

# LINKS TO LITERACY

SERVING ADULT BASIC LITERACY AND ESL STUDENTS IN CENTRE &amp; CLEARFIELD COUNTIES

## Computer Literacy for Grandparents

KAREN LOERCH, ADULT BASIC EDUCATION PROGRAM COORDINATOR

A generous grant by the Downtown State College Rotary Club was the spark behind the Literacy for Life Initiative to train grandparents in the technical skills needed to communicate with schools and help their grandchildren learn in a digital world. Amy Mitchell, who leads a support group in Centre County for grandparents in a caretaker role, can attest to this need. "When we raised our children - our grandchildren's parents - technology was not at the forefront like it is now. There are so many different technologies that the children use that the older people need to learn about... The school systems use specific programs to communicate with parents and guardians... We didn't have that to deal with when we were raising our children."

The program was launched in four locations - Bellefonte Senior Resource Center, Centre Hall Senior Center at Centre Hall Fire Hall, Holt Memorial Library in Philipsburg, and Centre Region Active Adult Center in State College, Monday through Thursday for five consecutive weeks in February and March, 2020. Our five weeks of lessons encompassed the following topics: basic computer skills, advanced computer skills & browsers, navigating school-specific systems and apps, best practices for helping your grandchildren in school, phone scams and financial woes. *(Continues on back page)*

## Health Literacy

ADDRESSING A VITAL TOPIC

The coronavirus pandemic has created urgent health literacy needs in the local community. In the past few weeks, Coordinator, Karen Loerch, developed a curriculum to help Mid-State students understand what COVID-19 is, how to prevent transmission, and what to do if they become ill. The curriculum will be available to students who register in the fall. Related resources can be found on our website.

While COVID-19 literacy is an urgent priority, general health literacy needs are on-going. Communicating about health and navigating access to providers can be especially challenging for those who are new to the English language and US healthcare system. To help these students develop the skills and confidence they need to maintain health while in the US, Mid-State offers a course on 'English for Doctor Visits' and tutoring curricula on 'Women's Health,' 'Men's Health,' and 'Workplace Wellness'. *(Continues on back page)*

## upcoming EVENTS

### New Volunteer Tutor Online Training

**August 31 - September 4**  
**Times TBA**

Volunteers attend three sessions

### Fall Program - Online Classes and Tutoring

**Beginning in September**

See website for an updated  
schedule in August

### 21st Ron and Mary Maxwell Community Spelling Bee

**Date TBA**

### Community Resources Orientation & Centre Safe Presentation

**October 1, 1:30pm Online**

Presented by Paula Bigatel, with  
Brittany Sherman, Prevention  
Educator, Centre Safe

### How to Help your Child Become a Better Reader

**October Zoom Sessions TBA**

Presented by Karen Loerch,  
MSLC Coordinator

### Book Fair with Barnes and Nobles

**Saturday, November 21st**

### Spring Program

**Beginning in January 2021**

## Because of You

AMY WILSON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,  
MID-STATE LITERACY COUNCIL



Together, ambassadors for literacy and supporters funded the successes of adults learning

reading, computer skills, and English. A grandmother raising grandchildren learned how to use the computer to access local schools and healthcare. She learned how to help the children become better readers. Our dream is that no one lacks literacy so everyone can access a life of safety, realized goals, and community participation.

Because of you, our health literacy classes and tutoring helped families safely navigate the pandemic. Lack of education is a barrier barricading families in poverty. This year students moved from part-time to full-time employment with their new skills. As rehiring begins, students are equipped to reenter the workforce. Volunteer tutors are continuing to teach remotely. Thank you for giving life-saving knowledge and skills.

We are a community of learners. Adults prepared with their tutors for the U.S. Naturalization Test. A deep understanding of civics and competent English skills led to passing scores and smiles.

Finally, 4,000 plus children's books to build reading skills and the enjoyment of learning were given to families. To describe the children receiving books - they wiggle, grin, and bounce. They say *thank you*.

## Centre Gives Raises \$23,805.70 Thanks to Literacy Supporters

Thank you, from the bottom of our hearts, for helping make this year's Centre Gives a success for Mid-State Literacy Council! Our community contributed a total of \$23,805.70 through the Centre Gives site and direct donations. Your donation has a real impact, and we are so grateful that you chose to invest in literacy. We're amazed by your generosity!

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## Equity and Justice

We believe in creating a culture where inclusiveness is a standard, everyday practice. To achieve this end, we are dedicated to ongoing dialogue and examination of all aspects of our organization to ensure that our volunteers, students, tutors, staff, and leadership are able to participate in a meaningful way in our literacy programs. We are committed to fostering and maintaining an equitable environment where all the diverse individuals in our community feel empowered to achieve their literacy and life goals.

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## Ruth Kistler Service Award

It is with pleasure and appreciation for their leadership, that the Mid-State Literacy Council Board of Directors voted to award AAUW State College Branch with the 2020 Ruth C. Kistler Service Award, the highest award honoring contributions to literacy in our community. Because of AAUW State College Branch support, Mid-State Literacy Council is able to provide essential education to women. With new skills, women obtained their first jobs, earned education degrees, and were powerful role models for their children.

## ABE Student: Leslie

KAREN LOERCH, ADULT BASIC EDUCATION PROGRAM  
COORDINATOR



Leslie has been a student of MSLC since 2016. She has received tutoring in money management and in reading recipes and cooking. She has learned to follow written directions with guidance. She has enjoyed learning to cook using the correct tools and measuring devices and learning to manage a grocery list to procure the food to make the dishes for her lesson.

She has her favorites but still enjoys new recipes from her vast collection of cookbooks. She loves lattes but knows she must save her own money for this costly but delicious beverage. She has learned to count out the exact coinage to purchase her chosen coffee concoctions every week.

She loves working with her two tutors and shows evidence of growth in Social Skills. She never expects a free beverage and comes prepared to count out her money and pay for her own coffee. She knows she must be prepared with the correct food to make her dish, or there will be no cooking that day. She always enjoys sharing what she has cooked with her friends at her residence.

Leslie has shown growth in her recent assessments, in contrast to her first two years. In 2019, she answered reading questions correctly at a 20% higher rate than on previous reading tests. She has growing confidence that she is becoming a reader at last.

## Lina Chung: From ESL Student to Instructor

KELLY MOORE, MID-STATE TUTOR & PSU STUDENT



Lina Chung, a Mid-State "graduate," moved to the United States from South Korea ten years ago when her husband decided to earn his Ph.D. from Penn State University. At the time, she had an inadequate understanding of the English language. She began her journey to fluency at Mid-State Literacy Council. Her drive came from everyday activities she could not perform, such as eating at a restaurant or participating in parent-teacher conferences at her children's school.

Although she only came to Mid-State to learn English, Lina met some of her closest friends here and even gained a better understanding about other cultures. Having benefited so much from the program, she decided to give back. She used her language skills to become a co-instructor and has helped teach for several semesters.

Lina believes her history as a student has given her a unique perspective as a co-instructor. She researches her students' cultures, discusses with them comparisons to American culture, and offers tips tailored to their specific needs. The assimilation into American culture is difficult, but Lina has successfully pushed through many challenges while also preserving her own Korean culture. Mid-State has helped Lina's confidence grow, inspiring her to instill that same confidence in others.



# Children's Book Drive

KAREN LOERCH, ADULT BASIC EDUCATION PROGRAM  
COORDINATOR

This year's bookfair at Barnes & Noble on Saturday, November 23 was our most successful ever, thanks to you! It was a day of stories, crafts, poetry, and more. We are thankful that so many families and individuals from the community could join us and support literacy.

MSLC works with Barnes and Nobles Book Store to acquire thousands of beautiful new books donated by caring shoppers from Central Pa. We level all the books and deliver them to the Bellefonte School District for summer reading. We also deliver books to Philipsburg YMCA for their Summer Backpack Program and to the Bald Eagle Schools for their summer program.

With the gracious assistance from our local AAUW, we receive gently used books that we sort, box up and deliver to our Food Banks located in Centre and Clearfield Counties. Thousands of children, and adults have reading material year round from our local donators.



# Author Event

KAREN LOERCH, ADULT BASIC EDUCATION PROGRAM  
COORDINATOR

On February 18, 2020 Mid-State co-hosted an event with acclaimed author, Michelle Nelson-Schmidt, who has written books to encourage wise decision making and caring choices with friends. To introduce our students to her great stories for parents and children, Mid-State hosted a book club with the chapter book, A New Friend for Jonathan James, Book 1 of The Whatif Monster Chapter Book Series. It was led by Carrie Koch and Lina Chung, who not only communicated the book content but also encouraged discussion with the ESL students in the group.

**Inspire your child to read!  
Improve your English!**

Join us for a Special Book club  
at Mid-State Literacy Council

**Mondays 10:15 - 11:30 am**  
**January 13 - February 17**  
special date Wednesday January 22 in place of January 20

You get your own free copy of "The Whatif Monster  
Chapter Book Series: A New Friend for Jonathan James"

Limited space—  
sign up today!  
Equal entry restrictions.  
statehatercouncil.org or call  
814-338-1809

...then see children's author  
**Michelle Nelson-Schmidt**  
for a live story time!

**Mid-State  
Literacy  
Council**

February 18, 2020 ~ 5:30 pm ~ Grace Lutheran Church  
presented by Jana Marie Foundation and  
Mid-State Literacy Council



Top left: Mary Dupuis and Mimi Coppersmith greet visitors at the Barnes & Noble bookfair; Bottom left: Paula Donson signs copies of her book at the bookfair. Top right: Students at Mid-State were invited to join a book club and attend the Author Event; Bottom right: Karen Loerch receives donated books from Suzanne Kerlin of the State College AAUW.

# Why Do People Volunteer At Mid-State Literacy Council

ERIKA REUTZEL-BECHTEL, ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE (ESL) SPECIALIST



Our outstanding volunteers from top left to bottom right:  
Nina Petrillo, Ann Echols, Ranjana Mathur

Who makes all of this possible through Mid-State Literacy Council? The answer is an army of devoted volunteers whose motivations are as interesting and diverse as the students they teach. Allyson Ray, for example, is a PhD student at Penn State who felt isolated in the campus bubble. At Mid-State, she discovered a place where she could use her skills to help people in the community access opportunities. Over a two-year period, she helped a student prepare for the ROTC exam, another work towards a high-school equivalency credential, and another practice for the US citizenship test. She is inspired by their determination and says of one student: *"I see how hard she's working so it makes me want to work harder for her and then she says the same thing about me and then we're crying and it's great!"*

Similarly, Lamees Eltohami, a freshman, admires how hard her students work to improve their computer literacy. Last year, Lamees worked with an airport employee who was falling behind due to her slow typing speed. With Lamees' support and daily practice, the student's typing speed improved significantly. Lamees shares her sense of accomplishment: *"I know it's a small thing but it makes me so excited to think of all the possibilities that could come with that. It makes me feel like I have a purpose. So, I love it."*

Another Penn State student, Marinelle Azar, who spent much of her childhood in Egypt, enjoys using Arabic as a teaching tool to help her beginning-level student from Saudi Arabia integrate into American society for the first time.

In reflecting on her volunteer experience, Nina Petrillo emphasizes the close relationship she has developed with her Russian-speaking student over a period of three years, saying--"She's like a grandmother to me." With Nina's help, Galina has gained the skills to interact more effortlessly with her English-speaking grandchildren and recently passed the US citizenship test. Nina says: "[Volunteering here] has come to be probably the best part of my day... I keep coming back and keep asking for Galina because I love that we've built that relationship and I think that it's really strong and that's something that's important when you're trying to learn a language because it can be scary."

After her retirement from a teaching career, Ranjana Mathur sought a place where she could apply her skills but maintain the flexibility to travel and spend time with her extended family. After teaching classes here for almost four years, she describes what keeps her coming back: "I like to hear about other cultures, other countries... I like the atmosphere, I like the people here, and I have fun teaching."

Similarly, Ann Echols, who taught in Penn State's Smeal College of Business, finds it rewarding to contribute to an organization's success without the pressures of a paid position. As the newly installed President of the Board of Directors, Ann's role includes ensuring the long-term sustainability of the organization while guiding its mission and policies. She describes what motivates her in this way: "We can't leave our brothers and sisters in the dark! I mean this is what we're supposed to do...take care of each other."

We couldn't close an article about the wonderful volunteers of Mid-State Literacy Council without paying tribute to our outgoing Board President, Cathi Alloway, whose leadership has served us well for many years. So, on behalf of Mid-State Literacy Council, heartfelt thanks to Cathi and all the volunteers who share their time and talents to help others in our community achieve their potential. You are an inspiration.

## Student quote

"After this class, I began feeling more confident. Thank you Mid-State Literacy Council teachers and tutors!" -Seher

## MSLC team

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## board of DIRECTORS

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[mid-stateliteracycouncil.org](http://mid-stateliteracycouncil.org)

our financial supporters:



Centre County  
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**The Hamer Foundation**

## Computer Literacy for Grandparents

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We would also like to thank the PSECU for pitching in to offer the 5th workshop on phishing and scams – a great addition to the program. With our beloved, capably trained team of PSU and local volunteers, willing participants, and dedicated site managers we managed to give our grandparents these technology

lessons through Power Point presentations, teaching tips, handouts, answers to specific needs, and a willingness to believe they could help their grandchildren wade through the technology brought home nightly in their book bags.

The sincere engagement and appreciation of our grandparents were voiced weekly. Our hope is to present another version that would resemble face-to-face tutoring, but in a virtual Zoom setting. We live in a fast paced world that in recent months has screeched to a halt. I believe with our short course in technology, we have tossed a life ring to our Centre County grandparents and families that will keep their boats afloat.

## Health Literacy

CONTINUED FROM FIRST PAGE

Mid-State Literacy Council has been able to provide well-informed programs on health literacy through our partnership with the Penn State Biobehavioral Health program. With the support of faculty members Dr. Anne-Marie Chang, Dr. Kari C. Kugler, and Dr. Lindsay Fernández-Rhodes, undergraduate majors in the program can receive course credit by tutoring with us. The relationships developed are mutually beneficial, as students gain hands-on experience related to their field while addressing the literacy needs of local ESL students. One recent pre-med volunteer from the program, Sarah Almarzooqi, described the value of the partnership in this way: "Health literacy is a topic that I find incredibly important and often overlooked, not only in ESL but for the global population... [Being able to help learners understand] their health, prevention, and treatment options was incredibly rewarding."

In our effort to support health literacy in the local area, there is much more work to be done. As the healthcare landscape continues to change, Mid-State Literacy Council is constantly seeking to build partnerships with Penn State programs, human service agencies, faith communities, healthcare providers and concerned citizens. If you feel you can help, please reach out! We would love to welcome you to the team.