



FALL 2020 NEWSLETTER

The latest news and updates from BEACON for Adult Literacy



BEACON and Lutheran Social Services: Helping Those Who Have Helped Us

Due to the increased accessibility of online classes, BEACON for Adult Literacy and Lutheran Social Services of the National Capital Area (LSSNCA) have strengthened their partnership to support refugees and immigrants in Northern Virginia.

“[BEACON] is the ESL provider whom most of our clients are studying with this fall. I’m impressed BEACON is able to do what it does for such good value,” says Becky Jennings, an LSSNCA case manager. She adds that students also like the virtual format of the classes during the pandemic. ***“[It’s] enabling so many more mothers to study English than they could pre-pandemic when transportation and childcare were issues.”***

LSSNCA has spent over 100 years focusing on a mission of rebuilding lives and helping people achieve self-sufficiency. Their many services include Immigration Advocacy, Refugee, Citizenship, and Family Reunification programs. As part of this, they work with participants of the Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) program, which allows Afghans and Iraqis who worked for or on behalf of the U.S. and whose lives are in danger to resettle in the U.S. with their immediate family.

LSSNCA case managers help SIV participants integrate into life in the U.S., including finding housing, employment, and benefits (such as medical care). One of the most popular services they help participants find is English classes. About 8 in 10 adult SIV participants have limited familiarity with English and need to take classes. LSSNCA paid for 7 SIV students to study at BEACON this fall.

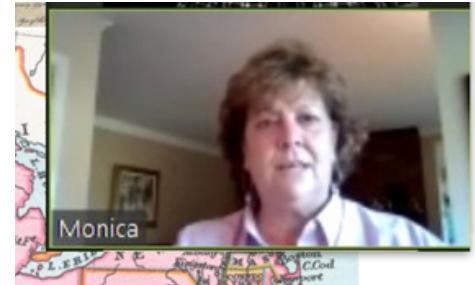
BEACON is proud to partner with LSS. Both organizations are looking forward to helping many more students find their places in the country they bravely assisted.

Student Spotlight, Meet a New Citizen

Becoming a U.S. citizen is important. You are more attached, more part of the community."

Jose, a former BEACON student from South America, became our newest United States citizen in September. Just in time for elections, Jose says that one of the reasons he wanted to become a U.S. citizen is to be able to participate in our democracy by voting. He takes his civic duty seriously and plans to vote early.

To pass the United States citizenship test, students prepare by studying 100 potential questions about the history and civics of the U.S. (They will be asked up to 10 questions and must answer 6 correctly to pass.) Applicants must be able to read a sentence, write a sentence, and answer questions about their application. Throughout the entire interview, they are evaluated on their speaking skills.



BEACON's citizenship class prepared Jose for each part of the exam and fortunately, he found the interview to be easy.

Monica is a wonderful teacher. She goes beyond the book and explains very well, describing all the details. I learned about the history of America. The class was very helpful."

One of the many things that Jose appreciates about BEACON is the structure and curriculum. His wife has studied with BEACON for several years, starting out in the lowest level. BEACON's English classes have enabled her to build the foundational language skills needed to apply for her citizenship. Jose is excited for his wife to become a U.S. citizen, and BEACON is confident that her hard work and the classes will make that dream a reality in the coming year.

Citizenship Panels Support Students

"Becoming a citizen of the U.S. is one of the most important goals of our students. The citizenship panel of experts gives students an overview of what to expect, and a roadmap for a successful journey to eventually becoming a proud U.S. citizen."

Monica Moore, Citizenship Instructor and panelist

BEACON's Citizenship classes focus on preparing students for the interview; however, navigating the application process for U.S. citizenship can be overwhelming and confusing, especially when English is not your native language. The process is long and complex, often requiring assistance from an Immigration Attorney. Current wait times are up to 18 months and require submission of a 20-page application. The cost is \$1,170 (recently increased by over 80%).

To educate students with general information about eligibility and the application process, BEACON hosts a Citizenship Panel each semester and invites Lisa Shea, Immigration Attorney (and Managing Partner) of Immigrants-First or Sydney Bright, Naturalization Manager of Hogar Immigrant Services, to participate.

A BEACON volunteer instructor also serves on the panel to highlight what students need to do to prepare for the interview, which tests student knowledge of the English language and the history and civics of the United States. Prospective applicants also hear from a student panelist who recently became a U.S. citizen. The student shares about their successful experience with the application and interview process, which hopefully makes the process less intimidating.

BEACON student, Yasmin, attended BEACON's fall Citizenship Panel and shared, "**I learned about a lot, like how to study for the test and the new [fees] to apply.**"

Romance is an 11-point word: Couple Find Love at BEACON's Scrabble® Scramble

In 2014, BEACON for Adult Literacy held its first ever Scrabble® Scramble. Marianne Racca was Executive Director at the time, and she's enjoyed watching the event's popularity and success grow with each passing year to become BEACON's signature annual event. But Scrabble® Scramble holds a special place in Marianne's heart for an even more personal reason.



That first Scrabble® Scramble, Marianne's daughter, Julie, and two grandchildren, Jenna and Jorden, attended. Jorden brought along a close work friend, Parker, because he loved playing Scrabble. Over the next few months, Jenna and Parker dated and eventually fell in love.

Fast forward to 2020, and the young couple were happily planning their wedding for June 6, 2020. Then came COVID-19. Disappointed, but determined to become man and wife, they rescheduled for September 5 in King George, Virginia. The couple exchanged vows in a beautiful outdoor ceremony, an intimate affair with closest family and friends in attendance.

The proud grandmother shared, "**Jenna has attended Scrabble® every year, and she always wins a prize (Windchimes and a \$200 Nordstrom gift card). Incentives for returning each year? Maybe, but I think it is more likely the nostalgia of her Scrabble® romance!**"

Congratulations to the happy couple!

BEACON celebrates Hispanic Heritage Month with board member, Diana Paguaga

Hispanic Heritage Month is celebrated nationwide, September 15 – October 15. While, the celebration looks a little different this year because of the pandemic, Diana Paguaga, BEACON board member, recounts all the amazing festivals and parties that usually take place during the month. Like many others in our community, Diana enjoys this time to celebrate her roots and the culture of her home country, Nicaragua.

"For me, Hispanic Heritage Month is awesome. Recognizing the Latino community is huge, especially here in Prince William County. We have great parties. Everybody gets together, and it's a big time to celebrate all the different folklore and different foods."

Celebrating the history and culture of the Hispanic community is important because of the numerous contributions Hispanics have made to enrich the United States. A significant portion, sixty-four percent, of the adult learners at BEACON are Hispanics, with Salvadorians, Mexicans, Guatemalans, and Hondurans among the top five countries.

Watch Diana's interview below.



BEACON for Adult Literacy is a proud member of Catalogue for Philanthropy's 2020-21 class, highlighting our organization as "one of the best" local nonprofits.



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