

Helping Adult Learners Fulfill Their Dreams

PROGRAM DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Spring 2022

Project Literacy students hail from:

Afghanistan	Iran
Albania	Iraq
Algeria	Israel
Argentina	Ivory Coast
Armenia	Japan
Azerbaijan	Jordan
Belarus	Kazakhstan
Benin	Korea
Brazil	Latvia
Bulgaria	Lebanon
Burkina Faso	Malaysia
Burma	Mexico
Canada	Moldova
Cape Verde	Morocco
Chili	Nepal
China	Nicaragua
Colombia	Pakistan
Costa Rica	Peru
Dominican Republic	Philippines
Ecuador	Puerto Rico
Egypt	Romania
El Salvador	Russia
Eritrea	Sudan
Ethiopia	Syria
Germany	Taiwan
Guatemala	Thailand
Haiti	Togo
Honduras	Turkey
Hong Kong	Ukraine
India	Uzbekistan
Indonesia	Venezuela
	Vietnam

It has been an exciting first half of the year in Project Literacy. This spring, in addition to our twelve year-long classes, we have had a citizenship class, over a dozen reading, writing, and conversation groups as well as a team of over 200 volunteers working one-on-one with learners. Through all of this we have pivoted when needed not only with Covid but also around individual needs.

In December we started receiving inquiries from groups and organizations sponsoring individuals and families coming to the United States from Afghanistan. When it became clear our existing classes were too advanced for this population, The Friends of Project Literacy provided full funding for a new beginner class. With this financial support we were able to create a professionally taught class that met twice a week for five months. After completion of the class in June students will be able to join our regular cycle of classes.

One of my goals for 2022 is to have the library serve our students beyond English instruction. As community members they too deserve a library that serves their individual and family needs. My initial focus has been on opportunities in Spanish and Portuguese as these are the first languages spoken by 55% of our beginner students.

- The Children's Department has increased their Spanish and Portuguese collections for children based on the needs of our beginner students' families.
- Starting in May the Children's Room will sponsor a regular Saturday Spanish Storytime.
- The Teen Room created a collection of books in Spanish and Portuguese.
- In March the Adult Department sponsored their first series of computer classes in Spanish.
- The Outreach Department translated our Project Literacy brochure into Spanish and Portuguese. They have also created Spanish and Portuguese bookmarks highlighting library resources including museum passes, HATCH, and online resources.
- On May 11th the library sponsored tours in Spanish and Portuguese that included introductions to Children's and Teen departments, library card sign-ups, and Project Literacy learning opportunities.

I meet regularly with English Language Learning program coordinators from around the state and can report that Project Literacy is a unique and special program: new students are not

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Beginner 1 class meeting in person for the first time after several weeks online. Beginners are a fast-growing and important group that Project Literacy supports.

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added to a long waiting list, they can start learning immediately; classes, groups and tutoring take place night and day during the week and on weekends to accommodate student schedules; we are part of a community and organization that supports English learners.

It takes a large team to serve over 500 students and I am so excited to be part of it and for what we have in store for the second half of this year.

~ Aimee Lambert, Project Literacy Program Director



A Project Literacy student tutoring his English tutor—in backgammon! Tavla or backgammon is considered by many to be Turkey's national pastime.

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Communication and Community at Project Literacy

In July 2021, twenty years after moving to the U.S., Thomas walked into the Watertown library and asked about opportunities to improve his English. He was quickly directed to Project Literacy and placed in an advanced class that started meeting in September. Thomas moved to the States from Benin, and his wife and son joined him in 2002. After a couple of decades with lots of business travel to West Africa, he retired and decided to devote more time to learning English.

One of the first things Thomas says about the course is what it does beyond just teaching the language. His teacher, “works to help people to integrate, to feel like they are home, to feel like they are accepted by the American community.” He remembers one class day, when the teacher acknowledged how hard things had been during the pandemic and reminded everyone that services like food stamps were available to help out. She offered to help anyone who needed more guidance for accessing assistance.

Thomas likes the structure of his course, because the teacher “lets students talk... She wants to know what we know about the subject. We all bring our culture, what we know about the subject, to what we have to learn. It is a kind of collaboration.”

Thomas points out how important communication can be to establishing mutual respect like this, and how that relates to his goals for learning English. “When you communicate well, people trust you. People take what you are saying seriously.” Sometimes, “people forget that you have your own language and that you are making an effort to speak their language. You feel well when you speak English better, when anything you want to say, you say it easily.” Thomas actually has four languages besides English –French, Fon, Mina, and Popo– plus a few others that he understands but doesn’t speak. “I could say I’m a polyglot.”

Whatever he chooses to do from here, he appreciates support from Project Literacy and is hopeful that others do, too. “Project Literacy is a good thing to help people feel integrated, to help people feel like they can do what they were doing in their country. Sometimes I think about people from Ukraine, if they come here, with that disaster. If they come here to Project Literacy, they’ll feel like family.”

Visit us online! Please go to <http://foplwatertown.org> to see student videos, join our email list, donate and share.

PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

Finding the Tools to Connect

In spring 2020, when pandemic restrictions prohibited in-person classes, Project Literacy quickly pivoted as many services as possible to virtual platforms. With impressive speed, learners, teachers and tutors started meeting online and continued their programs. This of course presented challenges, one of which was access to technology and devices that would allow learners to fully engage with their new class model.

Just a few months later, Project Literacy was able to start a laptop lending library, initiated when the Watertown Community Foundation facilitated a donation of 30 gently used laptops from a local company. Since then, Project Literacy has added new Chromebooks to lend to learners currently enrolled in programs. These purchases were made possible in part by funds from individual giving to Friends of Project Literacy.

Haydee, is a mother of two— one is a third-grader and the other a recent Watertown High School graduate. She arrived in the US from Guatemala about 20 years ago, and started in the parents' summer class in June 2020. With the support of a laptop from Project Literacy's lending library,

she grew more comfortable with video conferencing and remote communication. She continued her classes and put her new skills to use in other ways, like attending her daughter's online parent-teacher conference.

Zhelka, a retired technical architect originally from Bulgaria, was using her smartphone to attend class and found it challenging. Since she borrowed a laptop from Project Literacy's lending library, she has found it easier to access and fully participate in her classes by Zoom and to take full advantage of the asynchronous learning opportunities offered by Google Classroom and Quizlet.

When the pandemic hit, Mariesol, a young woman from Haiti, was working two jobs and attending Project Literacy classes. With the support of the laptop she continued her classes and ultimately skipped a level.

In the face of challenges that could have kept them apart, Project Literacy learners and instructors found new ways to connect, and the laptop lending library has become a piece of the network of support that reaches across the community.

English Pals

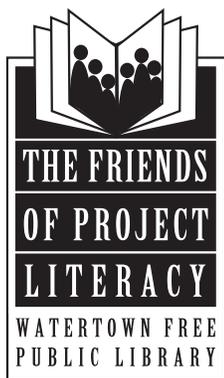
When Agnaldo arrived in the US from southeast Brazil almost 10 years ago, he came with no English training. Living in the countryside, he had left school early to work with his father.

He met his wife here in the Boston area, they settled in Watertown and had their daughter, now 8 years old. When she entered kindergarten, it was important for Agnaldo to communicate with her teachers, so when one of his coworkers, a Spanish speaker, told him about Project Literacy, he met with the Director. That began his 3-year journey with the program. Since then, he has taken many classes, including a twice-weekly evening class held at Watertown High School before Covid, the parents' summer class co-sponsored with the Watertown public schools, and a Saturday class. Classes have been online since 2020. Agnaldo's



daughter was in school remotely for a year, and although she did very well with online classes, she prefers learning in person with her friends. In addition to helping her Dad with English, her favorite subjects are the arts, physical education, and math. Agnaldo is very impressed with the education she's receiving.

As a carpentry worker at a very busy construction company, he speaks Spanish with his coworkers, many of whom are from Colombia. But Agnaldo needs English to communicate with his boss and clients. He has learned a lot and is very grateful to Project Literacy. He is determined to continue improving his English, and although his schedule is very busy with work and classes, he loves spending time with his daughter, who, in addition to baking cakes with her Mom, helps her Dad with his English.



ABOUT THE FRIENDS OF PROJECT LITERACY

The Friends of Project Literacy is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) corporation founded to support the work of Project Literacy. Our board of directors is involved in fundraising and other development and advisory activities to help ensure the continued growth of Project Literacy's educational programs.

Project Literacy is funded by the City of Watertown through the Watertown Free Public Library and grants and fundraising efforts of the Friends of Project Literacy. Contributions to the Friends of Project Literacy are welcome and tax deductible within the limits provided by law.

Please donate online at <https://bit.ly/donatefopl>

Or make your check payable to "Friends of Project Literacy" and mail to:
Friends of Project Literacy
c/o Watertown Free Public Library
123 Main Street
Watertown, MA 02472.

For more information contact us at fopl.watertown@gmail.com

FOR PROGRAM INFORMATION CONTACT:

Aimee Lambert, Program Director
Project Literacy
617-924-8797
<https://www.watertownlib.org/165/Project-Literacy>
alambert@watertown-ma.gov

Letter from a Learner

My name is Zhelka. I want to share my story. I am a student at Intermediate 2 class at Mishell and Saturday class at Donna. These classes are very, very important for me. When I arrived in the USA I didn't know English. I live in Watertown and take care of my grandson. Every day we went to the library. My grandson grew up in the library. When my grandson was a baby and little boy, I didn't have time to learn English. Last year in Mart I began English class at Leona's class and this year I continue at Mishell's class. In autumn I took citizenship class and I am very happy because in February this year, I passed my citizenship interview and took the oath. Now I am a citizen. I am so satisfied and proud with that. When I went to the interview the first question that the officer asked me before the interview was: "Do you learn English"? I answered "Yes I take English classes at the Library in Watertown". If I did not take these English classes I wouldn't take this interview.

Although my English is not as high level as it should be, I am very satisfied. My teachers are very kind, polite, and patient with us. They are excellent professionals. They put a lot of effort and energy into their work. I think your team of teachers is exceptional. I have not received such attention in all my years of study in my country. I would like to continue to study in the classes you have so that I can manage on my own without the help of my children when I go to the doctor and for other activities that are necessary to speak English. Thank you from the bottom of my heart for all the attention and concern and humanity you show us. Given my age, I never thought that anyone could help me so much to fit into your world. In my country, the elderly are not given such great respect and esteem. I am glad to be here with my family. I am proud that I am a citizen of this democratic country.

~ Zhelka, student, writing to Program Director Aimee Lambert

Thanks to individuals, businesses, grantmakers and the support of the City of Watertown and the Watertown Free Public Library, Project Literacy is able to support:

- 501 learners enrolled and actively participating in Project Literacy programs
- 220 learners enrolled in evening, morning, and Saturday classes
- 111 learners enrolled in small-group programs
- 187 learners working with tutors
- 218 volunteer tutors and group leaders
- 12 learners recently enrolled in citizenship classes
- Learners from 64 countries, who speak 38 languages

Thank you to the many individuals, families and businesses whose generosity contributed to Project Literacy students' success this year.

We would like to extend a special thank you to major funders The Glory Foundation, Marshall Home Fund and Watertown Community Foundation, without whom Project Literacy would not be able to serve so many deserving students.