

The Learning Connection

YOUR IMPACT REPORT | FALL 2023

Meet Willa and Saulo, 2023's Growing Through Literacy emcees!



Saulo and Willa, at a recent tutoring session

For the first time ever, a student-tutor pair will serve as co-emcees for September 26th's Growing Through Literacy fundraiser. Meet student Saulo and tutor Willa through their interviews below. See the newsletter insert for more information on the upcoming event!

SAULO

Saulo, where are you originally from?

I'm from Oaxaca, Mexico.

Why did you decide to take classes?

I decided to learning English because that help me to communicate with my kids' teacher or in my job.

What do you like about your tutor?

I like how she has patience to teach me and also we became good friends and she give me a lot of support with my English speak.

Describe your experience as a Literacy Network student.

The experience is if we want to open new world on our life we need to learning new things.

How has it helped you to improve your life?

I have better communication in my job, school, and I'm not shy when I talk with other people.

What's next? What plans do you have for the future?

My plan is still learning English and also taken classes how to use Macintosh and GED classes.

WILLA

Willa, how long have you been a tutor with Literacy Network?

I've been a tutor since November 2012. My first meeting with Saulo was 11/20/12.

Why did you decide to become a tutor?

I have experience in language teaching (German) and when I retired this seemed like the perfect activity.

What do you like about tutoring?

Literacy Network fulfills a real need in our society, offering help to learners gratis. The students are eager to learn.

How has tutoring impacted your life?

Tutoring has enriched my life tremendously through meeting and working with a person from another country and learning about him and his family.

Why is adult literacy important for our community?

We need to help people who want to learn English to be able to do so without expense or other difficulty.

What are you most proud of from your work with Literacy Network?

My student is much more confident now in speaking and understanding English.

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Tutoring is a way of not only helping a person who needs to learn English but also of learning just as much oneself about another person and their country. It has opened up a whole new world for me. ■

With improved English, former students build their own businesses



DIOCELINA

Being able to speak English is essential for Diocelina's cleaning business. "I am the owner of my work. I need to talk with my clients," she shares. "Most of my clients speak only English." **After practicing in class, Diocelina now feels comfortable talking and texting with her clients.**

Diocelina began English classes with Literacy Network in 2013, and has taken classes on and off since then. "I like the teachers. They help a lot," she says. In recent years, she has especially appreciated the flexibility of online classes. "I am busy because I have two boys. **I love the Zoom classes because I stay at home and take classes.**"

Her improved English helps in other parts of her life. She says she can now use English at places like the doctor, her sons' schools, and the grocery store.

"I am very grateful for the support and teachers and whole team because everybody help me," she says. "It is a very, very good place. I have very good memories with the teachers and everybody."



AMY

Amy and her husband have owned Right Size Alterations, located in Madison's Hilldale Mall, for over 10 years. Their services range from replacing zippers to altering wedding dresses. When Amy, who is originally from Laos, decided she wanted to improve her English to be able to better communicate with customers, she was excited to find Literacy Network.

"When you first start a new life in a new country a lot is going on and it's hard to afford everything, especially when you have kids too," Amy shares. **"Literacy Network let me learn for free."**

Amy was also excited to learn about the variety of class times offered, which helped her fit in English studies around her busy work schedule as a business owner. She began in Level 2 English class in 2017, and over time worked her way up to Level 4, and then enrolled in both Citizenship classes and our Transitions program (English for College and Career).

"When I came, at work, I couldn't communicate well with customers. When they asked me questions, I didn't understand. Even though I wanted to answer, I didn't know what to say," Amy says. **"By the second or third semester, my reading and writing improved. It helped me a lot to communicate with customers."**

Amy was also grateful for the other resources Literacy Network offers, explaining, "The school tries to help you if you need help besides English classes. Teachers provide addresses and information about places for food. I think that's really helpful for newcomers who don't know English or much about the U.S. That's amazing to me."

During the pandemic, Amy also used her skills to give back, as she made and donated masks to both healthcare facilities and Literacy Network staff.

While Amy has paused her studies because of her booming business, she hopes to return to class in the future, both at Literacy Network and college, where she would like to study fashion design. ■

95 AND COUNTING: Dedicated volunteer is citizenship student champion

Not many people can say they have personally helped 95 people become U.S. citizens, but Literacy Network volunteer Ruth Robarts can. Since 2016, Ruth has been both a volunteer instructor and tutor in our Citizenship program, teaching weekly group classes and tutoring students one-on-one. **In 2022, Ruth volunteered an impressive 466.5 hours!** Her citizenship student Bertha says, “She is the best teacher and person that I ever meet! I recognize her love for people.”



Ruth attended student Bertha's oath ceremony this August.

Ruth began volunteering at Literacy Network in April 2010, before retiring from the University of Wisconsin Law School. She knew she wanted to volunteer as a tutor with a local nonprofit, and started as an English tutor in our Community Literacy program. She was impressed by Literacy Network's responsiveness, volunteer orientation, training, and support.



Ruth and new citizen Regina

Ruth soon became interested in citizenship tutoring and helping in group classes. Ruth's background in education and her unwavering dedication to students create a safe, welcoming, and motivating environment for learners. Ruth is a champion for her students. She approaches each person with compassion and openness. Another of Ruth's students, Sergio, says, **“Ruth is good teacher because she is dedicated, patient, and listens everyone.”** Ruth has received multiple awards for her work with the Citizenship program. She was named 2018's Wisconsin Literacy Tutor of the Year and was awarded a United Way Distinguished Service Award and Rotary Club of Madison Senior Service Award.

In addition to volunteering in the citizenship program, Ruth has been a long-time personal ESL tutor with student Cristina. Cristina's goals include using English with her daughter's school and expanding her job opportunities. Two years ago, Cristina got her first full-time job with benefits, a position in housekeeping at St. Mary's Hospital. Cristina credits her time with Ruth for helping her get the job. She says, **“I can understand the nurses and patients and help them. Ruth is a very good person (with) a lot of patience.”**

Student Marie agrees, “Ruth is very patient and understanding. **She helped me learn to read and write which I didn't think was possible.** Her positivity and kindness are a plus!” The feeling is mutual. Ruth says students “...give me energy. They give me hope. They are helping me become a better teacher. They connect me to the broader community in very important ways. I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to serve them and for the staff and programs that make Literacy Network a bright light in our world.”

Thank you, Ruth, for your commitment to community members working toward their U.S. citizenship! ■

GROWING THROUGH *Literacy* — LUNCH

Tuesday, September 26, 2023
12:00 – 1:00 PM

The Madison Club
5 E. Wilson St., Madison, WI 53703

Join us to celebrate adult literacy students, volunteers, and other supporters at this year's Growing Through Literacy luncheon!

Attendance for this fundraising event is free of charge and includes lunch.

Register at www.litnetwork.org/GTL23 or by scanning this QR code.



All are welcome! Whether you're a longtime Literacy Network supporter or an interested community member looking to learn more about how to support adult literacy education, Growing Through Literacy provides an inspiring look at Literacy Network's programs. Learn about our mission and hear directly from the adults impacted by community support. Event proceeds will support students in our English group classes, citizenship program, GED tutoring, and more.



"I'm getting my words right again."
– Buddy, 2022 student speaker



"I feel more confident when socially talking to people so I can say now I feel good."
– Solange, 2022 student speaker

Questions? Interested in being an event sponsor? Contact margaret@litnetwork.org or call 608-268-6578. **Registration closes September 21 at 5:00 pm.**

THANK YOU TO OUR EVENT SPONSORS!



2023 student survey results

Literacy Network surveys our students each summer to learn more about their experience in our programs. 2023 results are in!

263 students completed the survey (35% increase from 2022)

100% of students are happy with their teacher or tutor

96% of students would recommend Literacy Network to a friend

47% of students prefer in-person class,

18% prefer online class, and

34% are happy with either



What do students say they like about Literacy Network?

"I like that they adapt to our schedules and what the student needs."

"They help a lot to prepare me professionally."

"I like Literacy Network because they have diversity in their students and staff."

"My tutor is amazing, the classrooms are good, the lessons are useful, the staff is friendly."

"It gives me a chance to learn at my age and it's free." ■



Share your LitNet story

You, too, can tell the world what you love about Literacy Network! Stories from volunteers, donors, students, and supporters like you will make an even bigger impact in our community.



GreatNonprofits is honoring highly regarded nonprofits with their 2023 Top-Rated List. Potential volunteers and donors look for this rating when learning more about our organization. Help Literacy Network renew its 2022 badge by posting a brief story about your experience with us. All content will be visible to potential donors and volunteers. It's easy and takes just minutes! **Submit your story by October 31 at bit.ly/LitNetGreatNonprofits.**

Record-breaking first half of 2023



This newly added Basic English group class had an average attendance of 21 students per class this summer!

Student enrollment continues to grow! Between January and June 2023, Literacy Network served 1,000 students. **This is an all-time high, exceeding the previous record set in 2016 by nearly 30 percent.** This total includes 116 refugee students, which is the most refugees served not only in six months, but also in a full calendar year.

Director of Program Impact Caitlin Mackesey shares, "Since the pandemic, we've seen a significant increase in demand for our services. **We are proud to be able to expand to meet our community's needs and hope to continue growing this fall semester and beyond!**"

Literacy Network's fall semester runs from September 11 through December 9. Final 2023 enrollment numbers will be shared in early 2024. ■



MISSION:

*Literacy Network
helps adults in Dane
County build skills,
reach goals, and
connect communities.*

Provide sustaining support of student-centered free adult literacy education

Make a lasting impact for our students when you give at
litnetwork.org/donate.

BECOME A MONTHLY DONOR

For as little as \$10 a month, your recurring contributions provide year-round hope and help. Your commitment to students is easy, convenient, and automatic.

JOIN THE LITERACY LEGACY SOCIETY

As a planned giver, you secure the future of adult literacy education for future generations. Extend your commitment and continue to make a difference for many years to come.



WHY I'M A MONTHLY DONOR...

*"My wife and I see our monthly support of
Literacy Network as an investment in the
amazing team there, and the life-changing
opportunities they offer to important
members of our community." – Conor Smyth*