



Volunteer Tutors Make the Difference: Changing Lives, One Student at a Time

Literacy Services of Wisconsin serves more than 250 English language learners from the metro Milwaukee area, including Waukesha, Ozaukee, and Washington counties. The program is based on a one-on-one tutoring model in which volunteer tutors and adult English language learners meet for approximately two hours per week. When the program initially started, tutors and students met in person, however, at the onset of the pandemic in 2020, the program pivoted to an online model. Today, many tutors and students are returning to in-person sessions, while others have chosen to maintain the online format, finding that it offers much more flexibility for both tutors and students.

Wisconsin Literacy volunteers have the option to use a variety of instructional resources, including BurlingtonEnglish. Heidi Friedrichs, Waukesha Site Coordinator for Literacy Services of Wisconsin, coordinates the initial pairing of tutors with students and provides the initial orientation and training. In this article, we will introduce two successful volunteer partnerships – tutors Carol and Gary, and their students, Nat and Mari – to highlight some of the life-changing work that happens at Literacy Services of Wisconsin’s ELL program.

Meet Our Tutors and Their Students

Carol and Nat

Carol joined Literacy Services of Wisconsin with compassion for others and a strong desire to offer adult English language learners the experience of interacting with a native English speaker. Her goal as a tutor is to help her students feel more comfortable speaking English in order to improve their quality of life in the U.S.

Carol is currently working with Nat, a recent immigrant to the U.S. After an initial warm-up with informal conversation, Carol begins her formal lesson. She uses the BurlingtonEnglish course, *Burlington Core* as her primary curriculum. She loves that Burlington is a comprehensive, web-based program with ready-made lessons; she feels confident that the content provides everything her student needs to improve her language and communication skills. The ease of

use is especially beneficial for volunteer tutors who may not have additional preparation time outside of their dedicated volunteer hours or a background in teaching.

Carol describes Nat as hardworking and highly motivated. Since beginning their sessions together, Nat's language skills have greatly improved, most notably her speaking skills. In Nat's own words, she describes how her life has changed as her English communication skills have improved.

"People understand what I am saying ...
I can make an appointment at the doctor's office.
I can go to the library and explain to the librarian what I am looking for.
I can tell the maintenance man what needs fixing when he comes to my apartment.
I can order my medication over the phone.
I can help my neighbor by ordering things for her over the phone.
I can go to a restaurant and order food.
I can make small talk with my English-speaking neighbors.
I can talk to the salespeople at the store.
And I passed my citizenship test! I understood everything the officer asked me. I was able to answer all the questions and write all the sentences she wanted."

Gary and Mari

Gary has been volunteering with Literacy Services of Wisconsin for several years. He has a background working as a college professor and as an editor. His goal for his current student, Mari, is to prepare her for subsequent study for her naturalization application and examination.

Gary also uses *Burlington Core* as his primary curriculum. Their tutoring sessions begin with an informal conversation, typically about Mari's week, her family, and her daily activities. They then work together on a *Burlington Core* In-Class Lesson. They engage in discussion about the content as Mari answers the questions in each activity.

Gary enjoys teaching with the leveled readings and exercises. The wide variety of activities address reading comprehension, vocabulary in context, writing, and conversation. During the sessions, he and Mari particularly favor the informal, interactive review games at the end of each lesson.

Gary and Mari meet online for each session using Zoom. Mari thrives with the personal one-on-one attention directed to her individual language needs. Gary describes Mari as highly motivated, social, and introspective. He attributes her progress to the "many exercises in *Burlington Core* that are directed to daily life. The content has helped her improve her vocabulary, build sentences, talk on the phone, communicate with friends and prospective employers, solve problems, and generally introduce her to important topics necessary to be a productive citizen of the U.S."

Measuring Success

Nat and Mari are only two of the many students who are benefiting from the invaluable contributions of volunteer tutors at Literacy Services of Wisconsin. With this one-on-one model, students can work at their own pace in a comfortable setting (on-site or online) that fits their schedule and meets their individual language learning needs. Heidi Friedrichs explains that periodic testing, once at initial intake and every six months thereafter, has shown that the process works! Even more importantly, the relationships that develop between the tutors and their students are inspiring and truly heartwarming.

To learn more about how you can make BurlingtonEnglish part of your Wisconsin Literacy program, contact JennaRose Dahl at JennaRose.D@BurlingtonEnglish.com

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