PROGRESS
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A Deeper Dive Into the Work of Community-Based Literacy Orgnizations

by Joanne Huebner

Situated cognition theory "holds that learning is intermeshed with the social and physical contexts of activity and that learning occurs through active participation in a community of practice" (Behrman, 2002, p. 26). Equity recognizes that each person has different circumstances and allocates the exact resources and opportunities needed to reach an equal outcome. This issue of ***PROGRESS*** highlights the role of community-based literacy organizations as an equitable conduit to their community for adult learners seeking to build literacy and engagement into their greater social context. Here you will find articles on collaboration, targeted programming, resilience, and innovation. Let's dive in.

Community-based literacy organizations (CBLOs), by definition, reside outside of formal or traditional institutions of learning and, therefore, are generally unburdened by rules and regulations associated with formal learning settings. Instead of a traditional approach, CBLOs epitomize the "it takes a village" approach to collaboratively support individuals on their life and learning journeys. Blue Ridge Literacy, for example, invites community partners into their programming using a "cross-sectional literacy approach." Read about how this approach provides a symbiotic relationship between community partners, such as medical students and local farmers, and adult learners that benefits everyone involved on page 13. On a broader scale, read about how the ongoing work of the 2021 CBLO ReMix collective provides mutual support for program improvement and growth on pages 11-12.

Amplified by the pandemic, targeted programs of support such as Stepping Stones to Literacy, School Success, Jobsite Program, The Bridge Ministry, and EmployEd provide examples of supporting needs locally while providing pilots of effective models for student engagement and readying them for scale.

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Lauren Gordon (p. 18), Jason Thornton (p. 21), and Valerie Palamountain (p. 16) share how engaging learners kept them not only motivated during this time, but also enabled individuals to see a role for themselves in the greater social context of their community.

CBLOs are nimble, yet stealth. Tutors are uniquely at the heart of this capacity. Lauren Gordon refers to tutors as "an army of volunteers and scores of fresh troops" to respond to learner's needs through ever-changing programs. In "Online Learning and the Demographic Change of Tutors," (p. 27). Michelle Abban shares how Literacy Volunteers of Charlottesville/Albemarle (LVCA) tackled training for a changing tutor base by making technology approachable, resulting in a "meaningful community of tutors for our students." Doctoral candidate, Robert Craig, describes his research in understanding volunteer tutor training and invites our community to participate as we continue to learn more about how the relationship between tutors and their learners affects outcomes. (p. 6). Dr. Silver-Pacuilla urges CBLOs and AEFLA-funded programs to collaborate in leveraging the work of tutors: "Embedding tutors in adult education classrooms creates an opportunity to increase the intensity of services by providing additional time with individual learners. . ." (p. 29).

In taking a deeper dive into the work of CBLOs, this issue of ***PROGRESS*** demonstrates that collaboration, targeted programming, resilience, and innovation are essential components of a learning society. Collaboration between CBLOs and publicly funded adult literacy providers is critical to the success of literacy learners at every stage along the way. The link between lifelong learning and literacy is a culture that takes literacy learning seriously. I urge you to find your community's literacy organizations. Spend some time with them (maybe even volunteer). Participate in research when approached or find and disseminate research-based models for teaching adults using the tips provided by Dr. Margaret Patterson (p. 3). Uncover their 'secret sauce' and share it widely.

Reference

Behrman, E. H. (2002). Community-based literacy learning. *Reading (Sunderland)*, *36*(1), 26–32. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9345.00181

Joanne Huebner is the manager of the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center (VALRC). She leads the team of educational specialists in carrying out the VALRC mission of equipping the field of adult education and literacy with essential skills and resources using an equity mindset.

Connecting Community-Based Literacy Programs to Research

Adult education generally sees limited funding for research, despite a huge need for services, so connecting research that is available with practice is vital (Kreil, 2018; Patterson, 2016).

by
Margaret Patterson, Ph.D.

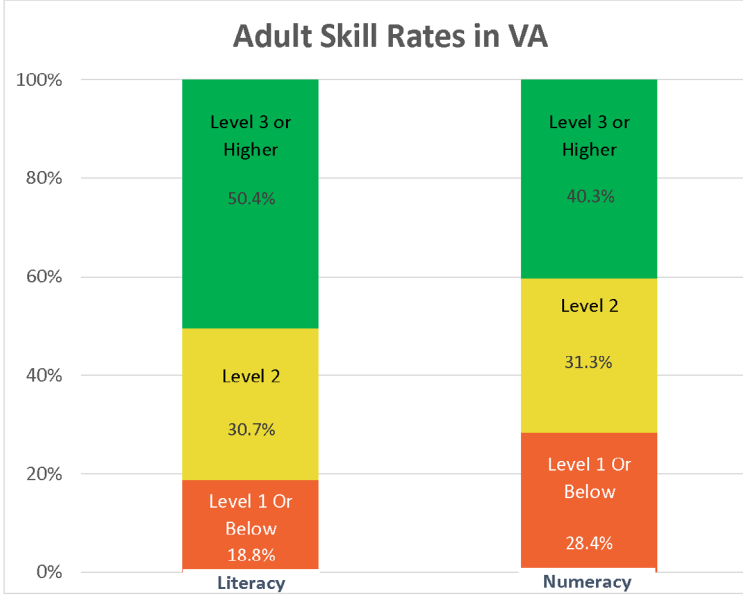
Imagine a director of a community-based literacy organization (CBLO) wants to find out "what works" for adult learners coming to the CBLO to learn math and numeracy skills. The director probably has some tried-and-true approaches for math tutoring or some favorite curricula from major vendors. The director may have heard a buzz in professional development sessions about the value of "research-based models" for teaching adults but isn't sure how to find credible research on adult numeracy. And, implementing research results into practice seems daunting. Tutors may think research is vague, inconclusive, or too difficult to apply (Kreil, 2018; Patterson, 2016). Where can the director even start?

Why research matters

Adult education generally sees limited funding for research, despite a huge need for services, so connecting research that is available with practice is vital (Kreil, 2018; Patterson, 2016). Many in adult education do not turn to research for practice (Patterson, 2016).

Finding research can also be challenging. With limited funding for dissemination, researchers tend to write journal papers rather than develop materials for practitioners or for professional developers (Smith, 2016).

A need for services is apparent in how many phone calls CBLOs get from prospective adult learners, not to mention a constant search for tutors. Can research help quantify the need— and provide persuasive evidence to potential funders? In Virginia, specifically, Programme for International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) data from a nationally representative largescale survey indicate about 60% of the adult population struggles with basic numeracy skills (see orange and yellow sections in the right bar of the figure). PIAAC counts and percentages on adult skills and demographics are also available by county in the PIAAC Skills Map and can be very informative to potential funders or media sources who want to know what a CBLO faces (see links section that follows).



Source: PIAAC Skills Map (2020), National Center for Education Statistics

Finding Research

Three useful places for CBLOs to search for research online are Google Scholar, ERIC, and LINCS resources. Returning to the scenario about the CBLO director, an example search for "Adult Numeracy Tutoring Virginia" in Google Scholar yields 528 results since 2020. Although searching is free and some PDF papers are available for free download, many papers may be in published journals that charge a fee, so checking with a community or postsecondary library for access may be fruitful.

In ERIC, a U.S. Department of Education website, searching for "Adult Numeracy" and selecting peer reviewed, full text available, and since 2020 yields 11 reports. Research that is peer reviewed has undergone review by researchers and editors to help ensure reports are as complete and credible as possible.

On LINCS, another federal repository, a search for "math and numeracy" yields 105 results. Not all LINCS resources are research reports, but filtering for research is possible (see links section that follows).

Another place to look for research is directly in an adult education journal. Several journals affiliated with professional associations include:

- *Adult Education Quarterly*
- *Adult Learning*
- *Adult Literacy Education*
- *COABE journal*

These journals provide peer-reviewed research and practice papers. Access is often included in membership fees and is another benefit of joining a professional association.

Also, at state and national conferences, researchers present and interpret findings for practice. If a CBLO has staff or tutors attending a conference, they could sit in on a research session and ask a researcher who is presenting to recommend reports on a particular topic.

Evaluating Research

Just as tutors seek to teach adult learners to think critically, evaluating research critically is useful to CBLO staff and tutors. In reviewing adult education research reports, they can consider six questions (for more in-depth explanation, see Patterson, 2016):

1. *Overarching Question*: What main question prompted the research?
2. *Assumptions*: What assumptions did researchers make about the program, activity, or population researched?
3. *Audience*: Who is the audience for the research? Were their concerns and questions addressed in the report?
4. *Effectiveness of Programs or Activities*: What is presented about how the program or activity was implemented? How does the report explain the effectiveness and costs of a program or activity?
5. *Validity Threats*: Did researchers draw realistic conclusions from the collected data? How widely do results generalize?
6. *Usefulness*: How does the research relate to learner outcomes?

CBLOs may also want to consider starting a tutor study circle to search for, download, and evaluate research. The study circle could meet monthly, perhaps before or after tutor training sessions. Employing the six questions, it could consider the merits of research and how results could benefit adult learners.

Links to Resources

ERIC ("Adult Numeracy" example)

Google Scholar Adult Numeracy Tutoring Virginia (example)

LINCS ("Math and Numeracy" example)

PIAAC Skills Map state and county-specific data

References

Kreil, J. L. (2018). *Becoming an Expert through the Process of Professionalization: A Case Study of an Adult Basic Education Licensure Program* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Minnesota]. https://conservancy.umn.edu/bitstream/handle/11299/199056/Kreil_umn_0130E_19229.pdf?sequence=1

Patterson, M. B. (2016). Research to practice connections. *Journal of Research and Practice for Adult Literacy, Secondary, and Basic Education*, *5*(3), 30-34. https://coabe.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Winter2016JournalFINALELECTRONIC.pdf#page=32

Smith, C. (2016). The role of professional development in bridging research and practice in adult literacy and basic education. *Journal of Research and Practice for Adult Literacy, Secondary, and Basic Education*, *5*(3), 40-42. https://coabe.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Winter2016JournalFINALELECTRONIC.pdf#page=42

Dr. Margaret Patterson *of Research Allies for Lifelong Learning (www.researchallies.org) in Vienna, VA, partners with non-profits, postsecondary institutions, and state agencies to apply research to support adult educators and learners. Previously, she served in state and national research leadership positions. She taught adult education in Nebraska, Nevada, Kansas, and Virginia and presents throughout the United States.*

by Robert Craig,
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Virginia Commonwealth University,
School of Education

Assessing the Perceptions of Adult Volunteers who Provide One-on-One Basic Literacy Instruction: A Research Study

In the United States, community-based literacy organizations (CBLOs) have depended on volunteer tutors for decades. Volunteer adult literacy tutors are at the forefront of the nation's efforts to close the gap between the 43 million adults who could use adult literacy services and the system's current capacity to provide services to only 1.8 million adults annually. However, CBLOs struggle to gain insights about how well their tutor programs are recruiting, training, and retaining their volunteer tutors. Most of the existing instruments used to assess the attitudes and perceptions of volunteers are broadly applicable to any organization that uses volunteers, e.g., Volunteer Satisfaction Index, Volunteer Functions Inventory. None of the instruments are specifically designed for the adults who volunteer as one-on-one adult literacy tutors.

The lack of a survey questionnaire specifically designed for volunteer adult literacy tutors indicates a gap in the volunteer tutor body of knowledge. Its absence also presents an opportunity to produce something that could be used immediately by CBLOs. These were the two primary reasons why I decided to focus my dissertation research project on the validation of a survey questionnaire for volunteer adult literacy tutors—a questionnaire that would provide program managers with a reliable and valid means to obtain actionable feedback from tutors about the quality of their tutor management programs.

Purpose of the Study

The validation of a Volunteer Adult Literacy Tutor Perception Feedback Scale (VALTPFS) is a dissertation research project, the final step for me to fulfill the requirements for a Ph.D. in education. The VALTPFS is designed to assess the perceptions of adults who volunteer to provide one-on-one basic literacy instruction to tutees who are U.S. born native English language speaking adults (age 18+). The reason for this focus is that the English Learner (EL) population is very diverse, ranging from students with very little literacy skills in their native language to individuals

Assuming all goes well, for the first time CBLOs will have a survey questionnaire specifically designed for the adults who volunteer as one-on-one adult literacy tutors. This means program managers will have a reliable and valid means to obtain actionable feedback from their tutors about the quality of their tutor management programs.

with a Ph.D., so in order to narrow the scope, this particular study is directed towards U.S. born native English language speakers. The goal of the study is to produce initial evidence for the instrument's reliability, validity, and reasonableness of using the community of practice concept as a theoretical framework. In this regard, a community of practice (CoP) is defined as a group of people who are engaged in a practice, are passionate about it, learn from their interactions, and apply that learning to improve the practice on an ongoing basis. The purpose of the CoP is to develop the capabilities of its members by creating, expanding, and exchanging knowledge. For those CBLOs who would like to participate in this research study and assist in validating the VALTPFS, please send an email to craigr@vcu.edu.

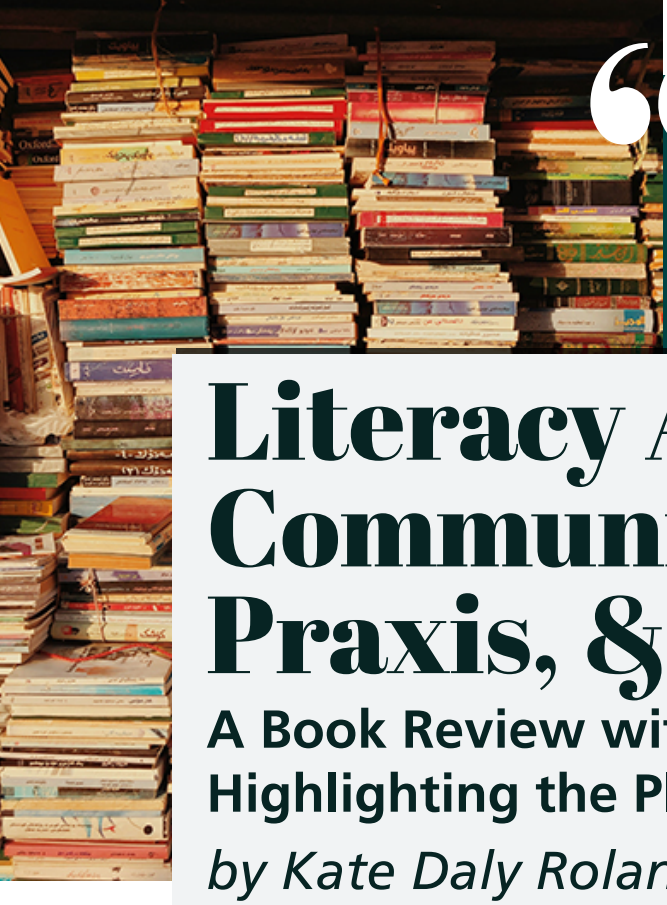
Scope and Nature of the Research Project

The self-report questionnaire will be web-based using the VCU QuestionPro online survey tool platform. No personally identifiable information or organizational identifiable information will be collected. The questionnaire is expected to take about 20 minutes to complete. The survey will include demographic questions and questions pertaining to the tutor's perceptions and activities. The tutors will provide their answers using a 4- or 5-point Likert scale. The questions are allocated to four sub-scales (i.e., values, knowledge sharing, belonging, and organizational commitment/ citizenship). These subscales are what operationalize the CoP theoretical framework.

The results of this research project will provide evidence for the reliability and validity of the tutor survey questionnaire. Assuming all goes well, for the first time CBLOs will have a survey questionnaire specifically designed for the adults who volunteer as one-on-one adult literacy tutors. This means program managers will have a reliable and valid means to obtain actionable feedback from their tutors about the quality of their tutor management programs. Equally important, the instrument will enable CBLOs to systematically track their efforts to establish a CoP for their tutor program, i.e., cultivate an environment where tutors work collectively to self-manage their practice. This semi-autonomy will enable program managers to: improve student outcomes, improve the tutor's volunteer experience, improve the quality of tutoring services, and increase the number of tutors while simultaneously reducing program oversight requirements.

This is a great opportunity for Virginia CBLOs to be part of a research initiative with a nationwide reach. Join in with other states such as New York and Michigan and make your voices heard. If you would like more information or would like to stay informed of this study's progress, contact Robert (Bob) Craig at craigr@vcu.edu.

Bob Craig, *M.P.A., M.Ed. (Adult Learning) is a Ph.D. candidate at Virginia Commonwealth University, School of Education, in the Research, Assessment & Evaluation track. Bob brings to his Ph.D. studies more than 35 years of experience working for the federal government as an engineer, logistician, program manager, strategic planner, and workforce development trainer for regional, national, and international organizations. In the areas of adult secondary education and adult literacy, Bob has served as a GED® math instructor and volunteer one-one-one adult literacy tutor.*



This is a unique volume of research and models of practice that bring together stories and learnings from programs across the lifespan and across a wide range of populations and situations.

Literacy Across the Community: Research, Praxis, & Trends

A Book Review with a Focus on a Chapter Highlighting the PluggedInVA Model

by Kate Daly Rolander, Ph.D.

Literacy Across the Community: Research, Praxis, and Trends is a volume of individual research studies where each explores the many impacts of community-based literacy programs on their learners, instructors, organizations, and communities. The chapters examine how the programs bridge gaps in literacy development, promote dialogue, and connect families, communities, and schools. Showcasing the wide diversity of literacy initiatives across populations, the book brings together innovative and emerging work on the relationship between P-20 schools and community-based literacy programming. This volume identifies current trends in research and practice and addresses the challenges affecting community-based programs. Each study is a story that presents the best practices that emerge from the work of community-based literacy programs. While we often lament the lack of current research to inform our work with adult learners, this book presents itself as an invaluable resource for literacy practitioners who are curious to know more about what is happening in our field.

The book covers programs from early childhood to incarcerated youths and adults, immigrants, refugees, and indigenous communities. Chapters address topics ranging from identity and empowerment to language and literacy development across the lifespan, including rural and urban environments and partnership programs. Each offers insights through stories into how literacy is enacted in unique situations and with diverse groups of people.

Chapter Highlight

PluggedInVA: Harnessing the Transformative Power of Learner-Centered Workforce Development Programs, co-authored by Kate Rolander and Susan Watson.

Susan Watson, who formerly worked at the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center as the ESOL Specialist and I were invited to co-author a chapter about PluggedInVA (PIVA). Laurie Henry, one of the editors of the book, was involved in the development of the PIVA model in 2008 and wanted it to be included in this volume on community literacy.

We focused our chapter on the power of the PIVA model to transform learners' identities and empower them to reimagine their opportunities.

The chapter explores the transformative impacts of PIVA, an adult education workforce development initiative in Virginia, on its learners, practitioners, and on the communities where it is implemented. The initial motivation was to build a supportive structure with a condensed timeframe that lower-skilled adults would need to strengthen their basic academic skills, earn a GED® credential, and participate in occupational training. As a model that aims to support learners' elevation to desired workforce and training environments, a well-designed PIVA program of instruction begins to resemble those of learners' target spaces, particularly their target work spaces.

The chapter includes reviews of previous external evaluations of the PIVA model, as well as qualitative information from interviews with two adult education program managers who have implemented a number of innovative PIVA programs. The findings from these analyses are that participation in the PIVA model enhances not only adult learners' education and employment options, but also transforms their perceptions of themselves and the perceptions that their communities have of adult literacy activities as a vehicle to community improvement. In all the external evaluations and in both of the program manager interviews, the instructors, managers, and participating community members commented on the changes they witnessed in the adults who went through PIVA.

Learners

"It's really what it takes—seeing themselves differently" (Program manager interview, 2019). In early studies of PIVA, learners often commented on the impacts the program had on their own outlook on life and on their potential to change: "this program helped me with my self-esteem and made me want to continue with my education" (Reflections from a 2012 - 2013 PIVA cohort). One particularly salient comment from a woman in the first PIVA cohort perfectly summarizes the identity-shifting potential of a program like PIVA. As she stood in front of an audience of legislators who had come to learn about the new innovative workforce program, she commented on her position within that space at that moment: "never in my lifetime did I think I would be speaking in front of a group of people like this, but, more importantly, that I would have anything to say that you'd be interested in hearing." The learner-centered nature of not only the program, but also of this event, provided this woman the platform to share her narrative, her goals, and her reflections about how she perceived herself and how she perceived her place in her community. In this instance, her identity was dismantled from her self-perception of someone who had nothing worthwhile to say; in this moment, she became a public speaker, a storyteller, and a representative for an innovative project. This is the gist of what PIVA can do for its learners.

Practitioners

PIVA also impacts the practitioners who implement it. One program manager whose program has run more than sixty PIVA cohorts reflected, "it has raised my expectations of what I should do as a program manager, that just getting by is not good enough. That we have to go the extra mile with our students, and being afforded the opportunity to provide training programs changes people's lives, and, therefore, it changes my life, too." The two program managers with whom we spoke shared that their roles had expanded to include more than the oversight of their programs; they have become partner conveners, problem solvers, workforce development experts, and community leaders.

Community

PIVA also changed how the adult education programs were perceived as members of a larger community. Before PIVA, one manager

described her relationship with the local rural community college as consisting primarily of shared student referrals, but with PIVA, they became partners who planned and worked together. She commented on their participation through PIVA: "It defines who we are...it helped cement a new kind of relationship."

The aim of PIVA is to expand access to training and career opportunities for adults who may otherwise not be admitted into or who may not succeed in traditional training programs due either to the length of time required to earn a credential or because the program represented an opportunity that the student could not see as being achievable or even appropriate for themselves. For these learners and the communities where they live, the PIVA program offers hope of something new when economies change and jobs are lost. After the pilot PIVA cohort in 2009, the program manager reflected, "Just doing that one cohort showed us how this could transform our program ... could better serve our community, our students, and benefit all of us." Both managers we interviewed shared that, through PIVA, they have witnessed transformations in their learners, in their instructors, in their programs as a whole, and in the larger communities where PIVA happens.

The chapter, along with other case studies in the book, lays out implications for more student-centered and community-driven approaches to adult literacy program design to both connect literacy practice with adults' lives and obligations and to raise the status of adult literacy practices as an integral component of community and economic development. "We are onto something special with PIVA" (Interview, 2019). As the program continues to grow across the state and adapts to an increasing number of demands within the workforce development system, it transforms how adult education programs do business and, most importantly, how adult learners perceive their own power to change their lives.

Summary review: This is a unique volume of research and models of practice that bring together stories and learnings from programs across the lifespan and across a wide range of populations and situations. This is a must-have reference for anyone interested in advancing their understanding of and innovations in community-based literacy.

**The authors would like to thank Linda Allen and Rachel Ambrose for participating in the interviews for this chapter. You have done so much to build truly transformative models of adult education. We are grateful for all the work you do for your learners and for our field.*

Reference:

Henry, L., & Stahl, N. (Eds.). (2020). *Community-based Literacy*. Routledge.

Dr. Kate Daly Rolander *is the Workforce Education Specialist at the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center (VALRC). She supports Virginia's development and implementation of career pathways programs, assists instructors and staff in tailoring instruction for workforce readiness, and coordinates the state's PluggedInVA programs.*

From fundraisers to best practices, we have been able to work together and enhance ideas and concepts to new heights.

by Andy Gail & Casey Guditus

Breaking Down Silos

Community-Based Literacy Organizations Join Forces to Collaborate & Provide Support

All too often, nonprofits work in silos and not in conjunction with others in their area, region, or state. They see other nonprofits as competition for donors, volunteers, grants, and other resources; but so often when given the chance (or when they are forced) to collaborate, success can follow. In one such case here in Virginia, what started as a project focused on volunteer recruitment strategies has ascended into new heights of collaboration. Six community-based literacy organizations (CBLOs) came together to work on a project for the 2021 Adult Education and Literacy Conference ReMix to figure out best paths to increase volunteer diversity and recruitment. Our team consisted of Ahoo Salem from Blue Ridge Literacy, Nausha Brown-Chavez from The READ Center, Linda Jilk from Literacy Volunteers of the New River Valley, Steven Reid from Literacy Volunteers of Charlottesville/ Albemarle, Andy Gail from Literacy Volunteers Winchester Area, and Casey Guditus from Peninsula READS. While our presentation found several techniques and resources that could be applied to any CBLO, it was the collaboration and support we found in our monthly planning sessions that provided even more value. This collaboration between our nonprofits with similar missions has led to increased support, ideation, and teamwork.

The six of our organizations individually recognize the unique positions CBLOs occupy within the broader context of adult education and the larger community. Traditionally, we partnered with other organizations in our area offering different services to supplement our own. This was the first time for all of us collaborating with similar organizations. This collaboration has been especially impactful during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to our monthly meetings, we often email each other with programmatic, fundraising, and structural questions unique to CBLOs. The responses have been swift, understanding, and extremely helpful; with topics ranging from tutor-student troubles, developing new fundraising ideas, the return to in-person learning, and finding good deals on learning materials.

As CBLOs, we have low staff numbers, aren't eligible for many large grants, and rely largely on donations and the generosity of community volunteers. By leveraging our size as a collective, we hope to move toward eligibility for larger grants and memberships. Creating a state-wide network supports the community as well, creating smoother channels for referrals of both volunteers and students. We also can leverage our collective knowledge and experiences to develop and implement new and creative ideas. From fundraisers to best practices, we have been able to work together and enhance ideas and concepts to new heights.

Even though the six of our CBLOs occupy similar niches within our respective communities, the size, staff, and resources available to each organization vary greatly. By adding each other to our organizations' mailing lists and events calendars, we are able to support each other in fundraising, volunteer training, and other development efforts. For example, Peninsula READS encourages their volunteer tutors to attend workshops and professional development opportunities offered through Literacy Volunteers of Charlottesville/Albemarle (LCVA). LCVA's larger staff size makes these opportunities more numerous, and a virtual format makes them accessible to volunteers across the state.

Steven Reid from Literacy Volunteers of Charlottesville Albemarle said it best: "While the outcome related to the identified problem was great, the larger impact was the connections and collaboration we made between our organizations. We all do very similar work and serve similar clients in our own areas of the state. We have shared resources, struggles, concerns, and over the past six months—we have used each other as sounding boards for new ideas and best practices. We plan on continuing to meet monthly to touch base and see how each organization is growing and progressing. We feel staying connected will allow us to continue working to improve our organizations by maintaining the team we've built. We're also looking to invite other CBLOs from across Virginia to join us."

If you are interested in joining our monthly CBLO Team meeting feel free to email Casey (programs@peninsulareads.com) or Andy (agail@lvwa.org). We host monthly Zoom meetings to discuss the most pressing concerns we have as CBLOs, create a mutually supportive environment to tackle those concerns together, and elevate our individual programs.

***Andy Gail** is the Executive Director for Literacy Volunteers Winchester Area. After working in corporate America and doing philanthropy in his free time, he quickly realized that he could leverage his business acumen and make a difference in his community every day. With the help of an amazing team, he was able to revive the 35-year-old origination and double the budget despite the pandemic.*

***Casey Guditus** has worked as the Program Specialist at Peninsula READS since 2018. As a former volunteer for various nonprofit organizations and Peninsula READS itself, Casey recognizes the importance of community collaboration for increased capacity and impact.*

by
Ahoo Salem, Ph.D.

Since 2019, Blue Ridge Literacy has been increasingly working towards utilizing its various community partnerships to provide cross-sectional literacy services and address adult learners' informational gaps.

Cross-Sectional Literacy Services: A Collaborative Approach to Provision of Functional Literacy Skills

Located in the City of Roanoke in southwest Virginia, Blue Ridge Literacy (BRL) was established in 1985 to address the basic literacy needs of American-born adults in the area. By the 1990's the organization added English as a second language (ESOL) programs to its services to address the English literacy needs of Roanoke's growing immigrant and refugee population. Currently, over 90% of BRL's learners are foreign-born adults seeking to improve their English literacy skills. *B*RL's services focus on functional literacy and aim to provide learners with the practical skills needed to read, write, and communicate real-life purposes to ensure adult learners can navigate everyday life situations and make informed long-term plans. BRL's focus on functional literacy aligns well with the City of Roanoke's 2040 Comprehensive Plan focusing on interwoven equity and the city's vision of becoming a diverse and inclusive community with access and opportunities available to all.

BRL field trip to a mobile farmers' market in 2019.

As an organization, BRL is an active participant in ongoing initiatives and programs in the city of Roanoke and works closely with community partners from a range of fields, including but not limited to the city public libraries, city schools, food access programs, institutions of higher education focusing on health care, and the city's Financial Empowerment Center. A question we frequently receive from our community partners revolves around the needs of adult ESOL learners. There is, however, no easy way to answer this question. Similar to any adult education program, BRL students have a variety of educational backgrounds, skill-sets, English proficiency levels, and differential levels of access to resources. Looking through the lens of functional literacy, BRL learners have a wide range of needs when it comes to navigating everyday settings, starting from differential levels of information about available resources.

Since 2019, Blue Ridge Literacy has been increasingly working towards utilizing its various community partnerships to provide cross-sectional literacy services and address adult learners' informational gaps. This approach aims to connect representatives among the service providers with BRL learners through guest lectures or as classroom assistants. Each visit revolves around a specific topic that BRL's instructors and learners cover as part of the class curriculum. BRL classes are viewed as safe and trusted spaces by our learners. When community partners join our classes as classroom assistants or guest presenters, they have the opportunity to become familiar with the linguistic and cultural diversity of our learners. At the same time, adult learners can interact with representatives of various services they use directly and share their questions and concerns in an environment of structured learning. The provision of cross-sectional literacy services is a work in progress and serves as a framework for creating BRL's new programs. The following examples focusing on health literacy and food access show the diversity of these partnerships and the benefits of such an approach.

BRL's English and health literacy program is one of our most established forms of cross-sectional services. BRL created this program in response to the English and health literacy needs of adult learners, as well as the expressed interests of medical students at Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine (VTCSOM) to become familiar with their future patients. Since January 2019, medical students at VTCSOM have been joining the health literacy block of our program as classroom assistants. The success of this collaboration has resulted in expressions of interest from students enrolled in the Physician Assistant program in Radford University Carilion (RUC) and the university's Public Health program.

BRL also has a long history of working with Roanoke's Local Environmental Agriculture Project Inc. (LEAP). This collaboration initially aimed to inform BRL's learners about the SNAP Double Value Programs through field trips to various farmers' market locations.

These visits, in exchange, helped familiarize the farmers' market staff about the needs of BRL's learners as potential customers. Currently, two of LEAP's mobile markets are held in neighborhoods that are highly populated by BRL's ESOL learners. Adult learners, the majority of whom are women, regularly shop at these locations and share their needs and requests with the mobile market managers.

Having the ability to interact with our community partners through the cross-sectional literacy programs promotes trust-building and increases mutual respect and understanding between adult literacy learners and service providers. BRL's vision is to expand its cross-sectional literacy services to establish additional programs focusing on English and financial literacy and English and digital literacy—and to include structured field trips and guest visits addressing the specific needs of adult learners. To realize our vision, we need to continue working with our community partners and create a dialogue about the importance of such an approach for the overall well-being of our community.

***Dr. Ahoo Salem** is the Executive Director of Blue Ridge Literacy (BRL), a CBLO that offers adult literacy services to foreign and native-born residents of Roanoke Valley. Ahoo is also a member of the Virginia Office of New Americans Advisory Board (ONAAB). In this role, she serves as one of the Board's two Language Access Co-Leads and works to provide actionable recommendations addressing linguistic, cultural, and economic integration of New Americans in the Commonwealth of Virginia. As a sociologist with a passion for integration initiatives, Ahoo is especially interested in the ways in which differential access to resources shapes and impacts experiences of everyday life for immigrants in different host settings. Originally from Iran, Ahoo holds a Ph.D. in sociology from Universita Degli Studi di Milano, in Milan, Italy.*

VALRC | Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center

New Year. New Look. Same Mission.

The Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center is proud to unveil our new logo. With it, we have endeavored to honor our past while looking to the future, which is emblematic of our collective challenge this year as we continue to evaluate what practices we should hold onto and where we need to innovate moving forward.

Rest assured that our mission to equip the field of adult education with essential skills and resources has not changed. In fact, we are continuing our evolution with a new website redesign in order to better reach, engage, and serve you better. Be on the lookout for the next announcement when our new website goes live!

Designed by Michael Bell, Inkable,LLC

The Bridge to Tranformational Learning

by Valerie Palamountain

The success of the program is unprecedented at The Bridge. By giving the residents control over their education, all of them embraced learning and set goals for themselves.

Joeph graduated from high school in 2009 where he was enrolled in an ag business program. He held a job for eleven years before his addiction took hold of him.

Dustin completed high school and some college classes, but like Joseph, his addiction took control of his life. At the age of 33, he found that he needed help, he needed skills, and he needed to learn how to work with others.

Both Joseph and Dustin entered The Bridge Ministry program in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. Since 1996, The Bridge Ministry has provided a second chance for men who are committed to breaking free from life-controlling issues; many are addicted to opioids, alcohol, or other drugs. The majority of men who successfully complete the 18-month program go on to live successful and productive lives.

According to an editorial in the Fredericksburg, Virginia Free Lance-Star (2021):

> In 2020, 93,000 people in the United States died of a drug overdose, up nearly 30 percent from the previous year. Almost 70,000 of those deaths were from opioids. In Virginia, however, it's worse than that. The state is one of 10 in which the overdose fatalities increased by more than 40 percent. (unpaged)

Joseph and Dustin completed 12 months of substance abuse treatment, vocational technical training and education, and received mental health support services. Through a partnership with Piedmont Virginia Community College, which was initiated in 2018, professional certification courses were offered in heating and air conditioning repair, electrical work, small engine repair, diesel engine repair, and welding. All of the classes prepare the students for an industry-recognized

credential. PVCC is the adult basic education (ABE) provider in the Charlottesville area. The classes taught at The Bridge incorporate study skills, math and financial literacy, reading skills, workplace readiness skills, and teamwork and communications skills.

In 2018, The Bridge contacted Piedmont Virginia Community College to offer classes in 4-stroke small engine repair to nine of their residents. At the end of the first class, 55% of the students did not pass. PVCC and Bridge Ministry staff members conducted interviews with the students and learned that the teaching methods developed for the traditional classroom were inappropriate for recovering addicts whose cognitive abilities have been affected by drug addiction. PVCC revised the teaching materials to be more visual and accessible to the students and repeated the class. One hundred percent of the students passed the 4-stroke class, followed by 100% passing the 2-stroke engine repair class, electrical systems, and driveline/hydraulics class. Furthermore, all of the students successfully earned four credentials from the Equipment and Engine Training Council (EETC), a nationally recognized credential that will prepare them for the workplace.

The success of the program is unprecedented at The Bridge. By giving the residents control over their education, all of them embraced learning and set goals for themselves.

"It's been awhile since I was in a classroom," said Dustin. "There is such a diverse group of people at The Bridge. Different ages and backgrounds, and we all learned to come together." Dustin is now employed in an electrician apprenticeship program earning $15.00/hour. "The program at The Bridge transformed my life."

"I want to continue taking classes at PVCC," agreed Joseph. "Welding and other classes look good to me. Maybe I'll start my own business." Joseph is a heavy equipment operator earning $17.00/hour with a possible raise in the near future. "My family is ecstatic with my success."

At the end of 12 months, both Joseph and Dustin had earned five credentials that prepared them for jobs as HVAC installers, electricians, and construction work. Both men completed an internship at The Bridge, constructing a 10'x12' shed on campus. Both men learned the importance of teamwork.

"The partnership with Piedmont Virginia Community College made all the difference," said the Intake Director at The Bridge. "PVCC's reputation in the business community is outstanding. Employers know that students who complete the program have received a quality education and are reliable workers. This is a win-win for our clients and the employers."

For more information, please visit The Bridge website or contact program staff at BridgeMinistryVA@gmail.com or 434-969-2991.

Reference:

The Free Lance-Star. (2021, July 21). *Editorial: Digging deeper into opioid overdose crisis*. https://fredericksburg.com/opinion/editorial-digging-deeper-into-opioid-overdose-crisis/article_5213d0ab-6f9f-5848-8e6f-e873d786d120.html

Valerie Palamountain *was the Dean of Workforce Services (Emerita) at Piedmont Virginia Community College, where she worked with employers and economic development agencies within the Charlottesville region for 16 years. She holds a B.A. in English from Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, NY, an M.S. in higher education administration from the University at Albany, New York, and was a Fulbright Specialist in Bermuda and Kolkata, India. Since retiring, she has stayed active in the community serving on the Economic Development Authority of Fluvanna County in Central Virginia and assisting community colleges and nonprofits in identifying and launching new programs.*

Life, Literacy & Happiness at Loudoun Literacy Council

by Lauren Gordon

Our lives have changed significantly over the last year and a half and will continue to change as we turn the corner on the pandemic. But what hasn't changed is Loudoun Literacy Council's commitment to ending illiteracy in Loudoun County, Virginia—to bring about a community where everyone has the literacy resources to achieve their personal, educational, and professional goals.

Unfortunately, 130,000 northern Virginia adults function at the lowest literacy level. Thirty-two thousand report that they do not speak English well. Our mission is to teach English communication skills and provide literacy resources to low-income adults and children to empower them to become self-sufficient and confident. We do this through providing year-round English classes and individual tutoring for adults, basic life skills, GED® and citizenship preparation, and financial, health, and jobsite literacy.

When COVID-19 hit in March 2020, Loudoun Literacy Council had reached 40 years of serving the community. But even with a long-standing track record, nothing fully prepares an organization for the unprecedented challenges brought about by the pandemic. Our non-profit organization, however, responded quickly and effectively to bring online instruction to our learners. Teachers and students transitioned to virtual meeting (Zoom) and collaborative (Google Classroom) platforms. In the summer of 2021, when the public libraries and community centers re-opened their doors, we were able to resume in-person classes. We have continued to be flexible and responsive to our adult learners' needs by conveniently providing both in-person and online classes. We offer year-round classes: fall, spring, and summer sessions with classes ranging from 9–12 weeks.

This fall, demand for English as a second language (ESL) classes was stronger than ever. To illustrate, pre-pandemic we served 315 adults. Now, during the first quarter of our current fiscal year starting July 1, 2021, we are serving 410 adults. Also during the pandemic, we expanded our offerings to include Stepping Stones to Literacy, a program intervention designed to provide bi-lingual literacy to pre-literate English learners. All classes and instructional materials are free of charge and

this latest step supports our goal to develop and deliver stellar programming that engages our participants and aligns with the needs of the communities we serve.

Unique to Loudoun Literacy Council is a strong partnership with the local business community. Our Jobsite Program offers work-focused English instruction for a variety of employers. Customized training takes place conveniently at the work site and is scheduled around employees' shifts. By improving the communication skills of employees, Loudoun Literacy Council provides these employers with tangible benefits such as better customer service, lower employee turnover, greater productivity, and a safer workplace. Employees who participate have an increase in job satisfaction and often experience more internal promotions as a result of their studies.

Another creative program is our School Success program, which helps non-English speaking parents at Loudoun County Public Schools to better communicate with their children's teachers and school staff, as well as navigate the school system. The program is guided by a robust set of research data that indicates low-literate parents are more likely to exert a positive influence on their child's academic success when they are able to enhance their own literacy skills. This program was a lifeline to so many parents supporting their children's virtual learning during the COVID-19 crisis.

It takes an army of volunteers and scores of fresh troops each year to keep our myriad literacy programs operating smoothly. We also offer teacher training workshops every other month, both in-person and online, to ensure

Loudoun Literacy Council English Teacher, Megan Stone, helps an English language learner during the group's first class of 2020 at Leesburg's Rust Library.

> It takes an army of volunteers and scores of fresh troops each year to keep our myriad literacy programs running smoothly.

a continuous flow of new teachers and tutors. Veteran volunteer teachers sometimes serve as mentors to new volunteers. New volunteers often observe, shadow, or assist experienced volunteers in the classroom to gain experience and build their self-confidence.

In FY 2021, 249 volunteers provided 2,753 hours of service to support the organization and its mission. We provided 112 hours of training to 103 volunteers. All of our teachers are volunteers and they are the lifeblood of our literacy programs. We provide the support and materials volunteer teachers need to succeed and all we require is patience, perseverance, and the genuine desire to help those who struggle with the written and spoken word.

Volunteer adult literacy instructors gain tremendous reward from helping those in need as well as learning about others' cultures and backgrounds. Volunteer instructors, such as Kathleen Salter, state that they "get far more from their students than they actually give." Instructor, Jackie Ly says, "It takes a village to uplift our community in these challenging times, and Loudoun Literacy Council is doing just that through community partnerships and with local businesses, schools and other service providers." Others such as Kelly Smith-Moore talk about "how meaningful and interesting it is to teach students from all over the world."

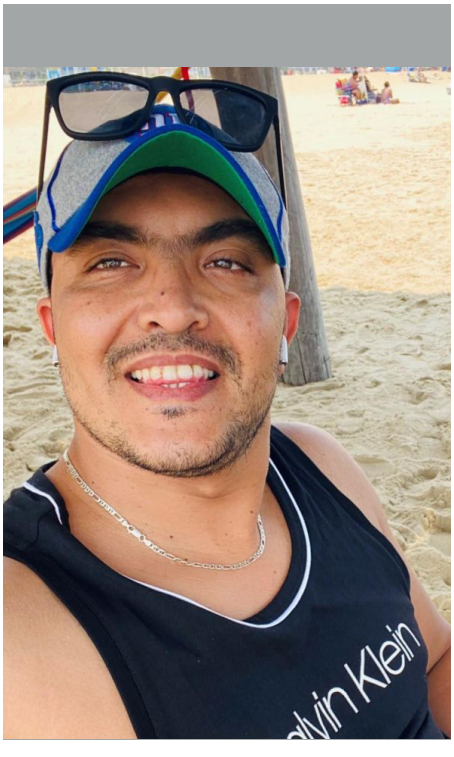
The impact of Loudoun Literacy Council's programs on the lives of immigrants and refugees in Loudoun County has been tremendous. Seeing adults improve their literacy skills is at the heart of our mission, and it is gratifying to hear testimonials from many of our ESOL students who have successfully gone through our ESOL programs. Abderrazaq Mihamou, a student originally from Morocco, stated, "Loudoun Literacy's English classes have helped me improve my English communication skills so I can volunteer with youth in my community." Stephane Rhanatamalala, a student originally from Madagascar who took our online classes maintained, "I've become better in my listening and speaking since I started your courses. I'm more confident speaking with others. I perform better in my jobs as a bus attendant and cashier, since I can understand others. In my personal life, I can have discussions with neighbors, friends, and coworkers. I appreciate your English program. Thank you, Loudoun Literacy."

Lauren Gordon *is a program assistant in the Adult Literacy Program at Loudoun Literacy Council in Leesburg, Virginia. Prior to joining Loudoun Literacy, she taught for 19 years in both Fairfax and Loudoun County public schools.*

The EmployEd program is not only a valuable resource to adult learners, but it also helps local businesses find the workers they need.

EmployEd: Providing Work Skills & Connections to Employment

by Jason Thornton



Hassan

Meet Hassan, originally from Morocco, who currently works as a waiter in Williamsburg. This survival job, however, is not what he had in mind for his career. Thanks to Literacy for Life and its EmployEd program, Hassan was able to meet with a career coach, assess his interests and skills, and pursue his dream of a future in information technology (IT).

According to the National Skills Coalition (2020), the largest portion of jobs in the U.S. require training beyond high school, but not a four-year degree. However, too few of America's workers have had access to the skills training necessary to fill those in-demand careers. Literacy for Life's EmployEd program focuses on filling this "Middle Skills Gap" so that learners can pursue lucrative, in-demand careers, and local businesses can build the workforce they need to grow and thrive. In fact, several learners at Literacy for Life are currently embarking on certifications in dental assisting, certified nursing, commercial driving, tax preparation, and information technology.

Hassan is Literacy for Life's first learner to pursue IT certification through Paul D. Camp Community College (PDCCC). Literacy for Life's Career Coach, Frances Falcón, worked with Hassan to enroll into PDCCC's IT certification program. "IT is consistently an in-demand field," says Frances. "Hassan will be highly employable, and the sky is the limit, as he can continue to stack credentials or even pursue a degree. I'm so excited to support Hassan and his tutor David. I'm learning more about the IT field and am laying the groundwork to assist more learners along the same path in the future."

Meiber at her job.

The tenets of the EmployEd program are simple—work skills + connections = success. The program offers both group and/or one-to-one tutor training to adults seeking to grow their financial literacy skills, career readiness skills, and/or soft skills. Adult participants meet with a Certified Global Career Development Facilitator to develop a customized work readiness plan to enhance their interviewing skills, write a resume and cover letter, apply strategies to their career search, and utilize local resources to meet their own needs. In addition, adult participants can receive individualized and tailored training services and support to help prepare them to take the GED® exam, Virginia Placement Test, and/or enter into a college or industry specific training program.

The EmployEd program is not only a valuable resource to adult learners, but it also helps local businesses find the workers they need. Kendra Robinson, Clinical Director of Williamsburg's Olde Towne Medical and Dental Center raves about EmployEd participant, Meiber, who was a nurse in her home country of Venezuela. "We work in a rural health center and we have a significant need for trained medical professionals. Meiber came to us from the EmployEd program. She stood out among all the other candidates that we had. It helped that she is bilingual because we have an increasingly growing Hispanic population that is Spanish-speaking. And, she just nailed the interview and her skills have been top-notch since she's gotten here."

While EmployEd is just one of the many programs that Literacy for Life offers to the community, it is making a significant impact in the lives of many adult learners—and solving real needs that face local employers. To learn more about EmployEd, take a look at this informational video or contact program coordinator, Frances Falcón, at ftfalcon@wm.edu or (757) 221-2422.

Reference:

National Skills Coalition. (2020, September 9). *Skills for an inclusive economic recovery: A call for action, equity, and accountability*. https://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/resource/publications/skills-for-an-inclusive-economic-recovery/

Jason Thornton *is the Executive Director of Literacy for Life (LFL). He began his adult education career as an English as a second language (ESL) teacher, then program manager, with the Peninsula Regional Education Program. He joined LFL as ESL Program Manager in 2016 and became Executive Director in 2021. Previously, Jason had served as a pastor for ten years. Fun fact: Jason taught English in Sulawesi for two years and learned to speak Indonesian. He appreciates the many challenges faced by adult students learning a new language.*

How My Program Thrived in the Pandemic

by Ahu Moser

My heart sank when my boss suggested we take a break from instruction for the next couple of weeks in March, 2020. I knew that these two weeks would last longer, but I never thought that we would still be remote after 19 months of online learning.

I work for the Literacy Council of Montgomery County (LCMC) in Montgomery County (MoCo), Maryland as the program administrator serving close to 2,000 students annually. We used to say, "We are small". This does not apply to us anymore, especially since the pandemic started. The pandemic has taught us we are not small, but we are mighty considering what we have accomplished in our organization, and in instruction. I am extremely proud of all the work that staff, instructors, and students have put in for the last one and a half years.

Programs have been challenged with so many elements since the pandemic hit. Grant-funded programs like ours have strict guidelines to follow. We have had to act fast

> *Although we have had challenges, we have also had great success in many areas during online instruction for students, teachers, and for administrators.*

LCMC offers workplace ESL classes.

without any delays—or any long breaks— because we had requirements to follow, classes to hold, and programming to continue regardless of the situation in which we found ourselves.

We can talk a lot about challenges, failures, the digital divide—and a lot more reasons about why online learning may be terrible or not produce a lot of compelling success stories. I am not going to talk about these because I believe that adult educators, students, and program administrators have accomplished a lot in the last 19 months, and we NEED to talk about our successes to move forward.

Although I am a program administrator, I am a teacher first and at heart. My organization is a non-profit that serves adults age 18 and older. We teach English as a second language (ESL), GED® preparation, digital literacy, workplace instruction, and more. Although we have had challenges, we have also had great success in many areas during online instruction for students, teachers, and for administrators. Let me highlight some of our successes with remote learning.

Improved Processes:

Think about doing registration for the public before the pandemic. We had to reserve rooms and classrooms in our county to do registrations. Most adult education programs do the same thing

if they do not have a big space for registration, intake, and testing. Moving these processes to the online environment helped ease the load of staff and decreased the expense of managing space.

Small Group Instruction:

While it may be hard for a lot of students in online instruction because Zoom or Google Meet sessions can be very tiring and overwhelming, online instruction provides the opportunity for more individualized instruction. Before, in-person classes always had between 10 and 15 students. Now, our online class sizes are smaller. Placing students in online classes with less than 10 people helped our teachers easily manage their classes and give focused attention to learners.

Professional Development Opportunities for Instructors:

Remote learning caused an immense shift in our professional development for instructors. We started offering easy, hands-on, and relatable professional development opportunities via Zoom or Google Meet. It did not matter how long a teacher had been teaching. We were all new to online learning. When we started, we made sure to relay one

Small online class size allows for more personalized instruction with LCMC.

important message to our teachers—our professional development opportunities were not mandatory. We hoped that our teachers would value professional development opportunities that were practical and useful to their teaching. First, we wanted our teachers to hear from experts so we invited guests. Additionally, we wanted to do something fun. We called our professional development opportunities "Virtual Brown Bags" and held these every Friday. Attendance increased every week and instructors saw the value in these meetings. Before the pandemic, finding the right time to do workshops was hard. Every instructor had their own scheduling issues with personal or religious reasons. Having online workshops during the pandemic has proven that workshops do not have to be lengthy, they can be focused on our current needs, and they can be fun.

A Focus on Belonging:

Living through a pandemic is not easy. Our learners have other priorities such as finding or going to a job, supporting their families, and a plethora of other challenges. And yet, our students chose to attend classes online despite their challenges and life priorities. One of the most significant successes that we have had is building community. When online learning takes place, we are invited into the homes of our learners. And while creating relationships is not easy during online learning, our program worked with instructors to implement fun and engaging activities while giving space to our learners to communicate openly. Little things such as staying on camera, involving family members, and being patient helped our learners thrive. We have found that connections are what can allow teachers and administrators to keep persisting when it gets hard.

Being Simple:

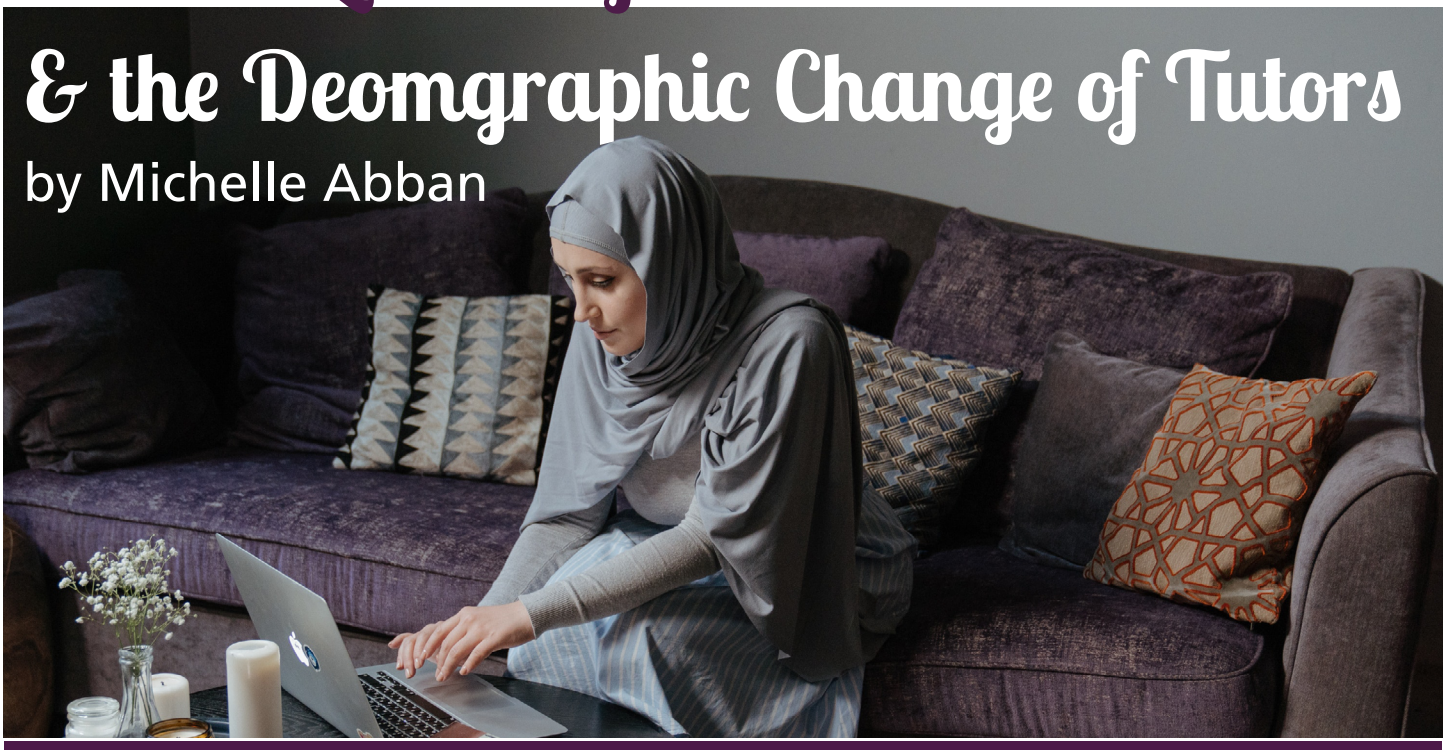
You might wonder what "Being Simple" is. After so many class observations, meetings, and feedback sessions, I could tell you that I have learnt that being simple is the key to a successful online learning experience. There are so many apps, learning management systems, and portals available for online learning. In our experience, having so many resources overwhelmed the students. This is why we worked hard to make online learning accessible to students and teachers by keeping tasks simple while still requiring depth of knowledge. Instead of assigning seats to students in different portals that require programs to spend tons of money and take so much time, we offered easy ways for our learners to complete assignments and have access to their student books. Keeping things simple also improved accessibility for learners who did not have good access to Wi-Fi and computers.

The last 19 months have been very challenging, full of new learning opportunities and discoveries every day. As I stated at the beginning, while there are many issues and problems related to online learning, I have decided to bring out the positives that have led to successes in our program. Here's hoping to learn more and exploring new things with our adult education students!

Ahu Moser *is the Senior Director of Academic Programming at Literacy Council of Montgomery County (LCMC) in Maryland. In her role, she oversees LCMC's MD LABOR and MCAEL- funded 60-hour classroom program, which offers 100 classes per fiscal year while employing 27 teachers. She also manages additional programs such as LCMC@Work and Small Online Group Learning. Ahu was born and raised in Turkey and has a B.A. in English as a foreign language and education. She holds an M.Ed. in adult education from Strayer University and is currently pursuing her Ed.D. degree in curriculum and instruction at American College of Education. Ahu is an expert speaker, presenter, and workshop facilitator at both the local and national level regarding assessment, curriculum and instruction, adult learning theory, and teacher support.*

Online Learning & the Deomgraphic Change of Tutors

by Michelle Abban



"A truly great mentor is hard to find, difficult to part with, and impossible to forget."

—Unknown

At Literacy Volunteers of Charlottesville/Albemarle (LVCA), we value and appreciate all of our tutor volunteers. Interestingly, however, between 2020 and 2021, 38 percent of our tutors at LCVA were under the age of 55—a seven percent increase from the previous year. And while we still experienced a significant number of older tutors, the demographic shift correlated with the move to online tutor training. In other words, we discovered that by moving our operations to the remote environment, younger tutors were more likely to now opt-in. We found ourselves with the task of making our tutor training inclusive for all ages and experience levels so that we could retain our older tutors while bringing in new, younger people. Here is what we did and how our efforts were received.

Familiarize

By having tutor training on Zoom, providing access to multiple online resources, and specifically pairing people to practice using Zoom, we had every tutor work on their online skills before meeting with a student remotely. By the end of training, tutors felt more confident to then meet with a student online. The format of the tutor training consisted of three Zoom sessions for two hours each. By training on Zoom, participants practiced the basic skills of opening a link, controlling the camera and the microphone, and typing in the chat function. The participants saw how the shared screen looked as the LVCA staff presented during each session.

Activity

At the end of the second session of training, the participants paired up to go through

tutor technology for 10-20 minutes sometime during the week. Usually, people with more experience on Zoom matched with people who felt less experienced. During their time, the dyad practiced sending and opening a Zoom link, using the whiteboard attachment in Zoom to draw or to type, and using the "Share My Screen" feature to display study materials.

Debrief

During the last training session, participants shared about the practice experience and general tips and tricks to help their fellow trainees. The participants listened and asked questions so that they could learn from each other and learn new ideas.

As a hybrid tutoring model becomes a part of our daily educational lives, preparation for tutors looks different than in the past. By making technology more approachable, we continue to increase the diversity of people involved and experiences brought to our program which creates a healthy, meaningful community of tutors for our students. As participants feel assured in their abilities, they can better help their students as they make the transition online and learn how to use all the functions on Zoom.

***Michelle Abban** is the Volunteer Engagement Coordinator for Literacy Volunteers Charlottesville/ Albemarle (LVCA). Before working at LVCA, she volunteered for the English Language Learning program while at the University of Virginia (UVA). She graduated from UVA with a degree in global public health in 2020.*

Don't just take our word for it. Hear what the partner participants of the September 2021 New Tutor Training technology practice session have to say.

Partner 1

I really enjoyed practicing on Zoom with my partner. I am quite familiar with Zoom having taught remotely full-time for well over a year. I was able to share the most important aspects of Zoom with my partner, and I think our meeting helped to increase not just her skill, but also her confidence. It also provided me with the opportunity to review the things I had used in my remote teaching but hadn't used over the summer, so our session was helpful to me too.

Partner 2

I was super glad to be able to practice with my partner! She really helped me be less worried about online teaching. I had used Zoom before, but I had never set up a meeting. Also, I didn't know how to screen share or use the "whiteboard" or how to type or draw on a shared screen. I will want to review how to set up Zoom before I actually do online tutoring, but after my partner helped me I was able to invite my niece and then my sister to Zoom with me. I may call on my partner again before I start tutoring."

From the VDOE

New Solutions in New Times: Partnering to Serve Those with the Lowest Levels of Literacy

The Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA), Title II of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) emphasizes that adults with the lowest levels of literacy are of high priority for service. The Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) included this focus as a statewide priority in the 2020-2023 competition:

> "**Service to Those with Low Levels of Literacy**. Per federal requirement, AEFLA providers are obligated to serve all eligible learners, particularly those eligible individuals who have low levels of literacy, are English language learners, or are individuals with disabilities. Should an eligible provider wish to collaborate with a community-based literacy organization to offer supplemental tutoring services as a programming model, a signed letter of support clearly articulating how services will be coordinated and participants will be dually-enrolled must be included in the [competitive] application" *Program Managers Responsibilities Manual*.

The community-based literacy organizations (CBLO) and the faith-based literacy organizations (FBLO) contributing to this issue of ***PROGRESS*** recognize the importance of these collaborations and, like local organizations throughout the Commonwealth, play a very important role in establishing effective and meaningful community partnerships.

The vision for collaboration is to enhance services so students reach their goals more quickly, expand outreach and service area footprints to increase enrollment, and strengthen the community network of services to improve students' economic stability. By definition, adult students who have low levels of literacy have at least one barrier to employment, and there are often other barriers to consistent participation in learning, training, and work. Addressing learners' multiple barriers requires community coordination and partnership. Below are three ways adult education programs and CBLOs and FBLOs can synergize their efforts.

1. Well-trained tutors can greatly enhance adult literacy services by providing one-on-one or one-to-few tutoring services that allow tutors to listen and respond to learners' cognitive processing. A tutoring situation can be the just-in-time instructional assistance needed to clarify and redirect misconceptions, boost confidence by making trial and error more comfortable, help students make connections and support transfer of learning from one concept to another, and encourage students to achieve their personal goals. Without these critical supports for literacy, numeracy, and language learning, adult students can get "stuck" in an educational level and lose motivation. Embedding tutors in adult education classrooms creates an opportunity to increase the intensity of services by providing additional time with individual learners and tailoring that time so that it reinforces classroom instruction and enhances students' comprehension and achievement.
2. The CBLOs and FBLOs are also excellent sources of community outreach and inreach. These organizations are

often connected to distinct populations of learners and other service providers in the community, and their reputation within those communities can be an asset to the recruitment and engagement efforts undertaken by adult education programs. We know that "word of mouth" from a trusted source is our best recruitment channel in any community, and our students often tell us that they heard about our programs from "friends and family" or from former or current students. CBLOs and FBLOs have native language resources in their organizations and may be able to help with native language messaging and engagement efforts. Making enrollment seamless from an English conversation group among new immigrants, for example, to an adult education class can provide the next step for learners looking to further their skills. Similarly, groups working to connect individuals returning to their communities from incarceration to needed services can offer their facilities as enrollment sites and/or class sites for local adult education programs. Deepening the connections between adult education programs and community-based programs beyond information sharing and referrals can support learners in getting enrolled as well as identifying and providing supportive services when participation barriers arise.

3. This past year of pandemic and economic disruption has demonstrated vividly how economically unstable some communities are and the many ways our vulnerable families may miss the services intended to support them. Service providers in communities must work more closely than ever to coordinate messaging and remove barriers to participation in services. In adult education, every student should be receiving what WIOA calls "career services", connecting them to information about Medicare, the Children's Health Insurance Program, and public health messaging; the Earned Income Tax Credit, the Child Care Subsidy Program, and federal stimulus payments; the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF); housing and eviction-prevention services; home Internet service stipends; and more. Information about these services may be provided by knowledgeable professionals and state agency practitioners, but adult learners with low literacy, numeracy, or English language proficiency often need additional assistance to understand the services, complete the applications, and take the necessary steps to receive the benefits. Partnering with community and faith-based organizations, whether or not they offer education services as part of their mission, to conduct service fairs and follow-up clinics, for example, can address these additional needs to help ensure that families are receiving the benefits for which they are eligible.

We know that teachers throughout the Commonwealth have provided and continue to provide extra support to students during the pandemic disruptions and that these sessions are critical to the retention and motivation of students who are struggling. Designing programs to include options for one-on-one support as part of planned service may be a lesson learned from the pandemic. Collaborating with CBLOs and FBLOs to dually enroll students is a promising model that can deliver the intensity and support students need and deserve to reach their goals.

Virginia Employment Commission's *Quick Guide to Relief Programs*

Virginia Career Works' *Common Referral Portal*

2021 PROGRESS CALENDAR

OCT

21–DEC 15 VALRC Online Courses

NOV

17–20 National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) Fall Virtual Conference
Hybrid

18–21 National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Annual Convention
Louisville, KY & Hybrid

DEC

23–JAN 3 VALRC offices closed

JAN

13–14 Virginia Association for Career & Technical Education (ACTE) Hybrid Professional Development & Leadership Seminar
Richmond, VA & Hybrid

20 VALRC Winter term online courses begin

ELPS & Adult Educators
(6 weeks)
Runs: 1/20/22–3/2/22

Improving Reading Instruction in Print Skills Professional Learning Community (PLC)
(6 weeks)
Runs: 1/20/22–3/2/22

MAR

22–25 TESOL 2022 International Convention & English Language Learning Expo
Pittsburgh, PA & Hybrid

POSTPONED

SETESOL
Richmond, VA
Moved to fall 2022

GED® Annual Conference
Atlanta, GA
Moved to July 2022 (awaiting date)

National College Transition Network Conference
Paused until further notice

National Career Pathways Network Conference
No information on future dates

Pro Literacy Conference on Adult Education
No information on future dates