

Volunteers Needed To Help Adults Improve Literacy

Nonprofit has long waiting list needing tutors.

BY DENISE LEW
THE CONNECTION

In light of National Adult Education and Family Literacy Week, Sept. 12-16, the Literacy Council of Northern Virginia is seeking at least 75 more volunteer tutors to promote its mission in teaching adults the basic skills of reading, writing, speaking and understanding English.

The organization already has a long waiting list of adult students who are eager to improve their literacy skills by working one-to-one with a trained volunteer.

"LCNV is the only organization in Virginia that offers one-to-one tutoring for adults at the lowest literacy level. There are over 129,000 adults living in Northern Virginia who are functionally illiterate," said Patricia Donnelly, executive director at LCNV.

Illiteracy often leads to unemployment, homelessness, criminal behavior, low self-esteem, poor health and poor performance in school. "I relied on my husband for everything because I don't speak English," said an LCNV student from Korea.

"Literacy education strengthens the community through workplace skill development, better jobs, better economy, improved life styles, better health, stronger tax base, more people active in their schools and neighborhoods," said Donnelly.

The LCNV currently educates 1,600 adults in the basic skills of understanding, reading, writing, speaking and English to empower them to integrate more fully and confidently in their communities. The Basic Literacy program works with native and fluent English speakers to improve their ability to read and write, and the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Tutoring program works with non-English speakers who are usually illiterate in their native language and want to improve understanding, speaking, reading, and writ-



McLean resident Anne Spear and her student work together during a tutoring session.

ing English. Both one-on-one tutoring and classroom programs are offered along with self-paced computer classes.

"I like the Literacy Council because it requires commitment both on the part of the tutor and the student. I am working with my third student and he recently became a citizen of the United States. His hard work and constant study enabled him to pass the test on his first attempt. He was thrilled at his success and I was proud of him and his hard work," said Alexandria resident Lynn Gallagher, who recently retired and was looking to volunteer.

Often the tutors and students form long-lasting professional relationships that are beneficial to both sides. "I joined LCNV to help adults who need instruction in the English language so they can become active participants in American society," said Anne Spear, a McLean resident who tutors at the LCNV. "This experience has been very satisfying for me because I have watched my student become more confident in expressing herself in English and she is a role model for the rest of her family. LCNV's tu-

toring approach is unique and perfect for those who do not have the time or money to take English classes. It's a huge opportunity LCNV provides for adults who do not have the benefit of the K-12 system's wonderful ESOL program."

Tutors have also seen the program enrich their own lives in terms of serving the community. "I volunteered to be a tutor for two reasons. I wanted to maintain a pro-bono dimension to my life and believe that helping people to learn English is very important for our society. I've gained the satisfaction that my student has improved his English and will soon take the examination to become a naturalized citizen. This is an inspiring accomplishment for a 40-year-old man who never went to school anywhere. He could not read nor write in any lan-

Special Event

The Literacy Council of Northern Virginia is one of the 10 selected participants in the Third Annual Acumen Solutions Race for a Cause on Sunday, Oct. 16, in Arlington. The event includes an 8K run and a 1 Mile Fun Run. All proceeds benefit the selected 10 local nonprofits.

Join

The next Basic Literacy tutor training workshop will be held on Sept. 24 at the James Lee Community Center, 2855 Annandale Road, Falls Church.

For more information, e-mail volunteers@lcnv.org or call 703-237-0866 x111.

guage," said Robert Stump, an Arlington resident.

Each year, LCNV hosts eight tutor training workshops to coach volunteer tutors to provide individualized instruction to adult students. Each tutor is trained, matched with a student, and suggested to meet weekly for an hour and a half to help improve the student's reading and writing skills. Tutoring usually occurs at a library or community center, and tutors and students are matched based on geographic proximity to make the weekly sessions as convenient as possible.

Most students have had positive life-changing experiences as a result of the LCNV programs. "I started to study last November with my tutor, Elison. Since then, I've been learning to speak English and about America. Elison encourages me to try doing everything and so, I'm changing. I can order what I want to eat, return something and explain simple things now," said the LCNV student from Korea who used to rely on her husband on everything.

"The Literacy Council of Northern Virginia has the best mission. We give people the tools they need to change and improve their lives forever: the gift of reading. Once you learn to read, then you can read to learn," said Donnelly.



New tutors attend a training course.



A Literacy Council of Northern Virginia class poses for a picture together.