

# LINKS TO LITERACY

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



## What Will You Learn Next?

AMANDA GIEDROC, LITERACY COORDINATOR, MID-STATE LITERACY COUNCIL

To live is to learn. Many of us are living our lives, but are we consistently learning? Are we like sponges and absorbing everything we can? Or are we more passive in our learning opportunities? The students and tutors at Mid-State Literacy Council exemplify the importance of learning during their tutoring sessions and classes. Walk into our office or hop on a Zoom session, and you will find tutors and students who delight in and work towards learning new things. Their relationships with each other and their dedication to the learning process propel them to master new math, language, and technology skills. Initially, some students find learning something new daunting and slightly embarrassing. They often feel they can't grasp new concepts because of their age or skill level. Even though they may perceive themselves as anything but a learner, our tutors and teachers help students to overcome learning obstacles and find success every day. When this happens, we often hear students say, "I can't believe I learned this!" or "I wish I would have learned this sooner!" These are moments when we can see the value and significance of learning in their lives and its effect on their perception of themselves. With our students as your motivation, I ask, what will you learn next?

## upcoming EVENTS

### Literacy Council at the Spikes

August 20, 6:35pm

\$10 tickets at 814-238-1809

### 23rd Ron and Mary Maxwell Community Spelling Bee

Wednesday, September 21  
6pm

### New ESL Volunteer Zoom Training

Monday, August 29

Wednesday, August 31

Friday, September 2

10 am - noon

Volunteers attend all sessions.

Sessions will be recorded for  
anyone who can't attend.

### Literacy for Life: Basic Cell Phone Skills

Education sessions will be  
scheduled throughout the fall  
and spring.

### MSLC Book Fair

November 18-20

Author and Shop In-Store events  
at Barnes & Noble, State College

## A Tremendous Year

AMY WILSON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,  
MID-STATE LITERACY COUNCIL



Together, volunteers and literacy supporters spurred on, nurtured, and increased the success of adults learning reading, technology, and English skills. Thank you.

Because of you, each year we get closer to our mission; Our dream is that no one lacks literacy so that everyone can access a life of safety, realized goals, and community participation.

Because of you, we provide literacy instruction for adults who need vital skills. A parent learned to read to ensure that her child learned to read. She didn't want her child to struggle as she had. This parent can read to her child, encourage reading in her home, and attend school meetings to support her child's education.

Because of you, Mid-State Literacy Council welcomes refugees, providing English instruction and support. They want to enter the workforce, develop friendships, and support their children. We are here to support them.

Because of you, we provide basic math skills for adults to help them gain the skills needed for employment and training programs. Volunteers are needed to teach addition, subtraction, and more. Training, mentoring, and instructional materials are provided. Consider volunteering at Mid-State in a way that sparks your interest.

Taylor Swift said, "Books train your imagination to think big." The U.S. Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) Skills Map <https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/piaac/skillsmap/> reports the following for adults, 16 - 74 years old:

In Centre County, 13% are at or below literacy level 1.

In Clearfield County, 23% are at or below literacy level 1.

Because of you, this year, we will teach adults vital skills and make a difference. Literacy is the gift that uplifts generation to generation. Literacy is the gift my parents gave to me. It is the gift we give to each other. Because of you, lives are changed. Thank you.

## Centre gives Raises \$28,892.23 for Mid-State Literacy Council

Our donors never cease to amaze us! Because of your generosity during Centre Gives and throughout the year, our students benefit. Thank you!

*"I can feel the support absolutely everywhere and I am so thankful that I walked into the doors of this wonderful family.*

*Thank you for doing all that you do."*

*Seher. Message to the agency. Dec. 2021. Letter.*

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## Literacy for Life: Technology Skills for Centre and Clearfield County Adults

The Hamer Foundation is sponsoring this program. As adults increase their reading skills, they need help with technology to apply for employment online and access telehealth. Local employers said that employees must access their benefits online, and low literate adults were unable to use the required technology in the workplace. This program provides technology instruction and opportunities.

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## MSLC's Rose Cologne Volunteer of the Year, Robert Leach, shares...

*"Volunteering is an integral part of my life. I was a Little League coach, a AYSO soccer coach, a Boy Scout leader, a Sunday school teacher and member of a local school board. In my more mature years I found I had a passion for teaching ESL. Volunteering to teach ESL at Mid-State was a natural choice for me."*

Four years. Twelve semesters. Over 120 engaged students. More than 500 hours of instruction. Exceeding 650 hours of preparation. One goal: to provide English as a second language students with the tools to speak and understand English with greater confidence and skill. Thank you, Robert Leach for your service!

## Becoming a United States Marine

AMANDA GIEDROC, LITERACY COORDINATOR



Brett:

Brett is a Ph.D. candidate in Materials Science and Engineering at Penn State and the captain of the Penn State Boxing Team, where he is ranked #2 in the nation for his weight. Brett's innate motivation to accomplish goals, his experiences teaching undergraduate students, and his interest in the Marines made him the perfect tutor for Yousif. The two were paired together in March of 2022.

Brett's goal is to help Yousif learn math concepts and skills to the point of automaticity. He wants Yousif to feel confident solving new and challenging math problems. When learning becomes confusing or difficult, Brett immediately explains the concept in a different way and connects it to what Yousif already knows. These strategies have helped Yousif to make incredible gains in a short period of time.

Brett enjoys tutoring Yousif because he feels that Yousif's goal has now become his own, forming a team that can conquer any task. Brett further explains, "Yousif is determined to learn and pass the ASVAB which makes my job exciting. Some days he comes in after working the night shift and is tired, but we always work through the rough days and come out better for them. Part of achieving your goals requires doing what you don't want when you don't want to do it. Vibrant and passionate, Yousif has a contagious energy that drives this ship forward towards success."

Yousif:

Yousif has one goal: to become a United States Marine. He wants to be a member of the "world's finest fighting force" and follow in his brother's footsteps. Before he can achieve this goal, Yousif must pass an extensive military entrance exam called the ASVAB. The ASVAB tests candidates on their knowledge of nine subject areas ranging from word knowledge to auto and shop.

To prepare for this exam, Yousif turned to the Mid-State Literacy Council to find tutors, like Brett, who could help him review information in these areas. Yousif and Brett meet multiple times a week to review and learn math concepts like geometry and algebra. When asked to describe Brett as his tutor, Yousif shared, "He explains things very slowly and helps me to learn things in different ways. He always teaches at my level. Brett is teaching me patience, to never give up, and to stay motivated to keep learning more."

Beyond their tutoring sessions, Yousif and Brett share similar interests like boxing and exercising. They plan to meet several times this summer, hopefully after boot camp, to discuss boxing strategies and schedule boxing matches. Their strong tutor-student relationship and dedication to learning has propelled Yousif to master new skills and deepen his understanding of math concepts. We wish Yousif luck on his journey to become a Marine!

# Improving Reading Skills One Book at a Time

AMANDA GIEDROC, LITERACY COORDINATOR



The more we read, the better readers we become. Our confidence and reading skills improve, thus leading us to read more challenging and engaging books. We knew books from Mid-State Literacy Council's (MSLC) annual book drive could help those in our community, who don't have access to books, improve their reading skills.

This year, Barnes and Noble and local shoppers contributed new adult and children's books through our annual book fair. Gently used and new books were donated from individuals and local organizations including Altrusa International of Centre County, Grace Lutheran Church, Class Act Productions, Ruth Kistler, and Dotty Delafield and family.

Some of the children's books collected from the book drive were donated to the Moshannon Valley YMCA. Over the summer, children will choose engaging books through the YMCA's Book Mobile to read as they wait for the new school year to begin. Books donated to non-profit organizations like the Clearfield Salvation Army, Clearfield County Area Office of Aging, Clearfield Area United Way, and others will encourage residents to continue reading by building their personal libraries. MSLC staff distributed books to several low-income housing locations in the area as well. New libraries were created in these locations and gave adults and families access to books they could read at home.

MSLC is proud to provide books and other resources to help community members improve their reading skills and develop a love of reading!

# Basic Cell Phone Skills

AMANDA GIEDROC, LITERACY COORDINATOR



As cell phone technology continues to rapidly evolve, many adults in Centre and Clearfield counties feel they are not able to keep up. The constant software updates, changes in network, and new upgrades make it difficult for smartphone users to feel confident using their device.

To support cell phone users in this changing landscape, Mid-State Literacy Council (MSLC) held several Basic Cell Phone Skills classes and tutoring sessions at the Centre Hall Senior Center. Participants were grouped according to their phone's operating system and with the help of tutors, were taught new features of their phone. Some of these features include adjusting the brightness, adding and editing contacts, changing the volume of the ringer, taking and sending photos, and downloading applications. Without knowing these skills, many of the participants struggled to communicate with friends and family and to customize their phone to reflect their needs. One cell phone student said, "Before these classes, I knew nothing about my phone. Now, I know how to text and call my family! My grandchildren think I'm so cool!"

As we look toward the future, MSLC will continue to provide basic classes and tutoring options for students to review and ask questions about their phones. We hope to build additional partnerships with local senior centers and aging agencies to coordinate this program and to ensure new smartphone users don't get left behind.



# ESL Classes Empower Students

KAREN DABNEY, VOLUNTEER TEACHER AND TUTOR (CENTER)

SAYURI SASSAKI AND ROMINA DINAMARCA, STUDENTS



It takes courage to come to a new country and adjust to a different language and culture. The details of daily life, like navigating a different healthcare system or interacting with your child's school, pose unexpected challenges. Mid-State Literacy Council's (MSLC) Multi-Skills ESL classes focus on improving language skills and cultural understanding to help people from other countries adjust to life in Centre County.

The classes offer benefits for both students and teachers. "I decided to volunteer for MSLC in 2020 when I retired," said Karen, an ESL tutor and Multi-Skills teacher. She goes on to say:

At first, I was nervous about teaching English as a Second Language, but the students are so eager, dedicated, and fun that each class is a joy. I'm seeing my own language and culture with new eyes, and learning along with my students. And I get to know wonderful people I wouldn't have met otherwise.

Romina came to State College from Chile in January 2022 with her husband, who is a Ph.D. student at Penn State University. She describes her experience as a student at MSLC this way:

The classes were really helpful for improving my skills in English. Now I have more confidence about my knowledge. I'm still learning, but I already learned things that I can use for communication. That is because, in the classes, I had a safe space for learning, and the opportunity to communicate my ideas and ask questions.

Sayuri came to State College from Brazil in October 2021 with her husband, a Ph.D. student at Penn State University,

and her Pomeranian dog, Mochi. In her words:

I have studied with Mid-State Literacy Council since January of 2022. When I started, my goal was to be myself in English. For most people who came from another country and don't have good English, it's difficult to do simple things, such as go to the grocery store, go to the hospital, and make friends.

With a perfect selection of teachers, now I can do everything! My speaking, listening, and writing have improved so much. I can make jokes with my friends and now they understand me. I can do whatever I want without feeling insecure.

Sayuri and Romina said that their ESL classes empowered them to use their English in daily life even if they made mistakes, instead of being afraid to try. This helped them learn faster, improve their interactions with local residents, and really enjoy living in State College. They enjoy the friendliness of the community and the four-season climate, especially snow. "Snow is magical," said Sayuri.

## English Class at Schlow



Each Monday and Wednesday in the late afternoon, a group of joyful students and volunteer teachers fill a small room in Schlow Library with laughter as they challenge themselves to learn English.

## our **MISSION**

The Mid-State Literacy Council is a non-profit group providing adult education instruction in Centre and Clearfield counties. We offer basic literacy, English as a Second Language, and health literacy services to adults in need of the essential skills to navigate their daily lives.

## **MSLC** *team*

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### our financial supporters:



**CENTRE DAILY TIMES**



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## Books and Guidelines and Levels, Oh My!

*ERIKA REUTZEL-BECHTEL, ESL SPECIALIST*

While serving students is at the heart of what we do at Mid-State Literacy Council (MSLC), achieving this mission is only possible when our volunteers have the support they need to be successful. That is why over the past few years, we collaborated with a team of experienced teachers to revamp the New Volunteer Training course. In 2021-22, we turned our attention to a different way of supporting volunteers—guiding them to excellent, appropriately-sequenced instructional materials.

In Fall 2021, we began the process of selecting three levels of new high-quality ESL textbooks for our core classes. We were supported in this work by Angela Tejada, a Penn State Humphrey Fellow from Peru, who brought to bear her expertise in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) research and teacher education to evaluate and recommend books.

In addition, we created Class Guidelines for every class. Since Spring 2022, every MSLC volunteer teacher now starts off with a realistic plan for how to pace instruction with the assigned book throughout our 10-week semester.

Because the books are designed to support state-of-the-art pedagogy, teachers can focus less on creating lessons and more on engaging with and enjoying their students. The books allow even the most novice volunteer teachers to be confident that they are providing what is needed to advance their students' English language skills to the next level.

Having completed the first full semester with the new books and guidelines, feedback from teachers and students alike suggests that the project has had a positive impact on teaching and learning.

## Current Events: Webster's Bookstore Cafe

*SOJEONG KWEON, SUMMER INTERN AND ASSISTANT TEACHER*



Students from all over the world gathered at Webster's Bookstore Cafe to start their morning with a Current Events class. After reading articles in News for You, a weekly newspaper for adult learners, students

shared their opinions and learned from others. Through meaningful discussions, they practiced and improved their listening and speaking skills and explored different cultures from their classmates.

Seeing my students share their various opinions and learning about current events worldwide made me excited to teach this class. Our nook in the mystery section of Webster's was the perfect place to encourage authentic conversations.