, and she tested at a higher level than before. Unfortunately, her work has become so demanding that she decided not to continue with tutoring this year. I told her I would take her back whenever she wanted. I consider her a friend and have been to visit her just to keep up the connection.

This year I started with a new student who is at an advanced level. She reads well and understands what I am saying, but she does struggle to find the right words to express herself. I suppose you'd say her receptive skills are better than her productive skills. We are using the Challenger workbook, which she likes very much. I assign a chapter and she'll do two! She has the time to study that my beginner student did not. But because I emphasize conversation and speaking, we spend most of every session talking. I still try to speak clearly and a bit more slowly than I would to an American, and she says she understands me when she cannot always understand others. I think that builds her confidence, even if it is a bit artificial. I correct her pronunciation or phrasing, but gently, and only when she might not be understood. We keep Google translate handy, plus a pad of paper and pencil for drawing pictures and writing words. I encourage her to speak to other mothers at the Y (she has 5 kids!) and she does. She watches TV with subtitles on. I think that is good for her, but I am urging her to rely less on seeing the printed word and to focus on listening. The family does not speak English at home, as they want their children to retain their native language. But the kids are learning English very quickly at school. The family has only been in the US about 7 months.

I can't say yet how much I am helping this new student improve, but I'm quite hopeful. She is willing to put in the work required and is becoming more integrated into US culture, so she'll have more opportunities to speak and learn. Meeting with me twice a week keeps her focused and progressing. It is certainly more comfortable to work with someone who can already hold a basic conversation, but there is a different challenge in bringing them to a more proficient level. And the progress is more subtle. Do they use verb tenses more appropriately? How much larger is their vocabulary? I'm icing the cake, not making the batter.

**Is it harder to teach a beginner? Yes, in some ways it is. You feel so inadequate when communication is difficult. And of course, they feel equally inadequate. But it is very rewarding to see them progress as you form a connection and they start to trust you. It's challenging. You have to be more inventive. Try one thing, try another thing. Repeat yourself. Use the book. Forget the book. Read out loud together. Draw pictures. Watch a YouTube. Laugh. Share. Above all, talk and listen. When a beginner student progresses, it makes such a BIG difference to their life, you know you've really accomplished something.**

**Beginner or advanced, it's all good.**

## PHILANTHROPY NEWS

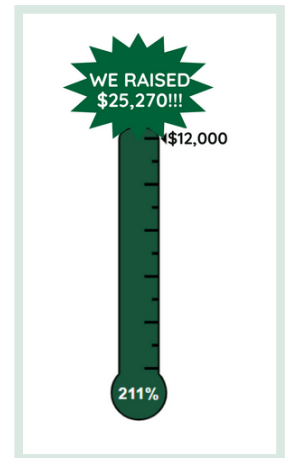
VEP is fully funded through philanthropy and grants. We are grateful for all of the supporters who believe in our mission.

### Annual Giving

Annual giving supports all areas of VEP operations and is a great way to build relationships. Money raised throughout the year, and especially during year-end campaigns, are considered unrestricted and can be used where needed most. Each time you give, you are telling us that the work we do is important. We look forward to this opportunity to invite your contributions through one-time or monthly giving. Visit our [donate page](#) for more details. Thank you for your pledge of support!

### Board Challenge: Thank You!

The generosity of students, tutors, and friends throughout the community has exceeded our expectations! Our first **Board Match Challenge** has raised \$25,270 for a combined total of \$37,270 in just over one month. We hope you are inspired by the success of this effort to ensure that VEP's services remain free and available in the year ahead. If you wish to make a **tax-deductible contribution**, there is still time. Every gift counts in helping new English speakers find their voice and place here in our region.



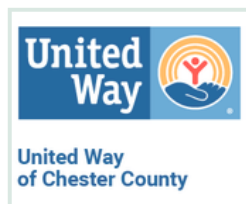
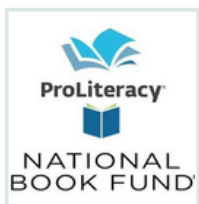
## FUNDER NEWS

### Chester County Fund for Women and Girls

Recently, a former VEP student from Ukraine spoke at a local Rotary meeting. She spoke eloquently about what her family, still in Eastern Europe, has been experiencing. She also shared how she has been able to rally her family and friends here in Chester County, PA, to provide supplies and funds to support her family and their neighbors in Poland and Ukraine. At the end of the meeting, there was not a dry eye in the place. The generosity of the audience flowed and this VEP former student was showered with financial blessings to send to her home country. Learning to speak English gave this woman international reach. VEP thanks **The Fund for Women & Girls** for their two-year general operating grant that directly impacts women and their families. Learning English allows women to find and develop their voice in their new culture.



VEP Student  
Nataliya DeMarco speaking  
at the Rotary Club of  
West Chester



### Ongoing Support

We are also grateful to the **United Way of Chester County** and **ProLiteracy National Book Fund** for their renewed annual general operating support.

### Stewardship Reaches Many

VEP is grateful for the continued stewardship and support of area churches, including **Calvary Lutheran Church** of West Chester, **St. Peter & Paul Catholic Church** (West Chester) and **St. Francis-in-the-Fields Episcopal Church** (Malvern).

Donna Dello Buono, Terri Potrako,  
Carol Cashon, Shirley Warren,  
Reverend Barbara Rivers,  
Dr. Carolyn Marchitell, Everett Warren  
at St. Francis-in-the-Fields



## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### Building the Board

**Mary Vilter** recently joined the board after several years of volunteering with VEP as a tutor and conversation group leader. Mary is a retired attorney who led the efforts of the Unified Judicial System (UJS) of Pennsylvania in providing language access to court users. Mary coordinated the Language Access Advisory Group appointed by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court to write a Language Access Plan for the UJS, assisted the team charged with implementing the Plan, and regularly presented continuing education programs for judges, court administrators, attorneys, and interpreters. In her free time, Mary takes French lessons through Main Line School Night and volunteers for her church. According to Mary, “while I have had the pleasure of doing many volunteer activities throughout my life, tutoring students through VEP has been my most enjoyable and rewarding volunteer experience. Helping one of these students to become a US citizen was one of the most joyful things I’ve had the honor to be a part of.”

**Jeff Randall** joined the Board this past spring after working as a volunteer tutor for VEP for the past ten years. This gave him an understanding of both the need for and the satisfaction possible from helping adults with a strong commitment to proficiency in a difficult language– English– not their own. Jeff brings over 30 years of experience in the management of small technology businesses, including his service as a professional, independent director for 8 companies. These companies were largely in the biotechnology sector developing therapeutic solutions to underserved medical needs. He retired from the last of these companies in June 2023. He sees serving on the Board as a chance to help VEP further itself as a community resource.

If you would like to get involved on a committee or as a future member of the Board of Directors, please email VEP’s Governance Chair, Valerie Rozek at [volunteer.english@volunteerenglish.org](mailto:volunteer.english@volunteerenglish.org).

### Thank You



**Dr. Susan Pierson** was recently recognized for her many years of service as a VEP Board member. During her tenure, she oversaw the development of a customized student listening assessment for advanced students and collaborated with staff to develop a partnership with an international school in Colombia, South America. She was instrumental in framing VEP’s first guiding principles and vision statement, which continue to communicate our purpose. Susan remains an active facilitator for one of six community conversation groups.

Susan’s extensive expertise as an educator has broadened our ability to implement best practices for teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students of all ages.

**”Thank you so much for this recognition. I feel honored and humbled!”**

**– Susan Jacques Pierson, PhD,**

Associate Professor of Education and Coordinator of Graduate ESL Specialist Program, Cabrini University; Director of the EXITO grant US Department of Education (2021 to 2026)



Dr. Susan Jacques Pierson, in her office at Cabrini University and with students at the 2019 Global Gathering

### New Staff and Volunteers

VEP extends a warm welcome to our newest staff member and volunteers.

**Anne-Marie Cowan** joins us as Program Coordinator. Her primary responsibilities will include the development of VEP services in the Coatesville and western Chester County area. This includes direct student services, tutor recruitment, training, and mentoring. Anne-Marie holds an M.A. degree in Bilingual/Bicultural Studies in Spanish, a B.A. in Foreign Service and International Politics, a PK-12 ESL Program Specialist certificate, a K-12 Spanish teaching certificate and a Middle School Grades 7-9 English teaching certificate. Anne-Marie has taught English both in the US and Japan to various age groups including adult learners. Her passion for helping English language learners and their families be successful grew when she was an ESL Program Specialist for a local school district. Anne-Marie continues to have a strong desire to help immigrants, refugees and English language learners so they can participate to the fullest extent in society.

We were fortunate to have the assistance of two interns this summer, **Charlotte Roupz** (Penn State University) and **Layla Malik** (West Chester University) as well as a new social media volunteer, **Taylor Hiller**, ESL Program Specialist for Downingtown School District.

# EVENTS

## Tutor Summit

As in past years, the annual **Tutor Summit** inspired conversation, ideas, and friendship. Thank you to the over 70 tutors, topic hosts, board members, and staff who took part, in person, on Saturday, May 20, 2023 at the **Chester County Boy Scout Council** in Exton. The format of this year’s program, “Catch Them Being Brilliant,” was inspired by **Shannon Almqvist** and enabled tutors to customize their day by choosing topics of interest within round-table discussions every 30 minutes. Topic hosts guided conversations that included bringing humor into lessons, project- and asset-based learning, leveraging ChatGPT in lesson planning, ways to augment learning through area resources, and much more. Free books were provided by **Larry Jilk** as well as the English Language Development department at **West Chester Henderson High School**.



**VOLUNTEERS NEEDED**

REGISTRATION IS NOW OPEN FOR  
**VOLUNTEER ENGLISH PROGRAM'S  
TUTOR TRAINING WORKSHOP**

**WHEN:** AUGUST 21, AUGUST 23, & AUGUST 28  
**TIME:** 9:00 A.M. TO 11:00 A.M.  
**WHERE:** ZOOM  
**WORKSHOP FEE:** \$40.00 (COVERS MATERIAL COST)

Register by August 10th, get entered to win a \$25 Five Guys gift card!

[BIT.LY/3X1T116](https://bit.ly/3X1T116)

*"Change someone's life and see how it changes yours"*

## Tutor Training Workshop

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 the areas of Phoenixville, West Chester and Coatesville, specifically for evenings and weekends.

Our next workshop takes place during the morning on August 21, August 23 & August 29 (9 to 11 am). [Register online](#) by August 10 for a chance to win a \$25 gift card to Five Guys! One winner will be announced on the final day of training.

## 3rd Annual Tennis Tournament

Have you been looking for a way to get involved in two great causes while enjoying competitive tennis? **The Chester County Open Tennis Fundraiser Tournament**, in association with **Tennis Addiction** and **Pennypacker Country Club**, returns for the 3rd year in August 2023. All proceeds benefit the **Volunteer English Program** and the **West Chester Food Cupboard**.

**Men's Doubles & Mixed Doubles  
Tennis Tournament**  
at  
Pennypacker Country Club  
Downingtown, PA

**OPENING CEREMONY**  
Aug 18th at 5:30 P.M.

**MEN'S DOUBLES**  
Aug 18-20 & 25-27

**MIXED DOUBLES**  
Aug 25 - 27

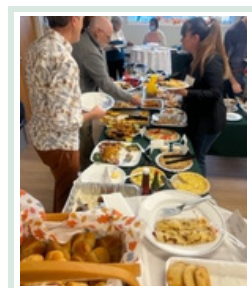
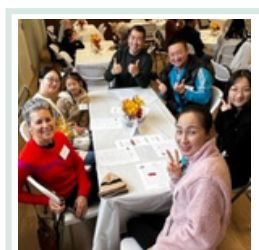
REGISTRATION & DONATIONS  
[cctennis2023.eventbrite.com](https://cctennis2023.eventbrite.com)

Tournament play opens on Friday, August 18 at 5:30 pm & continues throughout the weekends of August 18-20 and August 25-27, with finals play and a closing ceremony during the evening of August 27. The registration fee is \$90 per team plus processing fees, and for the first time this year, the event has been expanded to include both mixed doubles and men’s doubles. For more details, and to register to play or make a contribution, [click here](#). If Registration is closed, please email the committee at [cctennisfund@gmail.com](mailto:cctennisfund@gmail.com).

Thank you to our lead sponsors **USTA-Philly** and **Frazer Dental** as well as organizers **TT Krishnagopal**, **Anthony DeCecco**, and the entire Tennis Tournament Committee for their hard work bringing community members together to support VEP.

## Save the Date: Global Gathering

Students and tutors are invited to gather together on **Sunday, November 12** with students, tutors and families. Everyone is encouraged to bring a potluck meal to share from their country or heritage. More details to follow.



## Free Culinary Arts Training

PA CareerLink - Chester County and United Way of Chester County Financial Stability Center is spreading the word about a free training opportunity taking place at the Chester County Food Bank for anyone who is interested in pursuing a career in the culinary field. The free, 10-week culinary arts class begins on September 12, 2023, with classes held Tuesdays through Fridays from 9:30 am to 3:30 pm. The application deadline is September 5. For more information, [click here](#). To apply, [click here](#).



**FREE 10 WEEK CULINARY JOB TRAINING**

- PRACTICAL HANDS ON INSTRUCTION BY MENTOR CHEFS
- SERV SAFE MANAGERS CERTIFICATION
- RESTAURANT READY CERTIFICATIONS
- TRANSPORTATION
- JOB PLACEMENT SUPPORT



## Annual Report

We are preparing the current Annual Report issue. If you have photographs or stories about how our students are making an impact in the community, please forward to [volunteer.english@volunteerenglish.org](mailto:volunteer.english@volunteerenglish.org). We welcome the opportunity to celebrate their efforts and achievements.

[Click here](#) for past issues and highlights.

## Check it Out!



We are now on Instagram!  
Follow us at [volunteer\\_english\\_program](#).

“My name is William Miller and I am a retired physician who recently sponsored a Ukrainian family, Iryna K. and her two children, under the United for Ukraine Program. Since the U4U legislation was only recently enacted, there has been little time for government agencies and business entities to react and adjust their policies. Administrators, even though sympathetic, faced policy restrictions because official requirements had not yet been updated. As a consequence, we faced many roadblocks because our guests are considered “parolees” and do not have visas. Tasks such as obtaining a social security number and opening a bank account required multiple visits because the institutional policy was that a visa was required.

[I would like] to single out the Volunteer English Program in Chester County as the sole exception to the bureaucratic entanglements we encountered. We started with a simple email inquiry which Ms. Donna Dello Buono promptly answered and then she guided us through the necessary steps of finding a one-to-one English tutor for Ms. Irina. Without the ease and seamlessness of the VEP and the assistance of Donna, I doubt that we would have been able to find this service that has been so necessary to Iryna’s acclimation. We will forever be grateful to VEP and hope that you will convey a message of our gratitude to all those who work to support the program.”

- Dr. William Miller, retired physician

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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).

