

LEARN

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Adult Literacy Program
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Alive!



Fall 2011

NO BOUNDARIES

On this seemingly large planet, people from different parts of the globe cross paths at what appears random coincidence. I don't believe in coincidence. I know that my decision to volunteer as a tutor with LEARN brought my path to a crossroad with two extraordinary women I wouldn't have had the honor to know otherwise. LEARN is designed to help students improve English literacy, but I quickly discovered that my students are giving me as much or more in return. Suyoung and Youngran broaden my world and help me understand life in Korea. They also help me understand that no matter what part of the world; women have common concerns, hopes, sadness, needs and a harmony that comes from bonding with one another.

Within minutes of meeting my first student, Suyoung, the nervousness each of us felt literally melted like the last spring snow on newly sprouted crocus. I soon understood that the first order of business at all of our sessions was catching up with each other and feeling the warmth of friendship. Suyoung was fluent in Korean and Chinese, and had a solid understanding of English grammar. This highly educated young woman was a quick study, and we reveled in her mastery of pronouncing difficult English sounds not included in Korean or Chinese. Her laughter was contagious.

After a short six months when Suyoung told me her husband's company had promoted him to a new position...in Korea...my heart broke. But I quickly realized that my sadness couldn't come close to that of Suyoung and her family, leaving beautiful San Diego after three years. I just couldn't imagine tutoring anyone else. At our next session, one of her first comments was that I must continue tutoring. I shared my thoughts and the probability that I wouldn't be continuing. Her well planned and persuasive campaign was relentless! Her explanation that there were many others like her who needed my help made me suspicious that there was more to her plan than what was showing on the surface. When I asked if she had someone in mind, the telltale twinkle in her eyes and deep dimples that appeared with her bright smile told me everything: "Yes, my best friend. Her name is Youngran."



L to R: Youngran, Linda, Suyoung

So, now I'm under the spell of Youngran, of course. And here I go again, blessed with the privilege of helping Youngran with her English, and she has given me her trust. We're both in good hands, thanks to Suyoung.

And thanks to technology and Skype, we "see" Suyoung and her family regularly, so the kids don't grow up before we can lay hands on them again. My husband John and I are now making initial plans for our next vacation: South Korea. It appears this big world isn't so big after all, as love knows no boundaries.

Linda Henry
LEARN Tutor

LEARN 2010-2011 Facts & Figures

- 247 learners received 1-on-1 literacy instruction from 125 tutors
- 2,104 hours of 1-on-1 literacy instruction
- 509 ESL learners were served
- 756 adults received Literacy or ESL instruction
- 11,957 total hours served by volunteer tutors and instructors
- 191 Citizenship class hours

Source: monthly tutor reports, monthly ESL reports

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LESSONS IN LANGUAGE AND LIFE

Like most LEARN tutors, Jo-El Tapia wanted to make a difference in somebody's life. When she began tutoring at the Bonita Branch, she gathered materials and looked forward to helping her learner improve her literacy skills. Soon after beginning their sessions; however, Jo-El's learner took some time off due to the birth of her baby. Jo-El was back to square one, looking for a new learner to work with. As good fortune would have it, opportunity came knocking in the form of a new ESL class at the Chula Vista residential complex Towncentre Manor.

This small ESL class, a partnership between LEARN, Towncentre Manor, and South Bay Community Services, serves the residents of the facility. Once a week, Jo-El teaches 5-10 students new words and phrases in English and helps them improve their grammar and pronunciation. The elderly students enjoy the commute; a quick elevator ride or short walk from their apartment to the com-

munity room. "You don't have to go out and take the bus" explained student Marta. "And if you forget something, you go back to your apartment to get it."

Although the students are determined to improve their English skills, most of them are at different proficiency levels. "It is difficult to pronounce the sounds" said Josefina, a native Spanish speaker, as she pointed out some of the difficulty she has encountered while learning English. The students use their diverse knowledge of English to help each other learn while receiving the individualized attention Jo-El provides as their teacher.

When asked why they feel it is important to learn English, the students' answers are as diverse as their proficiency levels. "I want to be able to speak with my grandchildren" mentioned Marta. "It is important for medical reasons" explained Josefina. Angel, a student originally from Mexico, used English audio tapes to help him study for the citizenship exam years ago. Despite becoming a citizen and running a successful business for twenty years, he still feels he can improve his English. "The main part is to try" he said. "Communication is number one."

As is the case with many tutors, one's self-confidence can be a challenge when teaching others. "I get nervous that my students aren't learning or that they may get bored" explained Jo-El. "But at the end of the lesson, when they tell me how much they appreciate what I've prepared for them and how patient I've been, it helps me to not feel so insecure after all." The rewards Jo-El receives from the class go beyond the students' appreciation for her efforts. "I enjoy the sense of humor that my students have. They have lived many, many years and still seem to have a great time laughing and joking with each other."

Kevin Vigil
Library Associate



L to R: Angel, Jo-El, Marta, Josefina

Changes Afoot



The Vista Literacy Center is now located in the Empowerment Center at the Vista Branch Library. Call 760-643-5144 for more details.

