



# LITERACY MATTERS

OCTOBER 2016

Literacy Matters is a recurring publication of Literacy Nassau, Inc.



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## APPRECIATING CITIZENSHIP

*(submitted by Karen Micciche)*

I think it's because 2016 marks a historical presidential election (although I sometimes wonder if it's because Literacy Nassau is slowly becoming a household name), but for some reason, our phones have been ringing off the hook with people who want to apply for U.S. Citizenship. At this point, almost all of the potential applicants *are* aware that they will not be able to vote in the coming election even if they do apply right away, but there is still this growing sense of urgency. Despite the fact that it costs \$680 to file the 20+ page naturalization application, and our waiting list is over a month long, people are not deterred; they want to become Americans.

Typically, when we take appointments on a Citizenship Drive Day (which occurs once a month for an entire day), one of the first things we'll do is establish whether or not the applicant qualifies for a fee waiver. If he/she is living at or below 150% of the federal poverty level, we can submit a fee waiver application. If not, the applicant faces a \$680 fee.

This year, Stanford University (in partnership with the Robin Hood Foundation and the NYS Office for New Americans) decided to embark on a research study to better understand the true benefits of becoming a U.S. citizen. Obviously, we know you become able

to vote, but what are some of the other tangible benefits, beyond just voting, that U.S. citizenship has to offer? For those of us who have been citizens since birth, we don't give this much thought, but many people coming from an immigrant background have needs and circumstances much different from ours, which the study should reveal.

Conducted via a series of surveys, potential applicants who are living between 150% and 300% of the federal poverty level who would not qualify for the fee waiver but who are by no means "well off" are welcome to apply for a lottery. Applicants register for the lottery at [www.naturalizeny.org](http://www.naturalizeny.org). On a specific date, names are drawn at random - and if you are selected, you are referred to an ONA center (like Literacy Nassau) and you are able to apply for citizenship for free - the ONA center pays the fee for you. All you have to do in return is agree to complete follow up surveys that track what citizenship has meant to you throughout the process and about a year after you have naturalized.

As we approach Election Day, each of us should take a moment to reflect on what U.S. Citizenship really means. To so many on Long Island, it is so much more than just casting a ballot once a year. It's the opportunity to participate in civic activity - something many people in the world are prohibited from doing.

## THOUGHTS FROM THE CORNER OFFICE

Hi Everyone,

With school back in full swing, I have had the awesome opportunity to see my children in a whole new light. My youngest, Julianne, started nursery school this year, and Haley moved up to pre-K. For ease of scheduling, both girls are staying in school full day, from 8:10am-3pm. I was so absorbed with the day-to-day challenges of packing healthy lunches, transitioning summer wardrobes into fall wardrobes, and getting the whole family washed, fed, and out the door by 7:15am that I almost missed a huge realization: I am out of the "early childhood" phase of life as a mom. Sure, my kids are still little, but being in school full day is a huge step in their growth process! This realization hit me on the first full day of school (which, for us, was in mid-September) - when they were dismissed for the day, instead of running to greet my husband and I, they ran to each other in a movie-like embrace. Haley asked Julie about school and kept saying, "You're a big girl! I'm so proud of you!"

No matter our age, we're always growing. Tutors often say, "I learned more from my student than (s)he learned from me!" That's because when you're constantly teaching (like in parenting - or tutoring!), it's easy to forget that we're all constantly learning too. *☺ Karen*



As Haley helps Julie transition from being a baby to being a "big kid" in school, I've become aware of Haley's growth as a big sister and my growth as a mom.





## BY THE GRACE OF THE TEACHER: SPOTLIGHT ON THE GURU KRUPA FOUNDATION

(submitted by Karen Micciche)

Since 2012, Guru Krupa Foundation (GKF) has been a tremendous supporter of Literacy Nassau. I had the opportunity to learn more about GKF when I interviewed Mr. Mukund Padmanabhan earlier this month. His belief in the power of education is deeply spiritual, and his work both locally and internationally is truly inspiring.

*What is the vision and history of the Guru Krupa Foundation?*

Guru Krupa Foundation was started in 2008 as a private charitable foundation in New York. It was mainly motivated by a desire to do something for less fortunate people systematically, rather than through individual contributions to specific causes. Further, incorporating as a charitable foundation would also enable it to support national and international causes.

The vision for the organization, derived from the value system of Hinduism, may be succinctly summarized as:

- (i) Help those less fortunate than yourself,
- (ii) Support causes related to the acquisition of knowledge (both materialistic and non-materialistic),
- (iii) Preserve the heritage and knowledge that has already been acquired.

*What does Guru Krupa mean?*

The name "Guru Krupa" originates in Sanskrit and was given by one of the spiritual leaders in India (the Shankaracharya of Kanchi) - loosely translated, it means "By the Grace of the Teacher".

*What are some of the selection criteria for programs at the local, national and international level?*

GKF supports programs under three main categories:

- (i) "Social" projects – these projects are meant to improve the lives of impoverished people who do not have access to basic material needs.
- (ii) "Educational" projects essentially fund fellowships at well recognized universities, which in turn provide financial support to deserving students wishing to advance the frontiers of modern knowledge.
- (iii) "Religious/Cultural" projects support

activities related to preserving the traditional roots of Hinduism by providing financial support to ashrams/patashalas, temples, cultural programs, etc.

We invite organizations to submit proposals under these categories and evaluate the proposals on a case-by-case basis.

Selection criteria include:

- (i) whether the organization has 501(c)(3) certification (or, in the case of Indian organizations, the equivalent charitable status),
- (ii) the efficacy of the organization (percentage of income going towards direct service),
- (iii) the need for the organization's programs in the locality in which it operates,
- (iv) the amount of money requested, and,
- (v) the alignment between the project goals and GKF vision.



Mr. Padmanabhan at Recognition Night 2013.

*Why is teaching adults to interact in English important to GKF?*

Education is an important priority for GKF. While most of our education related programs focus on children, the adult education program administered by Literacy Nassau is an exception. In the U.S., there is a reasonable social safety-net that ensures that some minimum level of basic needs (including education) is provided to children (unlike places such as India, where the condition of poor children is much worse). Consequently, social programs that provide adults in need with help are equally important in the U.S. The demographic that Literacy Nassau serves falls in this category - they are well motivated immigrants who are trying to become more productive members of society but are handicapped by their lack of knowledge of English. Hence, the scope of the program aligns well with GKF goals.

An added benefit is that our support for Literacy Nassau's programs addresses our desire to support local programs as well as national and international ones.

*How does access to education shape communities? Can you provide a global perspective on communities that have changed as a result of your partnerships?*

Education is a major focus of many GKF programs, both at the level of children and adults. We believe that education serves as a building block for further success in life -

this is true at any stage, but children in particular can leverage the benefits even more than adults. Of course, education is of use only after basic life needs including food security are met.

Several GKF programs in India focus on providing for children, either by supporting orphanages, or by providing for their educational needs in non-profit schools. These programs are run by various organizations, some of them in India, and some in the U.S. Through these programs, GKF provides complete living expenses for a few hundred children and educational support for a few hundred more.

In addition to the programs in India, GKF also provides educational support to poor children in the U.S., by paying for several tens of thousands of books to be made available to them (through a partnership with a U.S. organization).

In terms of evaluating the impact of our programs, the nature of the programs is such that it is difficult to find objective measures to measure the impact.

The most that we can say is that we helped a few hundred children move ahead to the next year, we hope we



Above: An early childhood center funded by GKF in West Bengal, India.



Above: School children pose in front of a school bus funded by GKF for a school in Madurai, India.



**GKF SPOTLIGHT (CONT'D.)**

made their life a little easier, we hope that with our help they learned a little bit more, and we hope that we have played a role in making them productive members of society in the future.

*What are local causes close to GKF?*

Our local causes in the U.S. have started tilting further towards helping adults who are in need. For instance, in addition to the adult-education related Literacy Nassau programs, we have started supporting programs that provide food to homeless people (through a partnership with a local organization in Brooklyn). We do also remain committed to supporting children's causes locally, through free book distributions to children in schools in low income areas, in New York and other states. We are also interested in support for after-school programs for children in schools from low income areas.



Above: Mukund Padmanabhan poses with founder of Sevalaya, and organization in Chennai, India which operates an orphanage, school, medical center and more. (GKF partially funded the building of their school.)



school bus funded



Above: Mr. Padmanabhan with the President and staff of Akshay Patra, which serves 1.6 million children free lunch every day.

**HAPPY BIRTHDAY!**

Happy birthday to our tutors born in October! They are:

- |                     |                   |                    |
|---------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| Mary-Joan Albiston  | Catherine Antioco | Angella Broderick  |
| Ann Cullen          | Joanne DePaula    | Joshua Diamond     |
| Judy Douenias       | Sheryll Dorf      | Rhonnie Fischman   |
| Cindy Florman       | Lori Freeman      | Rosemary Fuchs     |
| Richard Gabriele    | Sakina Husain     | Sarah Jairam       |
| Carol Keating       | Jeff Konzet       | Laura Longo        |
| Catherine Lo Presti | Ada Marcus        | Maura Martinez     |
| Louise Nachshen     | Elizabeth Reilly  | Gwynn Riordan      |
| Olga Scileppi       | Philip Scotto     | Scott Shelofsky    |
| Andrea Snyder       | Diane Tully       | Thomas A. Williams |

**WELCOME CRAIG WEINTRAUB!**

A lifelong New Yorker, Craig got his start in film as an actor along side Jason Miller (The Exorcist) in the film, *Murdered Innocence*. He studied theatre and dramatic arts at Hofstra University, Stella Adler Conservatory, Lee Strasberg Institute and Susan Batson's Black Nexxus School of Acting. To further his deep passion for storytelling, he studied filmmaking at New York University. With the formation of his motion picture production company, Weintraub Films, he went on to write, produce and direct his first feature, *Uncle Melvin's Apartment*, which played in film festivals around the world and garnered awards for Best Comedy, Best Screenplay and Best Director.

Being a guest of other film festivals sparked his desire for creating one on Long Island. In 2011, that idea became a reality with the formation of the Long Beach International Film Festival, a dream opportunity for Craig as it combines his two passions - the art of film and giving to those in need. He believes that the medium of film has power to offer new perspectives on life, our culture and our world.

In his community, Craig produces the annual Gala film for the Give Kids A Smile Foundation, which offers free dental care to children from low income neighborhoods and assists the Laughter Saves Lives Foundation, supporting the families of those lost on 9/11 and providing medical care for patients fighting cancer.

Currently, Craig is filming a documentary focusing on a natural cancer cure alternative in the national story of a man who saved his beloved dog from terminal cancer as well as a documentary on the life story of UFC Champion, Chris Weidman.

Upcoming projects include the drama/thriller, *Baby Grand*, with producing partner Barbara Defina (*Goodfellas*, *Casino*) and the dramady, *Inappropriate Behavior*, a story that follows a father's struggles with raising his autistic son.

Along with actor/writer/director/producer Ed Burns (Saving Private Ryan, Brothers McMullen), Craig is building a 9th through 12th grade filmmaking curriculum at their alma mater, G.W. Hewlett High School. The goal is to introduce education and tools to students at an earlier age to encourage and inspire filmmaking while nurturing their own stories to life.

A former resident of Hewlett, Long Beach & Rockville Centre, Craig currently resides in Oceanside with his wife Bianca and their two chihuahuas, Lilly and Kylie.

We look forward to incorporating Craig's unique capacity for storytelling to help us widen the reach of Literacy Nassau throughout Long Island. Welcome Craig!



New Board Member, Craig Weintraub

**CONGRATULATIONS!**

Congratulations to all of our newest tutors! They are as follows:

- |                  |                      |                 |
|------------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| Elizabeth Ajasin | Susan Astre          | Dee Berger      |
| Marla Blackburn  | Laura Blanc de Silva | Sheryll Dorf    |
| Bob Hanna        | Joanne Kassnove      | Alexandra Leung |
| Daniel McCarthy  | Donna Muoio          | Keith Oshan     |
| Scott Pearlman   | Alice Scharf         | Irma Souveroff  |
| Donna White      |                      |                 |



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## **RESPONDING TO THE NEED: REVAMPING THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNER TTW**

*(submitted by Kim Nau)*

As announced in the August newsletter, my role of Program Director has expanded from Next Chapter Book Clubs to include a caseload of 1:1 students. I recently had the opportunity to co-facilitate our new English Language Learner (ELL) Tutor Training Workshop with Umama Pasha and, as a certified teacher of English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), what follows is my perspective of some of the changes we have made to the training.

The newest ELL TTW is full of valuable teaching strategies that are easy to differentiate and implement. It is very much focused on the beginner learner, and we discuss the importance of using visuals and real-life materials to enable our beginner students to make connections in order to develop meaning. One example I gave is of Annie Sullivan who was able to teach a very differently-abled Helen Keller to communicate with others. Certainly, none of the students in our program have the challenges that faced that particular teacher-student pair, how-

ever, many of the techniques that were developed can also be implemented with a beginner ELL. For example, when Ms. Sullivan was struggling to teach Ms. Keller the word "water", she tried spelling it out in her hand, over and over, "w-a-t-e-r." But Helen could not understand. Finally, her teacher took her hand and placed it under the water pump, allowing the cool water to flow onto her hand. That is when Helen made the connection, and the word had meaning for her. Throughout the TTW, we cover a variety of strategies to introduce new vocabulary words in simple, yet effective ways that enable your student to understand.

The workshop's goal is to prepare you to work with a beginner student, but I think what is so unique about Literacy Nassau's approach is that we offer partnership support and guidance through the whole process. Once volunteers are matched with a student, we encourage them to reach out and ask questions. We want both you and your student to not only enjoy the experience, but most importantly, to be successful in the tutor-student relationship. Through her rela-

tionship with her teacher, Ms. Keller was able to learn to communicate with others, but also became a journalist and educator herself, well-known for the inspiration she provided to so many. None of this would have been possible without the dedication and commitment of her teacher. In the words of Ms. Keller, "Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much".



We piloted our new and improved ELL Tutor Training Workshop on Saturday, September 10th. It includes the *Word by Word Literacy Workbook* as part of the new "bundle pack" of tutor materials.