

LINKS TO LITERACY

SERVING ADULT BASIC LITERACY AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS
IN CENTRE & CLEARFIELD COUNTIES



FORMER CITIZENSHIP STUDENT, FARHEEN ASHRAFY, TEACHES INTERMEDIATE EVERYDAY ENGLISH CLASS, SPRING 2023

Literacy is a Legacy: Remembering Founder Ruth C. Kistler

AMY WILSON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, MID-STATE LITERACY COUNCIL

In 1971, a group of volunteers trained to teach reading to adults in Centre County. Led by Ruth Kistler, this volunteer force for good began tutoring adults who did not know how to read. With trust established between the tutor and student, week by week, the adults learned.

We celebrated Ruth's 99th birthday together at our Book Fair last fall. She volunteered throughout her 90's, in the office, and at events. We miss her. Her passing leaves us filled with admiration, kindness, and a legacy.

Because of Ruth's vision, when adults learn to read, they then read to their children. They ask, how can I make sure my child becomes a good reader? In addition to guidance, families receive children's books, and a new generation of readers is born.

We remember Ruth Kistler, who volunteered, and provided leadership. Please join us in a toast saying, many thanks, Ruth, many thanks.

upcoming EVENTS

Literacy Council at the Spikes

August 19, 6:35pm

\$10 tickets at 814-238-1809

24th Ron and Mary Maxwell Community Spelling Bee

Wednesday, September 27

6pm on Zoom

New ESL Volunteer Zoom Training

Monday, August 28

Tuesday, August 29

Wednesday, August 30

9:30 - 11:00 am

New Volunteers attend all sessions. Sessions will be recorded for anyone who can't attend.

**Literacy for Life:
Basic Technology Skills**
Education sessions will be scheduled through fall and spring.

MSLC Book Fair

November 17-19

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

A Top-Notch Year

AMY WILSON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
MID-STATE LITERACY COUNCIL



Our deepest thanks to you: Our volunteers and supporters excelled this year with top-notch teamwork. Classes, workshops, and one-to-one tutoring provided adults with essential instruction.

Literacy skills advanced. Learning soared. The program expanded digital literacy instruction throughout Centre and Clearfield counties. We continue to assess community adult education needs and we appreciate your many contributions.

Please note that additional volunteers are needed this fall. We ask you to join us.

Mid-State Literacy Council's program includes technology training to support access to employment. The Brookings Institution reported, "The U.S. economy is digitizing at an extremely rapid pace." American workplaces are increasing their use of technologies, and computer skills are needed across industries and employment positions.

Numerous community members also need the high school equivalency credential in order to enter training programs. Many adults are interested in training and certifying for trade occupations. Some want to pass exams to enter the military.

Your support creates the strong education program at Mid-State Literacy Council.

To learn more, let's meet for coffee!

Literacy means a life of safety, realized goals, and community participation.

Contact us to get involved:

814-238-1809

www.mid-stateliteracycouncil.org

mslc@mid-stateliteracycouncil.org

248 East Calder Way # 307 State College, PA 16801



Centre gives Raises \$18,842.73 for Mid-State Literacy Council

We are one community working together. Thank you for making Mid-State Literacy Council possible, adult education available, and life-affirming skills shared. Sharing is our core value and your generosity glows bringing literacy to our community. The ability to read, write, and use technology is essential to succeed in training and employment. Because of you, adults are gaining the education they need and gaining employment.

Thank you for your donations and sharing the knowledge and gift of literacy.

MSLC's Rose Cologne Volunteer of the Year: Betse Esber



When Betse Esber contacted Mid-State Literacy Council to ask about volunteering, staff already knew she was a legend. Known for her kindness, knowledge, and expertise teaching English to language learners, she brought a ripple of vitality to Mid-State Literacy Council. Our community members needed to learn, they needed to connect, and they needed to practice their English. We needed Betse to bring Zoom classes to life. She is leading her students to achievement and success.

Erika Reutzler-Bechtel, the literacy council's English as a Second Language Specialist, shares, "Whenever I have an important decision to make about training, instructional materials, or program structures, I know I can call on Betse to help me think through things and make a good call. Betse brings valuable experience, expertise, and heart to the many things she does at Mid-State Literacy Council. Betse's sincere concern and affection for her students is what drives her. Her work inspires us all. Mid-State Literacy Council could never accomplish the good work it does without the steadfast dedication of talented, generous people like Betse."

We appreciate, honor, and acknowledge Betse Esber as our Rose Cologne Volunteer. Thank you, Betse. You make a difference!

Pushing Boundaries and Advocating for the Future

AMANDA DAIT, PENN STATE PUBLIC RELATIONS STUDENT & VOLUNTEER

Yang Xu came to the U.S. in 2018 shortly after learning she was pregnant. With no way of advocating for herself in her medical appointments, Yang didn't realize that her silence reflected a spirit of her having no questions rather than the 'where do I even begin' feeling she had deep within her.

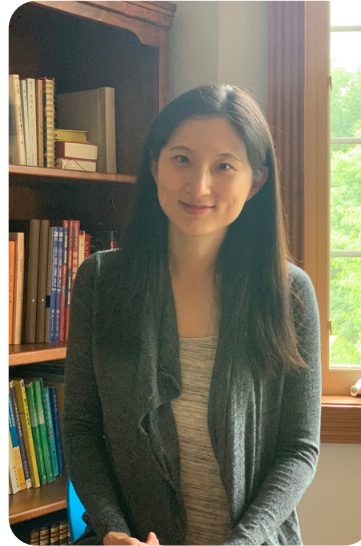
Yang decided to seek help from Mid-State Literacy Council following her immigration to State College from Beijing. The structure of one-to-one tutoring has allowed Yang to feel a more individualized experience as she learns daily English use compared to the formal English she learned in school in China. Not only has this structure allowed for a personalized pace, but it has also brought Yang a new friendship and connection in her new community.

This is where Karen, a Mid-State Literacy Council volunteer teacher and tutor, stepped in. Karen encourages Yang to take on extra readings, show up prepared for their sessions, push aside her fear, and speak up for what she needs. They meet weekly to focus on building the skills needed to accomplish Yang's goals.

"In China, I knew the language so it's very easy for me to be myself," Yang said. "Here, without the language, you're blank. Karen helped me to know myself. She not only tells me things to do, she connects with her experiences. I had tutors before, but we didn't have that deep connection like with Karen."

Yang feels the urge to learn more about the State College community within her amplified by Karen's encouragement. Her voice will continue to echo with the backing of a tutor turned into a friend.

This fall, Yang will be starting her first semester as a graduate student at Penn State University. Additionally, she started volunteering in the Mid-State Literacy Council's office this spring as a way to give back and help students that, like her, are looking to make State College their home.



Yang Xu, ESL Student



Karen Dabney, ESL Tutor

"Karen and I have been working together for years – she is the best," Yang remarks. "We talk a lot, not only about English, but also about culture, religion, politics, everything! She cares about me, about my life. She always encourages me. I can't use the words to describe her, she's so warm. So thoughtful. It's that mental support. She just really cares about me."



Digital Skills Ready @50+ Program TM

AMANDA GIEDROC, LITERACY COORDINATOR



When you hear the acronym AARP, what words come to mind? Insurance? Discounts? Retirement? Ask Mid-State Literacy Council (MSLC) staff, and you will likely get a very different response. Some words they might use include “technology,” “knowledge,” and “empowerment.” That’s because, in October 2022, MSLC partnered with AARP (American Association of Retired Persons) and OATS (Older Adults Technology Services) to implement their new Digital Skills Ready@50+ (DSR@50+) program in Clearfield and Centre counties. This program consists of free workshops and lectures focused on helping adults over 50 learn technology skills.

Before implementing this program, we knew many of our students and other older adults often fear they will get left behind when it comes to technology. One student shared with us, "I have no one to ask for help. Everyone seems to know more than I know. I just want to learn." With technology being the way of the future, we knew teaching digital skills through the DSR@50+ program would be life-changing.

We started offering lectures on several different topics but realized many people wanted to attend one DSR@50+ lecture in particular: Protecting Your Personal Information Online. For many, this subject is personally significant because they have either experienced scams directly or know someone who was scammed leading to lasting consequences. During this lecture, participants learned how to identify spam and phishing attempts, make strong passwords, shop safely online, and more!

Here is what some participants had to say about the lecture:

- “This lecture would benefit everyone, especially those struggling with security and revising passwords.”
- “I learned useful tips I didn’t know about previously, like never clicking on strange links, downloading attachments, or calling back unknown phone numbers.”
- “This lecture and what it taught me has been life changing.”

MSLC will continue to offer a variety of lectures and workshops thanks to the support of the Hamer Foundation, AARP, and OATS. We look forward to empowering more adults with the skills they need to improve their lives and the surrounding communities!

The Gift of Great Books

AMANDA GIEDROC, LITERACY COORDINATOR

Very few things can compare to the feeling of reading a great book. For many children and adults in the area, having access to great books isn’t always possible. However,



donated books from Mid-State Literacy Council’s annual book drive can help make this a reality!

This year, Barnes and Noble and local shoppers contributed new adult and children’s books through the annual book fair. Gently used and new books were also donated from individuals and local organizations including Grace Lutheran Church, Emme Devonish, and others. Thank you for supporting our book drive!

Children’s books collected from the book drive were donated to Moshannon Valley YMCA’s Book Mobile, non-profit organizations in Clearfield like the Salvation Army, and several low-income buildings in the area to create or expand their community libraries.

Mid-State Literacy Council is proud to provide books and other resources to help those in our community achieve their literacy goals!

GED Spotlight

AMANDA GIEDROC, LITERACY COORDINATOR

Students at Mid-State Literacy Council often come to us with very specific goals in mind. For some, they want to use their tutoring sessions to prepare for the GED (high school equivalency credential) test. The certification received from passing this test can help adults get a better job or continue their education. Two of our GED students share their stories below:

Mohammad



"I came to Mid-State Literacy Council in the middle of August 2022. My main goals are to learn English and get my GED. With my tutor, I'm learning new math skills. We are working on addition, subtraction, decimals, etc. My tutor has taught me about the ones, tens, hundreds, and thousands place too.

I want to apply for a job in the Department of Defense. It is a welding job. I have to have my GED to get hired. I have kids and a family that I want to take care of. With my job now, I can't make enough money. The welding job is a good job and has a good future. I can learn something new and the pay is good. I hope to get the job as soon as I get my GED."

Andrew

"I started working with Mid-State Literacy Council (MSLC) in November 2021. I want to get my GED so I can possibly go to school or get a better job. I am working towards an acting job because I am really passionate about it but need a job right now.



With my tutor, I am learning about math, social studies, reading, and history. Right now, I'm learning about division, multiplication, and percents. Tutoring has helped refresh my memory about what I learned in school.

MSLC is a great program to be involved with especially if you didn't graduate high school or are working towards your GED."

Teacher Tim to the Rescue

ERIKA REUTZEL-BECHTEL, ESL SPECIALIST



In February 2023, Brandi Bartley, Support Services Coordinator at Mount Nittany Residences, reached out to Mid-State Literacy Council with a simple request. Several residents of the apartment complex for low-income seniors were struggling with daily needs due to insufficient English language proficiency. Brandi asked whether we could provide books for them to study. We knew these seniors would learn faster and more happily with not only books, but also the support of a dedicated teacher. But who?

Serendipitously, around that same time, Tim Yingling, who had retired from his job at the railroad several years before, recognized he had some time between his rounds of golf and granddaughters' track meets. He had tutored ESL students in Altoona for several years, and was ready for his next assignment. It was a match made in heaven.

Now, on any given Friday, you can find a group of motivated English language learners from around the globe gathered around a table with notebooks, pencils, and books, reading, writing and speaking with each other and with Teacher Tim as he guides them through lessons.

Through these lessons, the students are gaining skills not only to access things they need like food and medical care, but also the things that make life worth living-- like social connection with neighbors, friends, and family.

When asked why she attends the class, one newcomer to the class wrote, "I can speaking to my neighbors and I happy!"

Thank you, Brandi and Tim!

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

Amy Wilson, Executive Director

awilson@mid-stateliteracycouncil.org

Amanda Giedroc, Literacy Program Coordinator

agiedroc@mid-stateliteracycouncil.org

Bridget Schell, ESL Coordinator

bschell@mid-stateliteracycouncil.org

Erika Reutzel-Bechtel, ESL Specialist

ebechtel@mid-stateliteracycouncil.org

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our financial supporters:



The Hamer Foundation
Mount Nittany Health
Diane V. Moore Memorial Fund

From Volunteer to Program Coordinator

BRIDGET SCHELL, ESL COORDINATOR



I began volunteering at Mid-State Literacy Council in January 2021. The initial panic of COVID-19 was dissipating, but so too was the assumption that things would go back to “normal” anytime soon. I craved community connection and was excited to co-teach MSLC’s Citizenship Class. Even on Zoom...

Two years later, and one semester coordinating the ESL program under my belt, I continue to be amazed by the dedication, resilience, and creativity of MSLC’s students. **This spring, MSLC has seen the largest increase in new students in over 50 years.** No, this is nothing that I can take credit for; it’s a sign that students, immigrants, and refugees are eager to participate more fully in their communities after a long isolating pandemic. The light is shining on the other side of the tunnel, and our literacy programs are growing to meet the demand. With new students walking through our doors daily, we are in need of new volunteer tutors and teachers.

Reach out today to get involved. I promise you’ll enjoy it!

"Sid Knows Everything"

ROBERTO GONZALEZ, ESL STUDENT

Every Tuesday and Thursday morning during the spring semester, a group of multilingual students met with volunteer instructor, Sid Doyle, at Webster's Bookstore Café to improve our English in a very interesting way; by reading and discussing articles from *News For You*.



We explored a range of topics, from politics and environmental issues to human interest stories. We learned a lot, not only about English, but also about American culture, civics, and political systems. This was a two-way trip. The students had come from Russia, Colombia, China, Mexico, South Korea and Spain. Whenever a topic came up, we shared the similarities and differences from our own countries.

Doyle, a Penn State Human Development and Family Studies graduate from California, describes the teaching experience as mutually rewarding: “It is a great way to have an experience of multicultural perspectives. I learn from people just as I am trying to teach them. I hope we learn from each other.”

Many students in the class, such as Youngji Lee, came to State College because their significant others either study or work at Penn State. Lee says, “In this class I got to know about recent issues in the United States and the world.” She also appreciates how enriching it was to exchange ideas with classmates and explore the vast array of topics beyond English that Sid highlighted in class discussion. In her words, “Sid knows everything!”