



Using Research-Based Strategies to Improve Retention

by RANDALL STAMPER

There they are – staring at you. Well, a few are staring at you. Two in the back are having a conversation, apparently oblivious to your presence. One, over on the left side of the room, is staring out the window. One in the front row is not really staring so much as glaring at you. The rest are looking down at their books or scribbling in notebooks, though you've said nothing yet and have not handed out any forms for them to fill out. There they are: your charges for the next several weeks. You recognize a few familiar faces; most are new. If national statistics hold true, a few of them won't be around long enough for you to develop much of a lasting impression of them, nor they of you. As you know, these students are hard to keep around.

While recruitment is the first step toward reaching the Governor's goal, it is retention that is the most important, and perhaps the most difficult, facet of the Race to GED. You're a good teacher in a good program with supportive staff and solid resources. But your students

are pulled in myriad different directions. Their presence in your class is admirable. Given time and work, we know most of them could make substantial strides toward passing the GED exam. The key is to keep them coming back, to keep them in the seats and on track. How? To answer that question, *Progress* spoke with program managers around the state and consulted the latest information available concerning adult student retention. Practice and theory agreed in this case.

What became clear is that successful programs are using strategies confirmed to be effective by nationally recognized experts on adult education. Interviews with several managers supported the findings of an NCSALL research team led by John Comings. That team found that four factors are critical to ensuring that students stay in your program and make the advancements necessary to their success and your reporting figures (see sidebar, page 10).

Many of the respondent's comments point to a basic thesis that suggests it is important to create an environment

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where students view the relationship less as a student/teacher dyad and more as a partnership. Responsibility for harboring such an attitude falls squarely on the teachers' shoulders.

"The right teacher is a key to the success of the program," Shelia Harper of Southside Virginia Community College stated. "Look for a teacher who is fair, consistent, trustworthy, patient, organized and prepared, flexible, a good listener, adept at skills, and a person who is also engaged in lifelong learning." That's a tall order, no doubt. But Harper acknowledges that managers and lead teachers are often responsible for harboring such characteristics in their instructors. Such instructors can serve as role-models to students who have to juggle multiple, often conflicting, responsibilities. This speaks to the first factor identified by Comings' team: students need to be aware of the positive and negative forces affecting their schooling. Identifying those factors is the first step to managing

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A Few Words on *Progress*

It is astonishing how much has occurred in 12 short months. Last fall, the program year started with a focus on assessment and accountability. Then, we entered the Race to GED, and we haven't stopped since.

Special recognition must go to the Fast Track GED pilot sites. Dr. Yvonne Thayer recognized these programs and the ten new sites at the statewide program managers' meeting in August (see page 6). Dr. Thayer also recognized the important contributions of two program managers who have helped shape the Race to GED promotional campaign: Sue O'Connor, Henrico County Adult Education, and Dale Temple, Southside Programs for Adult and Continuing Education. Congratulations to all of these programs, their managers, and staffs for leading the Race to GED.

This fall, regional workshops on Fast Track GED will help programs refine their instructional offerings. As of this printing, over 100 adult educators have participated in the Fast Track training with two additional workshops yet to be held. While the Race to GED has put GED instruction in the forefront of our minds, we know that instruction is only one aspect of a successful adult education or literacy program. A major part of the program managers' meeting agenda was devoted to marketing and customer service. VALRC will follow up in November and December with a series of regional customer service workshops geared for managers and support staff. In the spring, VALRC will debut a new regional workshop designed to help teachers improve their skills in combining assessment results, student goals, program goals, and instructional materials for effective classroom instruction.

This issue of *Progress* contains two articles related to student retention, an important factor in attaining desired outcomes in all instructional programs. Randy Stamper highlights some current research on retention, including the four keys to persistence, in his article "Seat Time" (page 1). Marcia Phillips, who is developing VALRC's customer service workshop, discusses the intersection between customer service and retention in "Please, May I, Thank You" (page 8).

Finally, last year *Progress* underwent changes in its design and content. These upgrades were due in large measure to Randy Stamper, Assistant Editor, and Stephen Grainer, Designer. I am pleased to announce that Randy has been promoted to Editor, and this is the first issue of *Progress* under his leadership. If you have suggestions for articles you would like to see in *Progress* or if you would like to write an article, please contact Randy at stamperrl@vcu.edu.

While last year was extraordinarily busy for all of us, this year promises to be equally challenging. *Progress* will attempt to keep you up to date with new developments, new ideas, and, we hope, a new outlook.

Sincerely,



Calendar

November

2-6

AAACE Conf.
Louisville, KY

7-9

Intl. Reading Assn.
Southeast Conf.
Savannah, GA

11-13

Reading Recovery &
Comprehensive
Literacy Conf.
Baltimore, MD

December

1-4

Ntl. Reading Conf.
San Antonio, TX

2-3

ProLiteracy America
Northeast Regional
Training
Pittsburgh, PA

4-7

Ntl. Workforce
Association Conf.
St. Petersburg, FL

10-14

Ntl. Head Start
Association Conf.
Salt Lake City, UT

January

27-29

Technology,
Reading, & Learning
Disabilities Conf.
San Francisco, CA

Hello and welcome to Click, our regular technology column in *Progress*. As webmaster at the Resource Center, I hope to share my passion for technology, featuring tools and tips relevant to the educational field.

Not too long ago, a coworker came to me with a problem; she was getting more and more ads every time she tried to use her computer. Then another coworker came to me. And another. Since then, we've done a number of things to alleviate the problem, and I'd like to share a few of our more useful discoveries.

First, I should define some of the things I'm going to talk about, in particular **adware** and **spyware**. Adware is software installed on your computer for the purpose of displaying ads, generally as popup windows. Similarly, spyware is invasive software that tracks the way you use your computer and the Internet and sends that information to a company over the Internet. Both adware and spyware often come packaged with software downloaded from the web and are usually installed without alerting you.

Be Aware of Adware

You can never be sure what's actually being installed when you download and install software from the Internet. The safest way to protect yourself from accidentally installing adware or spyware (or viruses) is to refrain from installing any software downloaded from the Internet. Of course, this isn't always feasible, so you need programs like Ad-Aware and Spybot to help remove the peskier adware and spyware programs. Ad-Aware is available free for personal use and can be downloaded from www.lavasoftusa.com. Once installed, you should update the definitions before running it for the first time. You should run Ad-Aware on a weekly or monthly basis to remove any adware that creeps onto your computer. Spybot Search & Destroy is another useful program for detecting and removing spyware from your computer and can be downloaded from www.spybot.info. Un-

like Ad-Aware, Spybot runs constantly in the background to keep spyware from being installed in the first place. As with Ad-Aware (and your antivirus software), make sure to download updates on a regular basis.

Take Back Your Web

Popups on the web are becoming a thing of the past with new browsers and tools. Several browsers have offered built-in popup blocking for over a year, while recent changes to Internet Explorer in the latest service pack for Windows XP also enable this useful feature. To start surfing without popups, check out the following:

- Mozilla Firefox, a fast new web browser from the developers of Netscape that is more powerful and more secure than Internet Explorer (www.getfirefox.com)
- Google Toolbar, which also adds a google search box to your Internet Explorer toolbar and blocks popups (<http://toolbar.google.com>)

There are many other commercial options available, but the two above are free and work very well. Of course, if you run Windows XP, you can (and should) download the recently released service pack to get an updated version of Internet Explorer with built-in popup blocking. The service pack is available from Windows Update at <http://windowsupdate.microsoft.com>. (Caution: The service pack can take a long time to download over a dial-up connection. It is available only for the latest version of Windows.)

Take Back Your Email

Remember the days when spam was just canned meat? Nowadays when people mention spam, they probably aren't talking about that tasty treat but instead about the junk email that floods

their inbox daily. So what can you do about spam?

1. Use filters or rules to reroute it.

Most modern email software comes with a way of filtering email based on certain information. For example, you could filter all email that you receive from a specific email address to go straight to a specially designated Junk folder. See the help files for your email software for more information.

2. Don't click opt-out links.

You may have noticed opt-out links at the bottom of junk email that promise to remove you if you click on a link. Very often, these are blatant lies, used to verify your email address so that spammers can send even more junk email.

3. Use a throwaway email address.

More and more websites require registration with a valid email address. To avoid worrying about whether your personal (or work) email is going to be barraged with junk, sign up for free email with Hotmail or Yahoo! and use that email address for websites that require you to register.

4. Use a spam-catching service or software.

If your spam trouble is still overwhelming, you might check out services like Knowspam (www.knowspam.net) or software like SpamNet (www.spamnet.com) that use community filters to detect known spam and catch it before it arrives in your inbox. These do cost money, but if you are sinking in a sea of spam, they might be just what you need.

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Got a question or suggestion for a future topic? Email sdgrainer@vcu.edu with the subject "Click on this."

15 Grant Writing Tips From a Grant Reader

by VICTOIRE GERKENS-SANBORN

In today's competitive funding environment, writing a successful grant has become more challenging than ever. As a grant reader, I would like to share some insights that grant writing teams might find helpful.

1 Before you begin, conduct an internal assessment. After reading the Request for Proposal (RFP) and before writing the grant, you and your team should answer the following question: Does our program have the resources to implement and manage the grant, and meet funding requirements? Most applicants do; sadly, the ones that don't spend a great deal of time away from their clients or sap their resources in order to satisfy grant requirements.

2 Build a strong case. The strength of your grant application depends on how well you can demonstrate the need for your project. Use current statistics, precise language, and sound reasoning to lay your foundation. If the needs section does not make a strong case for funding your project, the rest of your proposal – no matter how well thought out – will fail. Find current sources in “Facts and Statistics” on the Resource Center website: www.aehweb.vcu.edu/.

3 Write to your audience. Are the grant readers specialists who are already knowledgeable about adult literacy, or is the grants committee comprised of generalists who are considering applications from a variety of organizations with diverse missions? Once you have established the make up of the grant reading committee, keep jargon to a minimum. Use only facts that will strengthen your case or inform someone who is not familiar with the subject. Concentrate on the unique situation in your region. Yes, the problem is worldwide, but you are seeking funding for a local project, and you should write from that point of view.

4 Answer all questions, even if they seem obvious or repetitive. You can, if pressed for space, refer to a previous answer, but it is probably wiser to use the suggested format. The more specific you are, the better. This keeps the grants committee from guessing.

5 Show, don't tell. Long narratives can hide vital information. Use charts, graphs, or tables to explain demographics or statistics, or to list goals, objectives, and anticipated outcomes. If an answer must be lengthy, find ways to break up the text and create white space. Bold important items or phrases. Use lists and bullets when feasible.

6 Be realistic. Describe only attainable, measurable goals. In addition, tailor your project to the amount of funds your program is requesting. Describe what you actually mean to achieve with \$5,000. Explain doable strategies, accepted benchmarks of success, and reasonable outcomes.

7 Piggyback on others' strengths. Enhance your program's capacity (and multiply your region's need) by listing meaningful and integrated collaborations. Yes, partnerships take effort, but you'll earn major points.

8 Call for help. To clarify instructions on the RFP, call the grantor.

9 Proof, edit, proof, edit, proof. Then, proof again.

10 Show an “I can do” attitude. Use a positive tone in describing a problem you can solve. If you must mention obstacles (and I can't think of too many reasons why you must), don't dwell on them. The grants committee wants to support your cause. It is truly interested in your solutions, but not if you seem overwhelmed or defeated from the start.

11 Finish as strong as you started. Give each section of your proposal equal weight and don't run out of space. Too often, writers skim over the evaluation, outcomes, and dissemination questions only because they are placed at the end of the RFP. Many mystery writers write the ending before the beginning. See if this technique works for you: it may help to keep you focused throughout the writing process.

12 Don't be a grant chaser. If your proposed project doesn't fit into your program's mission or strategic plan, why are you making this time-consuming effort?

13 Be a team player. Some of the best proposals are made by grant writing teams. Why? Because during brainstorming sessions, members offer different perspectives, levels of expertise, and talents. They can tackle larger, more demanding grants, breaking up cumbersome tasks, meeting pressing deadlines, and tapping into a wider variety of community resources.

Virginia Literacy Institute Awarded \$3.3 Million Early Reading First Grant

by MIKE FRONTIERO

The U.S. Department of Education has awarded the Virginia Literacy Institute at Virginia Commonwealth University's School of Education a \$3.3 million grant to collaborate with VCU Head Start in creating an early-childhood reading program that will be the first of its kind in Virginia.

The program, Richmond Early Reading First, will promote preschoolers' successful transition to Kindergarten and will ensure they have the knowledge and skills necessary for optimal reading development. The federal government has funded 32 Early Reading First projects across the country worth \$90 million this year. This is the first such grant awarded in Virginia.

"This grant will allow us to work with the children attending VCU's Head Start program to provide each child with high quality, pre-reading instruction so they can enter Kindergarten ready to learn and to achieve their full potential," said Mark Emblidge, director of the Virginia Literacy Institute and vice president of the Virginia Board of Education.

The early-reading program will work in conjunction with VCU Head Start – a program of the VCU School of Social Work. In addition to Emblidge, it will be directed by Joan Rhodes,

Ph.D., assistant professor of reading, and Evelyn Reed-Victor, Ph.D., associate professor of special education. Also serving on the project management team will be VCU Head Start Director Phyllis Grooms-Gordon, evaluator Christopher E. Chin, Ph.D., of Children's Hospital in Richmond, and Barbara Gibson, associate director of the Virginia Literacy Institute.

"This project will not only benefit the children in VCU's Head Start program, but will serve as a model for other early childhood education programs across Virginia and the nation as they prepare young children to become proficient readers," Rhodes said. "It is an exciting cooperative venture with the School of Social Work's successful Head Start program."

Richmond Early Reading First also will:

- provide professional development for pre-school teachers and assistance for parents to support their children's learning at home
- engage parents in training and consultation activities regarding early-reading strategies they can use at home
- work with an external evaluator to identify children at risk for reading difficulties.

To meet the instructional needs of

VCU Head Start children, the three-year grant will provide funds to extend the school day to six-and-one-half hours and to provide a full-day, eight-week summer program for three-year-old children. The grant also will allow VCU Head Start to offer full-day instruction throughout the summer for four-year-old children with a special, elementary school-based, four-week session for children entering Kindergarten.

VCU Head Start, a delegate agency of Richmond Public Schools, was founded in 1996. It serves 210 three-and-four-year-old children in a community-based partnership of six preschool programs.

The Virginia Literacy Institute was established as a partnership between VCU and the Virginia Literacy Foundation to conduct research and development projects in adult education and family literacy. It is located in the VCU School of Education, the 47th ranked School of Education in the United States. ■■

Mike Frontiero is a public relations specialist for Virginia Commonwealth University's University News Services. This story is reprinted with the permission of the author and University News Services.

14 Tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Grant readers have access to resources that will rectify wrong information, clarify faulty reasoning, or fill in glaring holes. If your proposal needs to skirt certain issues, should you be writing it at all?

15 Use a "fresh eye." Before mailing your proposal, ask someone who is not on your grant writing team to read for understanding and to check each section against the RFP. This will ensure that all requirements have been met and that your proposal says what you mean for it to say. ■■

Victoire Gerkens Sanborn is the Director of the Literacy Support Center and author of the 2003 Grants and Foundations booklet, available on the Resource Center website. Since 2002, she has served on three grant-writing committees that were awarded close to \$4 million in grants.



the 2004 Program Managers' meeting

by RANDALL STAMPER

The Race to GED has officially begun across Virginia. The annual program managers' meeting was held August 18th and 19th at the Sheraton South hotel in Richmond, and it marked the official rollout of the statewide marketing plan for the Governor's initiative. Attendance was high, and participants walked away with a wealth of resources to be used in marketing the Race in their localities.

Nearly two hundred people were on hand to learn about the marketing plan and to receive the training and resources necessary to contribute to the initiative. The two days were extremely busy with several seminars about marketing, promotions, and customer service – critical components of the Race. Dr. Pamela Kieker and Dr. Deborah Cowles, both professors in the Department of Marketing and Business Law at Virginia Commonwealth University, conducted seminars on marketing and customer service. The VALRC's Victoire Gerken Sanborn outlined the Marketing and Promotions Guide. Other presentations included information about the Polilogue, a web-based discussion forum for Fast Track programs and state personnel, and exam-

ples of marketing endeavors by the five Fast Track pilot sites: Russell County, Prince William County, Danville-Martinsville, Hampton, and Virginia Beach.

Dr. Yvonne Thayer, Director of the Office of Adult Education and Literacy, handed out several awards on the first day. Bette Sneed, Cynthia Cooper, Stacey Wright, Bonnie Mizenko, and Linda Allen were recognized for their ef-

for Lee, Scott, Wise, and Norton Public Schools (Rebecca Scott); Fairfax County (Bonnie Moore); Spotsylvania Regional Adult Education Program (Betsy Mathias); Southside Programs for Adult and Continuing Education (Dale Temple); Roanoke City Schools (Dot Hayes); Henrico County Adult Education (Susan O'Connor); Portsmouth City Public Schools (Judy Eure); the Dayton Learn-

"It is critical that all state and local agencies that have a role in providing services to adults who do not have a diploma or a GED certificate collaborate in working toward this goal."

-- Gov. Mark Warner

forts as the managers of the pilot sites. Dale Temple of Southside Programs for Adult and Continuing Education and Sue O'Connor of Henrico County Adult Education received plaques in appreciation of their hard work on the Race to GED marketing team.

The first day culminated in the introduction of the next ten Fast Track programs and their managers: Mount Rogers Adult Education (Susan Seymore); the Regional Adult Education Program

ing Center in the Harrisonburg area (Jim Orndoff); and New River Community College (Jenny Bolte). Each of the original pilot site directors will mentor two of the new programs as they begin their participation in the Fast Track.

On the second day, Dr. Thayer facilitated a roundtable discussion with the representatives from both the original and the newly announced Fast Track programs. This talk centered on explaining to new programs the design,



Program managers from the five Fast Track pilot sites, along with the next ten Fast Track managers, are recognized by Dr. Yvonne Thayer. The five pilot managers will each mentor two of the new sites.

definitions, and standards included in the Office of Adult Education and Literacy's Implementation Guide. Participants also discussed the methods and strategies key to conducting a successful Fast Track program.

As hard as everyone worked to get the meeting together, the real work begins now. The Office of Adult Education hopes to start 40 more Fast Track sites after the first of the year. The numbers from the first five are encouraging. It is obvious that students appreciate the structured style of the classes and the emphasis on setting and achieving goals. Completion rates suggest that many students are ready and willing to put in the time and effort required by Fast Track if the result is earning their GEDs quickly. As more and more programs come online, one key to success will be collaboration with other agencies. As Governor Warner stated in a letter to program managers, "Interagency collaboration is essential if we are to meet this goal. It is critical that all state and local agencies that have a role in providing services to adults who do not have a diploma or a GED certificate collaborate in working toward this goal. It will take the combined efforts of the involved agencies to locate, refer, and

serve those individuals."

Such collaboration, coupled with excellent customer service and an emphasis on achieving goals, will also facilitate better retention numbers. Several of the new Fast Track program managers and teachers mentioned the latter two aspects as important facets of their plans to keep students in classrooms long enough to make gains. Jim Andre, a

Students are encouraged to focus on completing forty hours of class time. Those who do are rewarded for their efforts, as is the program, which is then able to use those students' statistics in its reporting.

teacher with Henrico County, explained that his program has been conducting its own form of Fast Track with a "Race to 40" theme. Students are encouraged to focus on completing forty hours of class time. Those who do are rewarded for their efforts, as is the program, which is then able to use those students' statistics

in its reporting. Emphasizing goals and rewarding students who achieve them is cited again and again by programs as a successful strategy. Various managers, including Tonya Creasy from Northern Neck Adult Education, mentioned that they provide certificates to students who make educational level advancements. These tokens provide the students with a tangible sign of success, as well as motivation to continue their studies.

Most agreed that the meeting was a great success. Shelia Harper of Southside Virginia Community College commented that it was the best she had ever attended. She particularly appreciated the fact that each program manager received actual samples of marketing materials and a cd-rom that included the electronic copies of each sample. This should not only make it easier for programs to produce marketing materials on their own, but also will help ensure that the Race to GED message is consistent across Virginia. ■

Ed's note: Most of the marketing materials included on the cd-rom are also available on the Resource Center's website. To access them, go to www.aelweb.vcu.edu, and click on the link to Race to GED under Projects and Publications.

PLEASE, MAY I, THANK YOU:

Customer Service is Key to Improving Your Retention

by MARCIA PHILLIPS

With all the attention now being focused on adult education programs, Fast Track, and the lofty goals that have been set for the next several years, you might feel that life as you know it has gotten out of control. The numbers you are expected to achieve are daunting. No doubt, you already know you will need to develop some strategies for operating in a different environment. Developing a strong customer service initiative for your program is one of the easiest strategies to begin working on. Not only will it help you in all aspects of your program, but it requires little more than self-awareness and basic courtesy to be effective. These are traits we all have. It's simply a matter of stressing their importance to yourself and your staff.

We in education think of ourselves as client-centered professionals. We are cheered by the stories of success, and we love the affirmation that these stories bring to our work. But the realities of overly busy days with too much to do and too few resources often cause us to forget to think about how others view us. Those views, however, are very important to our success and the success of our clients. If we make our clients comfortable, make them feel that they are welcome and in good hands, they are more likely to persist.

Customer service has become a buzzphrase in recent years. Because so many business transactions these days are self-service and impersonal, most businesses now spend considerable time and effort building awareness of the need to be courteous and helpful on those occasions that require person-to-person interaction. However, front-door greeters in huge warehouse stores, or sales clerks correctly

reading your name off your charge card when they thank you for shopping with them are shallow responses to the human needs for recognition and acknowledgment, needs that we should be aware of when dealing with our clients.

From the Front Door to the Final Handshake

Everyone: instructors, office staff, specialists, and program managers establish the tone and the service level of a program. First impressions take only a few seconds to form, but they are long lasting. The way a newcomer is greeted establishes his perception of the program and even his probable chances for success. If he is faced with indifference or condescension in that first meeting, the

Not all of us are extroverts, but everyone can and should be courteous and accepting.

chances he will return rest solely on his perceived need for your services. However, if that person is greeted warmly and given the necessary information in a friendly manner, you and he have formed a bond. It is more likely that he will perceive that you are both involved in a partnership even before he has begun his classwork.

Teachers, too, create first impressions by the way they come into their classroom and the manner in which they address their students. If the atmosphere is warm and friendly, the class is more likely to connect than if everyone is withdrawn and nervous. The teacher must not only facilitate learning, but also do as much as possible to create a sense of cohesion with and among students. Not

all of us are extroverts, but everyone can and should be courteous and accepting.

Ring, Ring, Ring, Ring...

On busy days, the level of stress in an office is high. Telephone calls and drop-in visitors add to the burden. It has been said that any position where the telephone rings more than four times an hour is a high-stress job. Small wonder, then, that many adult education programs around the state have turned to the answering machine. We know that because we call you for information or questions, and we hear the message that yes, we have gotten the correct number, and also that we have called during office hours. But we don't get our answer. For that we must leave our names and our numbers and wait for you to call us.

It is an irritant for us, particularly when we call several programs and never talk to an actual person. Insofar as we are your customers, it is poor service to us as well. But it is not nearly as bad for us as it is for the young woman who is nervous about the options she faces and concerned that she will not be able to develop the skills and knowledge she needs to get a job to support herself and her family. That potential student has just received poor service, no matter how politely it was intended. You have shown that during the business day, it is more important to you to do your *real work* than it is to take the call from a potential student. Do that enough times, and you have cost yourself enough students to fill at least one more class. Then, that *real work* will not be important, because it is the students who make the work necessary.

Think of all the telephone transactions you participate in where you are the only live body. Efficient though it is, reporting a problem to a computer-gen-

erated system does not satisfy the need to be sure that we are going to get the help we need. Moreover, our clients are doing much more than reporting a problem; they're asking for help to improve their lives. Such questions warrant our full attention the first time, every time. It may be difficult, yes. But it is crucial that as many callers as possible are greeted with a warm, living voice.

Uhhh, Ummm, Hmmm

Part of the problem outlined above is that small programs often do not have sufficient staffing to handle all of their incoming phone calls. It is not uncommon for someone else in the school system to take all the calls and forward them to the appropriate parties. This invariably leads to a loss of customer service. These people do not always know the answers to the questions about adult education offerings. They may actually know less about your services than the people calling. This is where a proactive program manager can make a difference.

As a program, you can provide the answers to frequently asked questions. Put together a brief guide and provide it to the staff in the office where the telephone is answered. You will probably discover that these folks are very happy to be able to answer the questions; after all, no one likes to tell the public, "I don't know." Be sure to keep the guide up to date. Make sure that you give those people the information about testing and assessment dates and upcoming classes in a timely fashion. Be sure that your part-time staffers are fully aware of what is happening. Not knowing the answers to simple questions such as, "When can I come in to be tested?" or "What days does the class in such-and-such location meet?" is not only poor customer service, it is bad advertising as well.

Theirs, Not Yours

The main difference between delivering a product and delivering a service is this. If you deliver a product, anyone can see that it is designed well and performs

its function dependably and adequately. People can see what they have bought. They can assess it against a similar object that they have had in the past, or that their neighbors have. The product is tangible. With a service, however, the product cannot be seen. People can go to classes and they can learn, or not. But only they will know if they have gained the knowledge and skills they looked for. Only they will know if the class they took is as good as their colleague's or neighbor's. Whether or not you have fulfilled your students' needs rests in their perception, not yours.

That is where strong client awareness adds value to any aspect of your program. Whenever people come to you for

Studies have shown that when participants feel connected, they will persist. If someone misses a class meeting and is greeted with 'I missed you last time,' his perception of his position in your class is strengthened.

help, they are taking the first in a series of steps to transform their lives. They trust you when you say that you will help them build their knowledge base, or that you will assist them in preparing for the GED. That trust makes them vulnerable to you and your program. Showing that you take their trust seriously and that you are committed to providing the best classes, support, and materials available is important. Letting them know that they personally are important to you in your day at work and that their success is your reason for being there cements a relationship. And in these hurried and stressful times, personal relationships are more and more important. That is why all good salespeople work on developing relationships before they focus on promoting their product. And in sales, the

more intangible the product, the more goes into the relationship.

This is the role customer service or client awareness, you can call it anything you like, plays in retention. Studies have shown that when participants feel connected, they will persist. If someone misses a class meeting and is greeted with "I missed you last time," his perception of his position in your class is strengthened. Consequently, if he feels that he plays a strong part in the class, he is less likely to drop out. While the program manager sets the tone for the program, everyone employed in it plays a role in providing good customer service. The group climate is important, but each staff person can choose whether or not to deliver good customer service.

Checking Yourself

How is your program doing? Performing a self-assessment can give you your answer to that question. You can call your program anonymously and see what kind of telephone service you get. Have a good friend or neighbor come in to the office looking for information. When you observe classes, pay particular attention to how the instructor connects with the learners. Rate your program for information given, level of friendliness, and courtesy. Look for areas that need improvement, not an assurance that you are doing as well as can be expected. Remember that while it is a job for us, it is a life-change for them. ■

Ed's note: The Resource Center has developed a training module, Delivering Good Customer Service, for adult education programs around the state. Dates will be announced on our website.

Marcia Phillips is Special Projects Specialist with the VALRC. She has worked in adult education for over twenty years. Marcia is leading the development and implementation of the customer service training that the Resource Center will be offering.



Seat Time: continued from front

them. And a teacher is in the best position to help students learn how.

Outside of the classroom, the staff must also provide support and services. Tonya Creasy of Northern Neck Adult Education explained that in her program, students are encouraged to drop in from time to time or call for help on subjects. More and more, students are availing themselves of these opportunities. Such support creates a community atmosphere in which the student knows that everyone in the program is there to help. This builds self-efficacy – a student's feeling that he can accomplish the

tasks placed in front of him.

Finally, the importance of goals can't be overstated. Whether it is Fast Track, GED preparation, or ABE, having students set goals and, then, providing them with ways to monitor progress toward those goals are keys to keeping students motivated and moving ahead. Creasy's program provides students with certificates for every educational gain. Jim Andre and Susan O'Connor of Henrico County Adult Education have established a "Race to 40 (hours)" concept. Students focus on a goal of 40 hours of classroom instruction. Those who attain

the goal are recognized with awards. Assessment and recognition are two factors identified by the NCSALL research team as crucial to the success of goal-setting. Students need to know where they are and where they are going. Programs that recognize and support those needs not only reward their students, but also are rewarded themselves with exceptional retention and pass rates. This is borne out by NRS data on retention rates state-wide. The Department of Education's data analysis suggests that for fiscal year 2003-2004, retention in Virginia adult education programs was at 80%. This represents a 10% gain over the 2002-2003 figure.

All of this information leads back to where we started – a teacher in the classroom looking at a group of students who are pulled in many different directions and asking, "How can I keep those seats filled?" Practice and theory both suggest that a big part of the answer is to confront the conflicting responsibilities together head-on and to stress the importance of goals in the classroom. Monitoring and rewarding progress toward those goals, most agree, will keep students coming back for more. ■

Randall Stamper is the publications manager for the Resource Center and the editor of Progress.



Four Key Supports to Persistence

A NCSALL research team headed by John Comings conducted a study into adult student persistence from 1997 to 2003. Among many findings based on literature review, interviews, and field tests, the team identified four key supports to persistence among adult students. These supports are summarized below.

1. **Awareness and management of the positive and negative forces that help and hinder persistence:** Adult learners experience both positive and negative forces related to persistence. Helping them identify and manage those forces can provide insights into

how to persist in learning.

2. **Self-efficacy:** This refers to a student's feeling of being able to accomplish a task. Programs can help build students' self-efficacy by providing experiences that allow them to be successful and then providing evidence of that success, as well as facilitating a community atmosphere that extends beyond the classroom.
3. **Students establish goals:** Program staff should establish clear goals upon students' entrance into a program, and teachers should use these goals as the context for instruction and inter-

mittently review them.

4. **Progress toward a goal:** Once a goal is set, programs and teachers should not only assist a student in working toward that goal, but also provide a range of assessments that allow students to measure their progress.

Source: Comings, J., Cuban, S., Parrella, A., & Soricone, L. (2002). *The First Five Years: National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy 1999-2001* (#23). Cambridge, MA: National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy.

From Fast Food to Fast Track

by APRIL L. ANDREWS

The GED test has been offered in my community for as long as I can remember. Many times I thought of taking the classes, but for some reason or another, I would make an excuse. I dropped out of high school at 16. I wasn't doing well in school, and I thought it would be easier to get a fast food job and work full time.

Over the years, I tried several GED classes, but they just never seemed right. Students were given workbooks, and they just sat in a room and worked in them. Also, there was no time limit to take the test; you just worked in the workbooks until you thought you were ready.

One day I realized I wanted a better

usually going to class – became the easiest. This wasn't failure; this was fun! I actually looked forward to going to classes. I would not have missed one session. The people in the Fast Track program offered me constant encouragement: "You can do it. We know you can." That support was so important to me keeping at it.

When the eight weeks ended, I felt confident and prepared to take the GED test. Before, when I attended high school, I never felt confident in test taking, which probably contributed to why I didn't finish high school. But I took the GED test, and I felt confident about it. My test results came in the mail a few weeks later. I passed the GED! I now have the equivalent to a high school edu-

"This wasn't failure; this was fun! I actually looked forward to going to classes. I would not have missed one session."

job and a good career. I wanted to establish a good foundation for my children to build on. That's when I realized I needed my GED. I went to the local adult education office at New River Community College to sign up. The staff was so helpful and informative. They encouraged me to sign up for the Fast Track class, an 8-week program that focused on the skills I needed to be successful. All I needed was to be committed and to allow them to teach and prepare me for taking the GED test.

Because of the support and friendliness of the staff, going to class was not as scary as I thought. Even so, the old fears about school came back. After so long of feeling like a failure, I worried that this would end the same way. To my surprise, I had the best teacher and support that I could ever imagine! Even though I was working as a Certified Nursing Assistant at the time, I found that what I thought would be the hardest thing – ac-

tion. I am very proud. I have confidence in education and myself. My only regret is not realizing this earlier in life.

I am currently taking college classes to fulfill the dream I've had as long as I can remember: to become a nurse. I am building a foundation for my children; now they also will know the importance of an education. I just want to scream to the world, because I'm so happy. This is what everyone should be doing!

Thanks to all of the wonderful staff in the New River Community College Adult Education department. This is truly a wonderful program. I am very proud and thankful to have the program available for my community. ■■

April, a proud Fast Track graduate of the Regional New River Community College Adult Education Program, received her GED diploma in May 2004 and immediately began classes at New River Community College in the nursing field.



Student Retention Suggested Sources

Below is a short list of recommended publications concerned with adult learner retention. The final report from NCSALL's study on adult learner retention, due in fall of 2003, is yet to be issued as of the time of this publication.

- Barron Jones, J. D. (1998). Retention and the ged. *Focus on Basics*, 2 (B), 15-17.
- Bingman, M.B., & Ebert, O. (2000). "I've Come a Long Way:" *Learner-Identified Outcomes of Participation in Adult Literacy Programs* (#13). Cambridge, MA: National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy.
- Comings, J., Cuban, S., Bos, J., & Porter, K. (2003). "As Long as it Takes:" *Responding to the Challenges of Adult Student Persistence in Library Literacy Programs*. New York: Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation.
- Comings, J., Cuban, S., Bos, J., & Taylor, C. (2001). "I Did it For Myself:" *Studying Efforts to Increase Adult Learner Persistence in Library Literacy Programs*. New York: Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation.
- Comings, J., Parrella, A. & Soricone, L. (1999). *Persistence Among Adult Basic Education Students in Pre-GED Classes* (#12). Cambridge, MA: National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy
- Comings, J., Parrella, A., & Soricone, L. (2000). Helping adults persist: four supports. *Focus on Basics*, 4(A), 1-6.
- Garner, B. (Ed.). (1998). Learner Motivation [Special Issue]. *Focus on Basics*, 2(A).
- Wonacott, M. E. (2001). Adult students: recruitment and retention. retrieved Sept 20, 2004, from Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education website: <http://www.cete.org/acve/docgen.asp?tbl=pab&ID=108>.
- Young, M., Fleischman, H., Fitzgerald, N., & Morgan, M. (1994). *National Evaluation of Adult Education Programs: Patterns and predictors of Client Attendance*. Arlington, VA: Development Associates.

Charlottesville Festival of Cultures: EL/Civics in Action

by SUSAN ERNO & DEBRA TULER



Charlottesville's first annual Festival of Cultures began, as most things do, with an idea. Our area's increasing diversity hit home last fall when we realized we had a class with sixteen students from sixteen different countries with sixteen different native languages. Both the richness and the challenges associated with a diverse population was seeping into the schools, workplace, and the fabric of daily life. Native Charlottesvilleans saw people waiting at the bus stop in traditional dress, but how much did either group know about each other?

Our philosophy of civics has consistently focused on a dual purpose: to prepare learners for successful transition into all aspects of community life, and to prepare the community to better understand and interact with their newest residents. We believe that to become effective participants in the community, ESOL learners need not only to understand their rights and responsibilities and how to navigate in American society, but also to engage in a process of mutual information sharing with others.

Thus, the purpose of the festival was multi-fold: to celebrate the cultural diversity in our community; to increase awareness of that diversity; and to build a bridge of communication between newcomers and established residents in the Charlottesville area. We envisioned

the festival as a gathering place where all could come together to celebrate, take pride in, and share the multiple cultures found in our community.

The planning committee, under the direction of Debra Tuler and Heidi Gordon, ESOL instructors and coordinators of the festival, consisted primarily of ESOL learners. Planning this event provided learners an opportunity to take on leadership roles and to engage in community outreach. We met monthly at the start and more frequently as the festival date neared. The committee, as well as other students, helped with all aspects of the festival from coming up with the overall plan and idea, to finding sponsors, recruiting participants, doing publicity, and performing.

The festival was a colorful and joyful celebration and a huge success with over 400 in attendance. It took place on a sunny day in May in Lee Park, near the downtown pedestrian mall. It included entertainment – music, dance, and storytelling – cultural exhibits, hands-on craft activities, craft vendors, and information booths from organizations that serve the ESOL population. The entertainment, exhibits, and crafts spanned the globe. One hands-on activity, the creation of a multicultural unity tree, demonstrated that the globe could be found right here in our city.

One of the greatest benefits of the festival for learners was that they became

leaders and teachers connected to each other and the larger community. In addition, they learned about services offered to them in the community, such as health, interpretation services, the transit system, other educational opportunities, and more. Finally, it satisfied an articulated need to give back to the community by sharing their culture and talents. At the same time, the larger community learned about and appreciated both the rich diversity in our midst and our common interests. "Family is everything" was written on a leaf for the unity tree. Watching the families and friends singing, dancing, and playing together, you couldn't help but agree.

The Festival of Cultures was a project of the Charlottesville City Schools Adult Education Program. It was partially funded by an English Language/Civics Grant. For further information, contact Susan Erno, Adult Education Program Coordinator at 434 245-2817 or email susan.erno@ccs.k12.va.us ■

Susan Erno is the Adult Education Coordinator for Charlottesville City Schools and Instructional Specialist for Planning District 10.

Debra Tuler has Masters degrees in both linguistics and in cultural anthropology. She began teaching ESL in 1988 in the Boston area and has been with the Charlottesville Adult Education Program since 1998.

Two Rounds of Applause for Virginia ESOL

by ANITA PRINCE

Virginia is one of eight states selected to participate in a national consortium to develop curriculum content standards for English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). Chosen through a competitive process, Virginia will join Florida, Illinois, Massachusetts, Missouri, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Washington to work with the American Institutes for Research over the 18 months of the development project. It is anticipated that the state will employ a process similar to the one used during the summer to produce draft curriculum standards for the five content areas of the GED. Participation from local practitioners across the state was solicited through competitive

applications, and the process involved about 35 of Virginia's best and brightest adult educators. While contributing to the work of the consortium at the national level, Virginia will be able to address any unique needs for its learners and practitioners. David Red of Fairfax County and Nancy Faux of the Resource Center will be the content experts serving on the consortium. Jane Swing will manage the Virginia process and the use of Polilogue, a web-based resource for a virtual community of practice. A preliminary meeting of the consortium took place in early October. It is anticipated that members of the field will be actively involved in this process.

Round two of applause goes to con-

gratulate Debbie Cargill of the Prince William County Adult Education program for her invitation to be a panelist at the Building A Common Civic Identity symposium presented by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services and Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. Debbie will share the stage with notable officials such as Tom Ridge, Director of the Department of Homeland Security. Virginia can be proud of its ESOL programs, practitioners, and learners. ■

Anita Prince is the Curriculum and Instruction Specialist for the Virginia Department of Education, Office of Adult Education and Literacy.

Virginia Businesses Show Support for Race to GED

by PATTY SHORTT

We are all winners in the Race to GED. Adult learners win when they pass the GED tests. Employers win when they provide employee access to GED classes. Adult educators win when the GED pass rate doubles. Economic developers win when an educated work force attracts new industries to Virginia. And thanks to our partners' commitment to support the Race to GED, we also have Applebee's winners.

The Virginia Lottery has provided high visibility for a Race to GED display booth adjacent to the Lottery station at eight major statewide events including the Pork Festival, Harborfest, Salem Fair, Galax Fiddler's Convention, NASCAR – Bristol Fan Appreciation, Hillsville Gun Show, Hampton Bay Days, and the Virginia State Fair. Local adult education programs are manning the Race to GED display booth at many other local events and providing information and marketing materials to thousands of people.

At each statewide event, adults inter-

ested in signing up to start GED classes are eligible to enter a drawing for a \$75 gift certificate to Applebee's Restaurant. Dr. Yvonne Thayer, Director of the Office of Adult Education and Literacy, draws the winning name, and the staff verifies the individual as a viable GED candidate. The winner receives a letter of congratulations and encouragement from Dr. Thayer, along with the \$75 gift certificate to Applebee's.

Mr. George E. Hunnicutt, Jr., President of Pepsi Bottling Company of Norton, is one of our corporate partners in Southwest Virginia. Mr. Hunnicutt's generous support is the source of the Applebee's gift certificates. The Applebee's gift certificates are drawing attention to the Race to GED display booth and are generating incentive for people to sign-up.

Partnerships are vital to our success. We cannot win the Race to GED alone. We must leverage our ability by creating associations and partnerships in a common interest that will pay big dividends. The five pilot Race to GED sites

have been creative in developing such partnerships. In addition to Mr. Hunnicutt and the Virginia Lottery, Virginia Employment Commission, Department of Social Services, Virginia Association of Elementary School Principals, Virginia's race industry, Verizon Reads, Hardee's, a marketing firm, radio stations, cable stations, grocery stores, and many other public and private organizations have joined us in the Race to GED.

Be proactive in establishing Race to GED partnerships. It is truly amazing to see the positive response and willingness to be a Race to GED partner – just ask.

For more information about establishing Race to GED partnerships, telephone Patty Shortt at 804-225-3997 or email pshortt@mail.vak12ed.edu. ■

Patty Shortt is the Workforce Development Specialist for the Virginia Department of Education, Office of Adult Education and Literacy. She has worked in education for several years and holds a B.S. in sociology and a Masters in public administration.

Email And Security

It seems like every week sees the release of a new email virus. No matter how prolific viruses become, there are some simple steps you can take to avoid nearly any infection:

1. **Never open attachments from someone you don't know.** Would you eat candy from a complete stranger? Why would you trust your computer to them?
2. **Cautiously open attachments from people you do know.** Unless you're expecting an attached file, don't open it. If you're not sure, call the

person and ask.

3. **Don't follow links blindly.** The text for a link in an email can say anything. Links that say they go to one website may go somewhere else. If in doubt, type the link into your browser by hand or forego visiting altogether.
4. **Don't just give your email address to anyone.** Save your personal email address for friends, family and work associates. Use your throwaway address (see page 3) for everything else. Lately, the writing in email gener-

ated by viruses has gotten more cunning, often masquerading as an email from your system administrators telling you that you have a virus and asking you to open an attached document to clean it up. The attached document is actually a virus. While it is conceivable that your mail server administrator might contact you and ask you to run a patch, you should verify these emails by contacting your administrator before opening any included attachments.

In the next issue, we'll take a look at intellectual property and fair use laws. ❖

Race to GED Message Appears on Unemployment Insurance Checks

An agreement with the Virginia Employment Commission (VEC) promises to aid in recruitment efforts for the Race to GED. Tens of thousands of potential students are now receiving a message encouraging them to earn their GEDs. With the help of Dee Esser, Director of the VEC, the Office of Adult Education and Literacy has arranged for all unemployment checks printed in the coming months to include the message, "Pass the GED test and qualify for higher paying jobs. Call toll free 877-37-MY-GED or email ged@vcu.edu." The message appears just above the perforation where

the check is attached to the stub. Recipients of the checks who call the statewide GED helpline will be given information about, and encouraged to contact, their local programs for more information.

Woody Tucker, Chief of Benefits for the VEC, stated that twenty-six to twenty-eight thousand checks are issued weekly. He went on to explain that approximately five thousand new check recipients are added to the rolls each week, while about the same number are taken off due to individuals obtaining employment or having their benefits terminated for other reasons. Consequently, we will

contact approximately five thousand new, potential students each week of the campaign. As of October 6, according to Tucker, 74,374 checks bearing the message have been mailed. The VALRC has hired an extra student worker and contracted with a call center to help George Bailey and Jason Guard handle the expected influx of calls. We will be doing our best to track the response generated from the checks and will let you know what the numbers look like in an upcoming issue of *Progress*. ❖

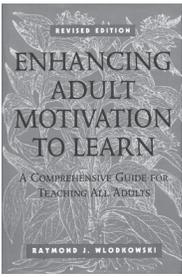


Join us in welcoming Debbie and Lauren to the Resource Center. Debbie is our new program development specialist, and Lauren joins as online training specialist.

The New Kids on the Block

The Resource Center would like to welcome two new staff members. Debbie Bergtholdt joined us in August as a Program Development Specialist. Debbie designs and implements training for teachers and program managers based on their needs and the ever changing priorities of our business. She also monitors several lists in an effort to keep the field up to date on issues relating to adult education and literacy. You may reach Debbie at: dbergholdt@vcu.edu.

Lauren Ellington joins us as Online Training Specialist. Lauren has spent the last six years as a teacher in Colonial Heights Public Schools. She has master's degrees in both teaching and adult education with a specialization in distance learning. Her primary focus at the Resource Center will be online professional development. In that capacity, she will oversee our current online courses and will contribute to the development of new courses. If you need to contact Lauren, please send her an email at: lellington@vcu.edu. ❖



Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn: A Comprehensive Guide for Teaching All Adults

Author: RAYMOND WLODKOWSKI / Review by DONALD FINN

Motivating learners to participate in educational activities is an issue faced by instructors in all educational settings including those who instruct adults. Whether they teach in a GED, ESOL, or workplace classroom, instructors are often challenged to keep their learners “on task and enthusiastic.” In the second edition of *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn: A Comprehensive Guide for Teaching All Adults*, Raymond Wlodkowski approaches the issue of motivating adult learners from a 360-degree perspective that includes looking at the roles of both adult learners and their instructors. According to the dust jacket, “This valuable resource is for teachers, trainers, and anyone who wants learning to be a motivating experience for all adults.” Wlodkowski relies on an easy-to-follow writing style and presents the principles of adult education, instructional clarity, and motivation in an uncomplicated manner that clearly illustrates how these elements are transferable to a variety of adult education settings.

My first exposure to Wlodkowski’s book came as I was conducting research for a curriculum design course in my doctoral program. Specifically, I was researching materials about the characteristics of effective adult education instructors. I found Wlodkowski’s ideas so useful that I later integrated many of his concepts into instructional opportunities I designed for the Resource Center, and I made it a required text for the online, graduate-level introduction to adult learners course that I developed and taught.

The book begins with a discussion of motivation and the impact that motivation has on instructional effectiveness.

Citing research, Wlodkowski establishes the link between motivation and the application of skills and principles learned in the classroom. The idea of relevance of learning is reinforced often with examples and scenarios from various instructional settings. The author also discusses the unique characteristics of adult learners, including emotional and psychological considerations and the multiplicity of demands that adults confront daily. Throughout the book, Wlodkowski reinforces the positive relationship between motivated adult learners and their achievement in the instructional environment.

In chapter two, Wlodkowski explores the characteristics of instructors who successfully motivate adults to learn and take ownership of their learning. He asserts that adult learners act as “consumers” of education who enter into learning settings with “personally relevant goals.” According to Wlodkowski, successful adult instructors are those who possess a number of characteristics. One of the key characteristics is empathy toward learners and their educational purposes and goals. The concept of empathy toward adult learners is developed through a discussion inspired by the writings of Carl Rogers and Daniel Goleman. Empathy is presented in three parts:

1. Having a realistic understanding of the learners’ goals, perspectives, and expectations for what is being learned
2. Adapting instruction to the learners’ levels of experience and skill development
3. A continuous consideration of the learners’ perspectives and feelings

Instructors who are empathetic toward their adult learners help their learners to develop persistence and a love for learning.

Wlodkowski later introduces 60 specific motivational strategies that instructors can integrate into their settings to help motivate their adult learners. Each strategy is presented in detail using helpful examples and scenarios. The first 30 strategies are designed to create an inclusive environment for all learners and an attitude toward the learning tasks or units that is positive and anticipates success. Strategies 31 through 47 help the learner to develop meaning while engaged in learning activities with the purposes of maintaining their attention, evoking the interest of the learner, and engaging and challenging the learner. Strategies 48 through 60 concentrate on concluding lessons to help engender competence using assessment and communication techniques.

The final chapter provides the reader with ideas for the successful integration of the motivational strategies into the learning setting. The author arranges the strategies in an easy-to-follow table, and he presents the reader with four specific examples for applying the motivational framework in the instructional planning process. Through these examples, Wlodkowski demonstrates how instructors can choose appropriate motivational strategies in the lesson building process that develop competence in the learner and to meet the objectives of each lesson.

Once you read *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn*, I think you will agree that this book should be required reading for anyone who teaches adults, regardless of the setting. ■

Donald Finn, Jr., is the Higher Education Disability Training Coordinator for Professional Development Academy (PDA), a project of the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Workplace Supports at Virginia Commonwealth University.

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Community Commitment: How One NOVA Company is Supporting Literacy

by AL RAMSEY, PhD

In Fauquier County, a man brought his family 9,000 miles from Southeast Asia to provide a higher quality of life for his family; a couple from Eastern Europe flew 4,000 miles to find a safe haven for political freedom; and a woman traveled 5,000 miles from South America to find the opportunity to pursue her dreams. There are many immigrants in the U.S. who have journeyed long distances in their pursuit of happiness, but physical relocation is only the beginning of their journeys. Overcoming the gaps in culture, customs, and language will be the next daunting challenge they face, and often these gaps are overwhelming. Individuals such as Vaughne Donnelly recognize this problem and are stepping forward to do something about it.

Vaughne is a volunteer tutor with the Literacy Volunteers of Fauquier County (LVFC), a nonprofit organization that provides literacy resources to adults in the local community. LVFC is based in

Warrenton, VA, and many of its students participate in the organization's ESL programs. Vaughne teaches two ESL classes per week, with students from countries as diverse as Mexico, Honduras, Colombia, Vietnam, and Russia. Vaughne has helped many of her students make significant progress with their literacy goals.

Because LVFC is a nonprofit organization, it relies on volunteers to make its programs work. What has helped enable Vaughne to volunteer her time is her company's community service program. She is a project manager at Vecna Technologies, Inc. Vecna encourages its employees to spend approximately 10% of their paid time volunteering in community service activities. "Enthusiasm drives employee commitment beyond work projects to substantial involvement in community service," says Deborah Theobald, CEO of Vecna. There are also organizations such as Greater DC Cares and NetworkForGood.com that serve as

bridges for individuals and companies looking to contribute to community service at the grass roots level, and there is always room for more volunteers to join such organizations.

There exists a great need in many Virginia communities for resources that help immigrants get acclimated to the U.S. The goal of LVFC is to improve the basic communication for people in Fauquier County, and many ESL students are making measurable strides toward their goals for literacy. Volunteers are stepping forward to help these students reach their goals, and organizations are making it possible for volunteers to come forward and make a difference. ■

Al Ramsey, PhD., works as a software engineer for Vecna Technologies, Inc., in their Falls Church, VA, office. He is also one of the community service coordinators for Vecna and can be reached at aramsey@vecna.com.