CELEBRATING 40 YEARS OF

LITERACY LANGUAGE LEARNERS

VISIONS 2026

Welcome

Message from the Hillsborough Literacy Council President

Dear Friends, Students, Tutors, and Supporters,

As we celebrate our 40th anniversary under the theme "Celebrating 40 Years of Literacy and Language Learning," I find myself reflecting on the true magnitude of what we have built together across Hillsborough County.

When people ask me what makes the Hillsborough Literacy Council endure year after year, the answer is always about connection. Think about the ripple effect of our work. Over the past four decades, every tutor who has sat down with a student hasn't just taught the mechanics of reading or conversational English, they have changed a life. And that student, armed with new confidence, goes on to advocate for their family, advance in their career, and engage deeply with our community. One life touches hundreds of others, and those lives touch countless more in an unbroken chain of human potential.

It is also worth noting that the traditional gemstone for a 40th anniversary is the ruby. That little trivia fact brought to mind a familiar cinematic journey: in The Wizard of Oz, Dorothy relies on her ruby slippers to finally find her way home.

In many ways, that is what forty years of language and literacy instruction has been for all of us. Learning to read, write, and speak a new language isn't just about acquiring a skill set. It's about unlocking the tools to fully belong. It is about navigating the world with agency, dignity, and a profound sense of place. Through decades of patience, dedication, and shared stories, this community has helped thousands of learners—and all of us who walk alongside them—find our way home.

Thank you for being part of this remarkable journey. Here is to the next chapter, and to the enduring power of words.

With deep gratitude,

Eric Hughes
President
Hillsborough Literacy Council

Message from the Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library Director

This is truly a special year as Hillsborough Literacy Council and Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Libraries celebrate 40 years of literacy and language learning! Over those forty years, more than 10,000 students have been guided on their journey of personal growth. Thank you to all the tutors, students, board members, volunteers, friends and family who have supported this.

I could use this space to talk about the meaningful impact literacy makes on an individual's life and the importance of developing and maintaining skills that unlock a better understanding of the world. I could also speak about the diligent effort put forth by the Literacy Council, its tutors, and the library. What I feel is most important to point out, however, is the human connection involved in all of this.

At the previous literacy celebration, I was incredibly moved by witnessing the bonds that had formed between students and tutors, hearing the words of gratitude that flowed between everyone, and seeing the look of pride in each person's eyes for the accomplishments being celebrated. That level of human connection is hard to duplicate and helps us thrive. Visions captures these moments of pride and gratitude and allows us all to share in these accomplishments. It enables us to experience a human connection without being physically present.

Thank you to everyone who makes this possible!

Chely Cantrell
Library Director
Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library

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The Hillsborough Literacy Council

The Hillsborough Literacy Council (HLC) is a nonprofit affiliate of Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library teaching functionally and marginally illiterate adults to read and write. Through its Adult Basic Literacy program, participants learn to read, write, and communicate in basic English.

HLC accepts adults 18 and over. Depending upon the student's level, learning to read can take a year or more. HLC needs volunteer tutors and will provide them training and materials. We ask our tutors to commit to 48 hours of tutoring time, with a minimum of one hour per week. HLC seeks funding partners and donations which will directly support the program by providing student materials and supplies for tutor trainings.

For more information, visit **HillsboroughLiteracy.org or call 813-273-3650.**

The Hillsborough Literacy Council Board of Directors

Eric Hughes, President
Jenifer Schneider, Vice President
Genevieve DiCiaccio, Treasurer
Bill Hunter, Secretary
Carol Bockenek
Mari Sakai
Paul Suppich

Hillsborough County Public Library Cooperative Library Support

Chely Cantrell, Director of Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library
Lyn Begraft, Library Brand Innovation Manager
Antoinette Giamalva, Library Programming Manager
Daniel Sullivan, Literacy Coordinator

Hillsborough Literacy Council
Annual Student & Tutor Celebration

Robert W. Saunders, Sr. Public Library
1505 N. Nebraska Ave., Tampa, FL 33602-2849

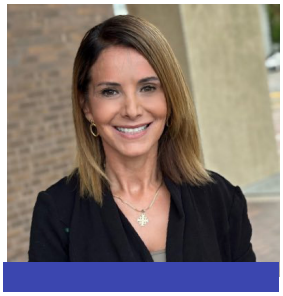
Saturday, September 26, 2026
10 a.m. – 12 p.m.

Welcome and Introductions

Eric Hughes, HLC President
Antoinette Giamalva, Library Programming Manager

Keynote Speaker

Melissa Morgado
K-12 World Languages Supervisor
Hillsborough County Public Schools



Student Speakers

Awards and Recognitions

Students of the Year
Tutor of the Year
Graduates
Sylvia Miller Award

Closing Remarks

Special Thanks to The Mosaic Company, Kendra Scott Hyde Park, and The Rotary Club of New Tampa for their generous support of our annual student and tutor celebration.

Hillsborough Literacy Council Student Stories

The Hillsborough Literacy Council supports our tutors who graciously volunteer to help students develop strategies and techniques for reading and comprehension. It is a lifelong learning process, and our students excel in their dedication and commitment.

The following entries are written by our current students. The entries have been printed in the exact way the students have written them.

Please enjoy and learn about our amazing students through their work.

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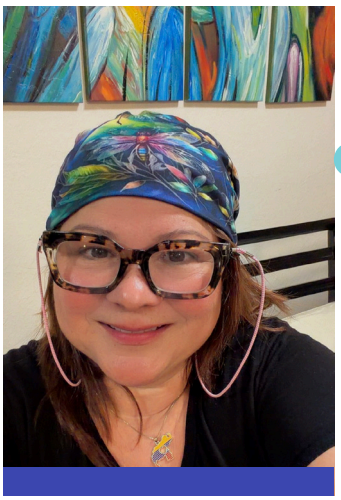
I Am Proud of My Son
by Jackie Fernandez Villarereal

My son is one person have a big heart. He's belong a running club, and work in a restaurant, his friends and coworkers, organize one event for help a thousands peoples, victims of the most terrorific earthquake never see in Venezuela. The event consisted in receiving donation (food, diapers, medicine, wipes, bandages, first aid supplies). This donation will be taken to the central donation center, who deliver all supplies boxes.

I'm very very proud of my son, because he didn't think about himself. He thought the people in Venezuela needed a lot of help.

My husband, my daughter and me helped to organize and pack all supplies for sending to Venezeuela.



Thank you Teacher Miss Collen
by Yixy Loredo

My name is Yixy and after an adventurous journey, I arrived in the land of freedom and opportunity—the United States—where I have been warmly welcomed by both acquaintances and strangers.

For the past two years, I have been working in a public school cafeteria alongside an incredible team. I like to translate whenever they need me. I am married and the mother of a very happy, mischievous boy. Now I am helping him with his home work. My son has learned to read on his own. We read together. My husband talked to me, he would like to learn English.

I have received help in countless ways, and I am deeply grateful to God and to everyone who has supported me. I would like to dedicate these words to a special person I hold very dear: my teacher, Colleen a volunteer with the county library system's literacy program. Her dedication, patience, empathy, and commitment to each of her students make life happier for us in this country—our second home—and have enabled us to gradually improve our communication skills.

She has also inspired me to become a tutor myself one day.

Thank you so much.

My Dream
by Adriana Hernandez

My dream is to speak English fluently to travel the world. I would like to travel to get to know different cities, cultures, and their food. For example: Australia, England, Greece, and Italy. For Greece and Italy, I don't think I need to speak English, but that's fine. I want to see and experience beautiful nature and landscapes of each place and beaches.

Kazakhstan
by Dinara Kazymbetova

I hear this question very often: "Are you from Kazakhstan? Where is this country located, and what can you tell me about it?" I never thought anyone would ask me such questions. After all, there aren't that many countries in the world, and my country plays a key role in today's geopolitical process.

Nevertheless, that is the reality, and I would love to share a little bit about my country.

I will begin by describing the natural beauty of my country. Perhaps nowhere else in the world

can one find such breathtaking landscapes. When gazing upon the Kolsai Lakes, the pink lake of Kobeytuz, Charyn Canyon or the Singing Dune in Altyn Emel National Park, one cannot escape the impression that magic has touched these places. The scenery is so enchantingly beautiful that you find yourself believing in the folk tales and legends that have accompanied these lands for a millennium.

However, the most valuable asset of my country is its people. Over many centuries the Kazakh people have had to fight to preserve their statehood. The fact that we possess our own sovereign state today is, to a great extent, thanks to our ancestors.

The culture of the Kazakh people is rich and unique. The country's culture reflects the processes that have unfolded across its territory over the course of a millennia, which, in turn, have shaped the character, behavioral pattern, and worldview of its people.

Kazakhs have always been known for their hospitality. During difficult times, Kazakhstan welcomed exiles, deportees, and evacuees. Everyone found food and shelter here, and for some, it even became a second home.

During difficult years, the Kazakh people showed remarkable endurance and patience, surrounding the weak and the needy with care and support.

In the Kazakh steppe, great importance was places on respect for elders, hospitality, openness, and friendliness. These values have been preserved to this day. Today Kazakhstan is home to representatives of many different ethnic groups, all of whom make effort to contribute to the prosperity of our country.

The Art of Migration

by Paola Juarez Vazquez

Migration is a heartbeat that has existed since the beginning of life. It is not unique to human beings: animals, plants, fungi, and microorganisms all experience their own journeys in search of a home. It is a law of nature.

However, humans—who are supposed to have a higher "consciousness" than other living beings on this planet—still show rejection and anger when they see a fellow human migrate from one corner of the Earth to another. When Europeans first arrived in the Americas, they introduced the idea of measuring the land and setting up borders to prevent stealing. The Native Americans could not understand why anyone would want to create boundaries or own a piece of land, because to them, the Earth does not belong to us; we belong to her.

Perhaps that is where the root of so much patriotism and racism lies: in the fact that we feel like strangers to this beautiful planet. It is Mother Earth who shelters us and allows us to experience ourselves as beings connected to something divine and greater. Maybe we have forgotten our own divinity, or perhaps we have been conditioned to forget it so that we keep fighting over mental structures that only pull us apart.

Modernity and technology promised to bring us closer to those who are far away. And while it is true that we can communicate instantly today, the reality is that we have become more individualistic. Children and young people today often forget how to interact face-to-face; they spend so much time looking at screens that they ignore the life happening outside, in nature. We are forgetting our roots. We trade the wise knowledge of medicinal plants for synthetic medicines that promise a quick cure, but often lock us into a dependence on pills that relieve one symptom while damaging ten other parts of our health.

As an immigrant born in Mexico, I live with deep gratitude for the opportunities and love I have found in this country USA. This is where you truly understand what it means to arrive and feel like an outsider. But with time, when you return to your country of origin, you discover that you also feel like a stranger there, because you have already grown roots in this new land of hope. This has been a place of growth—not just fi nancially, but intellectually and, of course, spiritually.

Today, my heart embraces two worlds: a part of it stays in my beloved Mexico, and another part is here in the United States. I feel deeply proud of the experiences I have lived. The journey has not been easy, but those very

challenges are what have strengthened us and made my family and me grow.

By living here, I do not intend to build walls, reject my neighbors, or force my beliefs on anyone, because true freedom lives in love and mutual respect. The world often marches and fights for peace, but peace is not something you should have to battle for. Peace is a state of being that flows from the deepest part of the soul. You don't just have peace; you live in peace. When we inhabit that peace, we realize there is nothing to fight against; we simply have to embody it so the world can see it and reflect it.

If only we could let go of the pride of believing our own ideology is the only right one—a blindness that leads us to destroy each other. If only we dared to remember what we are truly made of... We would remember that we are made of deep love. We are earth, water, air, fire, and above all, we are spirit.

English Conversation Corner

by Mimi

One day I realized my English is getting worse after moving to the U.S for a while. You might think it is weird to hear, but it happened to me.

I was thinking hard about why that happened and I came across that I am not speaking enough English. Everywhere I go I end up listening to others what they have to say. My husband is American but he would rather speak than listen, so as in-laws. I only had friends of the same nationality at the time, of course we don't speak English to each other.

I knew I had to do something. I know that the solution is I need to find friends who have to speak English with me, that have to be of a different nationality than me.

And then I remember when I first moved here to Tampa, somebody told me about the free English Conversation Corner Class. I hesitated a little, because I heard that the class is for beginners. I didn't want to start from the bottom again.

First I went to the Town & Country library. It was Carol's class. Honesty was at all levels and every time was different because not the same students. All the volunteers were nice. I liked it, I went there for about 4years and I Even I attended her zoom class 4years more years with Carol and her sister Nancy too.

At the same time I started to take another zoom class with Christine E, Mary & Laren, Ethan & Greg, Christ K (In-person). I especially love Dana Williams, she makes all the ESOL lesson plans for intermediate classes. I took a lot of classes.

I am more comfortable speaking English. Moreover, I am happier than ever because I made a lot of friends, including volunteers. They are wonderful. Attendending English Conversation Corner is like being in a support group. Living in a foreign country could be difficult. This program is helping a lot of foreigners. I hope this program can continue to operate for a long time.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to all the volunteers. **Thank you so much for your dedication and kindness.**

Celebrating 40 Years of Learning and Community

by Lucila Micaela Raciti

I would like to share my experience and explain what this program has meant to me as we celebrate its 40th anniversary.

When I moved to the United States in May 2022, I could barely speak English. I had learned some basic grammar, but I couldn't understand people when they spoke. I remember joking with my husband that English sounded like Chinese because I couldn't understand a single word.

I continued taking online English classes in Argentina, but everything changed in February 2023 when I saw a flyer at the Brandon Library about this conversation program. I was nervous because it was my first time joining an English conversation group. I didn't know if my English was good enough or whether or not I would be able to communicate.

From the very first day, Joy, the tutor, welcomed me with kindness and made me feel comfortable. That first class was much more than an English lesson. It was my first opportunity to meet people from different countries, learn about their cultures, and share our experiences as immigrants starting new lives in the United States.

Since then, I have continued studying English both in Argentina and here, but this program has given me something that no textbook ever could: Confidence. Today, I am working towards achieving a C1 level, and English is no longer something that scares me. I study in English, go to the movies and the theater using closed captions, communicate with people in my community, and feel that I truly belong here.

However, the greatest gift this program has given me is not only the language but the people. Every Wednesday became something I look forward to. Working from home can sometimes feel lonely, and this program gave me a reason to leave the house, meet wonderful people, and build meaningful friendships.

After three years, some of the people I met here have become part of my family. We celebrate birthdays, support one another, and have created a real community. Joy, in particular, has had a special impact on my life. Through her kindness, patience, and encouragement, she showed me the warmth and generosity that define so many Americans.

People often say that learning English opens doors, and that is true. But, in my opinion, the greatest benefit has been finding a place where I feel welcomed, accepted, and connected.

This letter is my way of saying thank you for these three unforgettable years. It is also my way of giving back a small portion of what this program has given me. I hope that, in the future, I will have the opportunity to help others the way this program helped me. That would be the best way to say thank you.

Happy 40th Anniversary!

Untitled

by Lisa Liao

I am from China and came to the US after retiring. I enjoy the friendly people and the environment here.

Although I had never studied English before, I am very interested in learning it. I am Grateful to the Adult English education center for arranging an instructor for me. And I thank my teacher for teaching me free of charge, I have now completed all four books in the adult English program.

English is a global language and learning it is very important. However, as I am older, my memory is not great and I learn slowly. I often call myself a slow learner, but my Tutor always encourages me, often saying "Don't rush...just keep at it."

There are many ways to learn English these days. I have a Tutor I meet with once a week, and I also have Google Translate with me 24hours a day. I enjoy playing games with its. AI software.

Whenever I write a sentence, ask the AI if it is correct. It quickly tells me whether I am right or wrong and explains the reasons why. I find this to be a very interesting guessing game.

I am currently in my seventies. I am not learning English for employment purposes, nor is it likely I will reach a level of conversational fluency. Nevertheless, I persist in my studies because it helps me acquire new knowledge and exercise my memory.

Through learning English, I have gained insight into aspects of American history and historical figures that were previously unknown to me. It has become an important part of my life. While I sometimes feel a bit of pressure, the sense of accomplishment and the joy that learning brings me far outweigh it.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Adult English Education center and my Tutor. Finally, I wish the adult English education programs continued success and growth.

The Venezuelan People I Admire Most

by Yanira Centeno

When we think of someone we admire, we often think of historical figures, celebrities, or even members of our own families. However, the people I admire most are the Venezuelan people.

My home country recently endured two powerful earthquakes that brought devastation, pain, and heartbreak. Homes were destroyed, families lost everything they had worked for, and many people were left mourning the loss of loved ones. Seeing the suffering of my fellow Venezuelans was deeply painful. Yet, in the midst of tragedy, something extraordinary happened. Thousands of Venezuelans came together to help one another.

People with very little shared what they had. Volunteers risked their own safety to rescue victims, care for the injured, transport doctors and emergency workers, and deliver food, water, and essential supplies to those in need. Strangers became family, united by compassion and hope. What makes this even more inspiring is that Venezuela has faced many hardships over the years.

Despite the challenges, the kindness and generosity of its people remain unbroken. There is always a Venezuelan willing to extend a helping hand, offer a comforting embrace, or speak words of encouragement to someone who needs them.

These simple acts of love and humanity can bring light even in the darkest moments. The strength, resilience, and solidarity of the Venezuelan people fill me with pride and admiration. Their ability to stand together in times of crisis reminds us of the very best of humanity.

May God bless Venezuela, comfort those who are suffering, and guide the nation toward recovery. I pray that my beautiful country rises once again and shines as brightly as it deserves.

Thank you
by Shaoqing Zhou

Thank you, VISIONS, for the invitation.
I would like to share more of my story…
This year, my dream came true: my daughter helped me buy a house and I moved this past August.

I am now embarking on a new life where I must independently handle bills, manage mail, familiarize myself with various regulations, and do my own grocery shopping. For someone in their seventies who has lived in the U.S. for just over three years, these tasks present real challenges.

With the changes in healthcare policies that came to the U.S. in 2026, I needed to increase my income to meet the minimum threshold for purchasing, Obamacare. I chose to do so by becoming a nursing assistant, as I already had some knowledge in the field. Early this year, I began an online CNA, Certified Nursing Assistant, course. I completed the program and received my certificate in just one month!

I quickly found a job caring for an elderly patient who had suffered a stroke. I currently work three days a week and commute on an e-bike.

I am grateful to the Hillsborough Literacy Council, to Zul, and to the library. Your dedication helped me learn English and gain basic language skills needed to integrate into society. I have also been volunteering at the Lutz Senior Center for nearly three years; I love it there and have made wonderful friends from diverse backgrounds. I am truly happy, and my life in the U.S. has become much better.

Lastly, I want to improve my English so that my independent life runs more smoothly.

I ask God to watch over me and protect my health, and grant me the faith and ability to work for me.

Untitled
by Carol Bockenek
Volunteer Tutor

When I began working with the Hillsborough Literacy Council over 25 years ago, I was so anxious to be a literacy tutor. I have loved reading all my life. From the beginning my mother read to my brother, sister and me every night. Grimms fairy tales, children's books from the library, I even remember her reading us Poe's eerie tales. I have learned so much through books, newspapers, magazines even the backs of boxes. I couldn't imagine the tragedy of being unable to read and I would have been happy to bring that ability to even just one other person.

Over the years I was matched with three basic learners. One made it all the way through the program and we were both so proud! The other two did not finish but progress was made. It is so difficult to be an adult learner. Those of you students who are sticking with the program are to be commended.

My next foray was to work with English as a Second Language (ESOL) students in Conversation Corners. These corners were set up to help students as they waited for a tutor to come available. The idea was, and is, to just talk in a group of learners giving them a chance to practice English in a protective environment. I have met so many wonderful people in these classes over the years. I have learned more from them about their cultures and challenges than they have from me, but we all have gained.

I have had many happy and proud moments with the successes of the ESOL learners. The one that stands out to me was when I was working at an election site. I was surprised to see a past conversation corner student came to my post. She told me she had achieved her citizenship and was voting for the first time. We both teared up with joy at her dream come true.

The Hillsborough Literacy Council offers the opportunity for adults to learn to read, write

and to speak English. It also offers tutors the opportunity to share their abilities with others and to reap rewards themselves. This is why I am still volunteering after all these years, it has been completely worth it.

Untitled

by Bria Holmes
Volunteer Tutor

What is the meaning of the word literacy? The word literacy is defined as developing the skill to read or write. Now, what is the word tutor classified as? A tutor is characterized as an individual who teaches one or more students a specific subject.

If one were to combine the words literacy and tutor, the explanation is as follows: one who is trained to implement the skills they have learned (reading, writing, fluency, and comprehension. Literacy tutoring is also defined as supporting, correcting, and empathizing with an individual who yearns to expand their views of the world by making societal connections through English conversations. By fully comprehending these terms, I can now divulge how being a Hillsborough County Literacy ESOL Tutor has impacted my life.

Conversing with unique individuals and hearing about different cultures and their own experiences piqued my intellect. However, the most beautiful aspect of this journey is listening intently and tutoring when questions are asked. I want to ensure that individuals learn the English language to the best of their ability. There is no laughter when one mixes up a phrase; there is no daunting presence of failure that lingers throughout the rest of the Zoom call. No, with me, there is empathy, a tutor who is willing to lead in a caring way and listen to what the individual has to say.

Thank you for this amazing opportunity.

Building Community Through Learning

by Joy Langone
Volunteer Tutor

Application, resume, references CHECK. Background investigation CHECK. Training sessions CHECK. Then on February 19, 2010, an email from Mari Sakai, HLC's Literacy Coordinator at the time. She had matched me (a brand-new tutor) with my very first students. One from Colombia. One from Venezuela. I was excited and a little nervous. They were strangers to me, and I did not speak Spanish.

Like most tutors, I started my journey with HLC thinking I had so much to give; how I could help my community. I love meeting new people. I enjoy conversation. I was sure that with the support of HLC, I could help many people improve their English. What a gift I would be able to give!

What I did not know then was that I would get way more than I ever thought I'd give. Weekly meetings at the library turned out to be about so much more than learning English. I would have to think and wonder about funny or confusing aspects of my own culture. I would learn about many, many other cultures.

Discussions about goals, jobs, schools, families, feelings, paperwork (you get the idea) led to conversations on a very personal level. It helped me learn about the challenges and obstacles people immigrating to the US face. Those conversations also gave me a deep appreciation for what immigrants leave behind; for the many things they lose in the process of coming here to live.

When that first Venezuelan learner achieved one of her goals, we both cried with excitement. She was able to order exactly what she wanted at a Starbucks. We talked and tutored, learned and shared through finding jobs, losing jobs, studying for driver licenses and applying for green cards. We practiced interviewing for jobs, writing letters to teachers, and sending messages to doctors. We shared moments of joy as babies were born, and cried together through the death of parents, missed birthdays, loss of jobs, or complications of immigration paperwork.

CONTINUED

The years of tutoring and conversation corner have ebbed and flowed for me as life permits. I've experienced the whole spectrum, from one-to-one tutoring to leading conversation corners of 20+ people. I've watched new friendships blossom between people on similar paths. I've witnessed people helping others not to make their same mistakes. I've learned where the best stores are, who has the best deals, where to find great Peruvian FOOD (just to name a few). Mostly, I gradually got to know the stories from hard-working, optimistic people, who are just trying to find their way in American society.

I have been privileged to share the experiences of people from 33 different countries; people who were once doctors, lawyers, laborers, farmers, teachers, retirees, parents, sons, daughters, business owners, professors, artists, nurses, dentists, refugees, asylum seekers, tour guides, bankers, and on and on and on. These are dreamers all seeking the same thing: community and belonging.

Thanks to programs offered by HLC, our public library is the place they can connect. WE can connect. We can find community and belonging. New people can make a friend. They can share their experiences, their grief and losses, as well as their accomplishments and achievements.

Now in 2026, it is the 40th anniversary of HLC. That same Mari Sakai who sent me that first email went on to earn her PhD! She has returned to offer new expertise to HLC, as DOCTOR Mari Sakai; and those first two students I was so worried about? They are now lifelong friends, fully living their lives in the US as citizens. AND-they speak English fluently when we meet for coffee now.

When I reflect on my experiences as a tutor and Conversation Corner leader, the main thing I realize is not how much there is to give. It is how much there is to learn. To grow. To find connection in wonderful ways.

My life is richer because of the opportunities provided by HLC. Sharing time and space with people brave enough to make that phone call or show up in that meeting room has been the greatest gift to ME! This what it means to build community.

Why I Love Language Learning

by Eric Hughes
Volunteer Tutor

When I was in college, I took a class about world music. Many international students were in the class. The professor asked them to bring music from their home countries and share it with us.

One day, a girl from Brazil brought a CD. We listened to a little of it at the start of class. I liked the music right away. I thought, "I want to listen to more of this." But I was busy with school, and I did not do anything about it for a few years.

After I graduated, I got my first job and my first apartment. One day, I remembered that Brazilian music. I did not know the name of the singer or the album. But I remembered what the CD looked like.

So I went to a music store. I looked through all the CDs in the Brazil section. Finally, I found it! The singer was Marisa Monte. I took the CD home and played it. I loved the music. Back then, CDs came with the song lyrics printed inside. But these lyrics were in Portuguese, a language I did not know.

I wanted to understand the songs. So I went to a bookstore and bought a Portuguese dictionary. I decided to teach myself Portuguese, one word at a time.

That was the beginning of a new part of my life. Learning Portuguese opened many doors for me. I lived in Portugal. I studied in a summer Portuguese program in Massachusetts. I even lived in Mozambique, a country in Africa where people speak Portuguese.

One student brought one CD to class. That small moment changed my whole life. It even led me to get a master's degree in applied linguistics, so I could teach languages to other people — especially English.

It is amazing to think about it now. One small moment, many years ago, changed everything.

History of Hillsborough Literacy Council

by Bill Hunter
Volunteer Tutor

What eventually became the Hillsborough Literacy Council (HLC) was begun in 1986 as the Library Literacy Volunteers of the Tampa/Hillsborough County Public Library System. Over time, the name was changed to Hillsborough County Literacy Council, and finally to just Hillsborough Literacy Council.

The program was originally established to teach adults who, for whatever reason, had never learned to read. HLC began receiving many requests for help from those whose original language was not English. Therefore, in addition to the basic literacy course, a program called English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) was established to help people learn the challenging language that is English.

In the beginning, training of tutors, matching students with tutors, and following up were all done by volunteers. Managing the various administrative activities was a bit unsteady as volunteers with various abilities came and went. In 1996, the library established the position of Literacy Coordinator as support for HLC. The first person to hold this position was Jodi Cohen, a woman who set a wonderful example of enthusiasm, dedication, and hard work that has served as an example all those who followed her in that job.

Having a full-time professional managing daily activities was a significant improvement in continuity and consistency of the program and allowed HLC volunteers to concentrate on tutoring. More recently, the library has provided an assistant to the coordinator. These posts are currently filled by Daniel Sullivan, HLC Coordinator, and Antoinette Giamalva, Library Programming Manager. Workbooks, supplies, and instructional manuals are provided by the library and HLC.

The Laubach system of reading education is used in the basic program and there is now an on-line training program for tutors. Several years ago, a survey of tutors showed that, although they found the basic materials very good, tutors were amazingly inventive in finding and using all kinds of resources and materials.

The library system has been a tremendous support from the very beginning, supporting the program and providing space in each library building for tutors to meet with students. HLC is indeed fortunate to have the support of the library system and its staff. Together, HLC and the library have provided an important and vital service to our community.

It is interesting to note that HLC has been celebrating and recognizing the work of students and tutors since very early in its existence. The July 1996 edition of The Reader, HLC's newsletter, included the notice of the annual Appreciation Assembly in September at the Ybor Library. HLC will again celebrate the accomplishments of all those involved with a celebration in September of **2026 of HLC's 40th year.**

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