

MID-STATE LITERACY COUNCIL | 2024 PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

LINKS TO LITERACY

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



BEGINNER ENGLISH CLASS WITH TEACHER BRUCE HOCKENBERRY

Beyond Words: Literacy Matters

BRIDGET SCHELL, ELL PROGRAM COORDINATOR

Tim says, “Mid-State Literacy Council has never given up on me.” Currently, more than 350 adult literacy students and their families benefit from education provided by Mid-State Literacy Council (MSLC). Students live in 15 different towns in Centre and Clearfield counties. They come from 40 different countries, including the United States, and speak 28 different languages, including native English speakers.

What does “literacy” look like in our community? The ability to read, write, communicate, and understand is vital for community members to gain credentials and employment, access healthcare and transportation, raise a family, navigate everyday interactions, and feel connected to community.

Literacy has profound impacts. In the past year, MSLC students found work, received promotions, and better understood their bosses and co-workers. Students found new apartments and communicated with their landlords to solve problems. One student was able to talk to her gynecologist without a translator for the first time. Another student disputed a medical bill and got a refund. Several students passed their drivers license exams, read books aloud to their children, and volunteered in the community. One student attended her first yoga class in English, another student can now pronounce all vowel and consonant sounds.

Many of us take literacy for granted. A reading tutor recently told us, “My favorite indoor pastime is reading, and I can't imagine not being able to do it.” Joy shares the love of reading with her student weekly and encourages them to take advantage of the world's many opportunities.

How will you contribute to literacy in our community this year?

upcoming EVENTS

25th Ron and Mary Maxwell

Community Spelling Bee

Wednesday, September 25

6pm on Zoom

English Language Learning

Summer Semester

June 17 - July 26

English Language Learning

Fall Semester

September 16 - November 22

Literacy for Life:

Basic Technology Skills

Education sessions will be scheduled through fall and spring.

MSLC Book Fair

November 22-24

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

LITERACY MEANS A LIFE OF
SAFETY, REALIZED GOALS, AND
COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION.



LEFT TO RIGHT: BRIDGET, AMANDA, AMY, DAVE (BOARD PRESIDENT), AND ERIKA

Valor, Determination, Courage

AMY WILSON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

When I accepted the position of Executive Director in 2011, my mantra was **help walks through the door**. As the only full-time employee, I knew that the literacy council needed hundreds of volunteers. **Thank you**. You came and you shared your thoughtfulness and expertise. Since then, you have helped community members gain the knowledge and skills they need in order to gain employment, housing, and a future of opportunities.

Donors who believe in the value of literacy increased the professional staff to two full-time and two part-time positions allowing Mid-State Literacy Council to expand the program and include more digital literacy, classes, and tutoring. The number of adults requesting technology instruction has quadrupled. As adults increase their reading skills, they request help with technology because they need to apply for employment online, access telehealth, and set-up accounts. Local employers indicate that employees must now access employee benefits online and use technology in the workplace. Adults are challenged to use new technologies while maintaining safety and protecting their privacy. The Mid-State Literacy Council is providing instruction across Centre and Clearfield counties.

I am retiring this summer and **thank you** for your support, your generosity, and your leadership in ensuring that our community provides adult literacy services. I know our staff, with your support, will lead high-quality programs. It's together that we have valor, determination, and the courage to build a strong, peaceful, and joyous community.

Centre Gives Raises \$19,665.71 for Mid-State Literacy Council

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

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

Rose Cologne Volunteer of the Year 2024: Sue Vidmar



ERIKA REUTZEL-BECHTEL, ELL SPECIALIST

Mid-State Literacy Council is blessed to have an abundant supply of volunteers who show up to help their neighbors learn and thrive. It's not every day, though, that a volunteer goes beyond the typical assignment to the point that she becomes part of the fabric of the organization. Sue Vidmar is that kind of person.

As the child of refugees herself, when Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, Sue felt called to help people fleeing the chaos of war. She came to Mid-State Literacy Council and was connected to a Ukrainian woman whose family had to stay behind. With skill and gentle care, Sue supported her student through this traumatic period and helped her gain the English skills and confidence to rebuild her life.

Since that time, Sue has continued to tutor language learners along with supporting technology workshops and helping with whatever needs to be done around the office. No task is too small or too challenging for Sue to come to the rescue!

While Sue brings outstanding professionalism and expertise to all she does, what we treasure most about her is her patience, kindness, and genuine concern for her fellow human beings. Sue—we honor and thank you!

Conversation & Coffee

MEI YING, ELL STUDENT & DONNA PRESTON, VOLUNTEER

Mei-Ying's Story:

I came to the United States from China in 2014. I had very little English in school in China. I grew up in a poor village. I came to the US with very little ability to communicate. I wanted to come to the US for a better way of life.

I lived in an Apartment building in State College that housed many people from China. My first job here was in a Chinese market where most people spoke Chinese. I then got a job as a delivery person for a Chinese Restaurant. I needed more English, but could do my job with the little I knew.

I went to the Mid-State Literacy Council for help. My first tutor was Tracy. She helped me learn some basic words, but it was hard. I had trouble remembering them. I talked too slow, "I old." The tutor talked too fast at first. I did learn many new words, but never used them except when I was tutored. Tracy left the Literacy council, Covid lockdown started and I then had a new tutor on Zoom.

At first the new tutor talked too fast also, but she learned to slow down. I was shy at first, and didn't ask questions. Now I ask many questions. Donna told me I needed to talk more in English, watch some TV shows, read easy books. She helped me understand my lease and words you need when you rent an apartment. My English improved.

My son moved to the US his senior year in High School. When he was in China his school was much better than mine. They taught him English. I now could practice English with him. He is now a sophomore at Penn State and a US citizen.

I moved to Reading, PA for a better job. Teacher and I continue to meet twice a week.

"My English has improved enough that I train new wait staff at my job. I want to learn more things now."



"I want to learn how to plan a vacation and make reservations. Learning English is getting easier, especially since I use English daily and ask questions."

Using Zoom is perfect for our tutoring. Teacher shares articles to read and we investigate the internet. It is great since we both don't live in State College anymore. We get on two times a week in the morning and we both have mugs filled with coffee.

Donna's Story:

During COVID-19 a friend mentioned to me that I could tutor for Mid-State Literacy Council via Zoom. I was not sure about this, since I had never tutored English to those who didn't speak English fluently. I have degrees in teaching Elementary Education, Special Education and Private Preschool. I had been tutoring K-12 in person when COVID shut us down. After some conversations with the staff at MSLC I decided to try something new. The staff was very supportive.

A week later I was introduced to Mei Ying, in March 2020. Our first meeting was a bit awkward for both of us. Mei Ying was very tentative with her speaking. I was a bit nervous. I am sure I made many mistakes the first few sessions. The first thing I really needed to learn was to talk slower. Mei Ying had learned some basic English before I started working with her. Now I needed to expand her vocabulary to be more functional.

As we proceeded, I realized that the Chinese language does not use all the phonetic sounds English does. For example, "v". We worked hard for her to be able to say "vaccine." Zoom was helpful because I could get close to the camera and show her the way the mouth forms the sounds. By now Mei Ying and I had grown to be friends. As friends we laughed every time the "v" sound was used. ... Continued on page 5

Answering the Call: Technology Support

AMANDA GIEDROC, LITERACY COORDINATOR



Technology. It's like a fly buzzing around you in the summer warmth; it's there all the time and right in your face. There is no escaping the prevalence of technology in our society or the importance of understanding how to use it. Knowing how fast technology evolves and the necessity of using it to complete daily tasks, there is a sense of urgency to teach adults new technology skills. Mid-State Literacy Council (MSLC) has answered the call and is here to help!

Over the past year and a half, MSLC has helped more than 300 adults in Centre and Clearfield counties learn new digital skills. Many of these adults have participated in our technology tutoring program. Through this program, students are matched with trained tutors to learn more about their smartphone, tablet, or computer. Below, two students share the impact of tutoring on their lives:

"I was totally ready to give up. I had been in isolation, and I just couldn't make things work anymore. I wasn't in a place where I was able to cope well with that. I just didn't have the tools anymore. But with Mid-State, I was able to climb out and keep going." -S.

"Mid-State Literacy provided a tutor who gave me peace of mind. I thought I was too old to learn. I have low vision. I cannot type! We started slowly. My tutor listened and customized my lessons to my needs and interests. I gained confidence and lost my fear." -Darcey

Many adults in Centre and Clearfield counties also attended one of our Digital Skills Ready@50+ lectures or technology help sessions at local senior centers.

These sessions cover topics like protecting personal information online and saving money on prescription drugs. The impact of these presentations and help sessions is significant as seen by the responses of participants:

- *"The class presented good information that any older adult can use."* -Christine
- *"I'm learning how to navigate my computer and this class gave me more confidence to use it for health information."* -B.

MSLC will continue to offer a variety of lectures and workshops thanks to the support of the Hamer Foundation, AARP, and OATS Foundation. Give us a call at 814-238-1809 to learn more about upcoming classes. We would love to see you there!

A Summer Gift

AMANDA GIEDROC, LITERACY COORDINATOR

Summer can be a time for rest and fun after a long school year. Even though it's tempting to avoid anything school related, summer is one of the most important times for children to read. Reading fun and interesting books can help students avoid the "summer slide" where they typically lose academic skills. By reading over the summer, students can maintain or improve their vocabulary, gain more background knowledge, and build their reading stamina. All these skills support their development and success the next school year.

Thankfully, children in our area don't have to worry about not having books to read. Barnes and Noble, local shoppers, Grace Lutheran Church, and others contributed new and gently used adult and children's books through our annual book fair and children's book drive. Books collected from these events were donated to the Moshannon Valley YMCA and to several low-income buildings in Centre and Clearfield counties.

Mid-State Literacy Council looks forward to supporting children and families with their literacy goals for years to come!



GED and Reading Spotlight

AMANDA GIEDROC, LITERACY COORDINATOR

Mid-State Literacy Council is proud to work with students who have specific goals including improving their reading skills or passing the GED (high-school certification) test. The reading and GED skills derived from tutoring help our students to thrive in society and gain better employment opportunities to support their families. Three of our students from two different counties in the area share their stories below:

Shah (GED, Centre County)

"I want to learn English and pass the GED test. I want to pass the test because I applied for a job as a welder, but I needed a high school diploma. If you have a GED, you can find jobs at a lot of nice places. I would like an office job or to work at a library."



With my math tutor, I learn about addition and subtraction. My favorite part about math tutoring is solving math problems by myself. My math tutor is very good and tries very hard to help me. I'm excited to learn about multiplication and division next. I appreciate Mid-State Literacy Council for helping me learn."

Tim (Reading, Clearfield County)

"As my tutor, JoAnn, is an exceptional tutor because she will take time to show me how reading works and will help me take time to pronounce things better. If I need help with anything, we discuss it and make a note of it and study it again until it works for me. I've never had anyone else do that for me."

JoAnn never gives up on me and will break things down for me. She does take the time to do things that others won't. Mid-State Literacy Council hasn't given up on me. They have been with me for 4 years. You can't ask for anything more than that."

M. (Reading, Clearfield County)

"Tutoring has helped me to read better. When I first started, I had to spell most of the words I was reading. I knew the small words but some of the longer words I didn't know what it was. I can read 100% better now and I understand what I am reading. I can now read and open the mail and understand what they are saying."

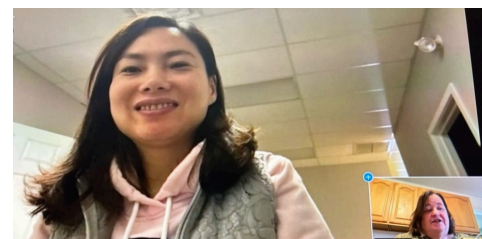


Conversation & Coffee, continued

MEI YING, ELL STUDENT
& DONNA PRESTON,
VOLUNTEER

Donna's Story:

Continued from page 3



Her English was expanding, and Mei Ying was less shy about using her English at work. She has worked at a few Chinese restaurants. I encouraged her to try talking more to customers. Through these last few years we have studied the Citizenship 100 questions, we have worked on her reading, we have talked about US culture and government, cooking, raising college age children, and whatever pops up in her life.

For me the very best thing about tutoring Mei Ying is that I enjoy our time together. I have learned so much about China, their customs, her family, and the processes for immigrants to come to the US and work here. I also learned that I could teach English to people new to the language. I now teach English classes via Zoom for the Mid-State Literacy Council and find it a rewarding experience.

Hopefully, Mei Ying and I will be able to continue meeting via Zoom for many more years. I started out four years ago with Mei Ying to teach her English fluency and things she might need to learn to have a successful life in America. Mei Ying has taught me so much about the way people live in other countries. She has helped build my confidence in tutoring. I believe I may have learned as much from her as she has from me.

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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Mid-State Literacy Council: A Refugee's Bridge to Peace

*SUE VIDMAR, OLEKSANDRA'S VOLUNTEER TUTOR
& ERIKA REUTZEL-BECHTEL, ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING SPECIALIST*

When Russia invaded Ukraine in early 2022, Oleksandra fled to the United States to live safely with her sister, Svitlana, a long-term resident of State College. Since men were prohibited from exiting Ukraine at the time, she had to leave her husband and 32-year-old son behind. Her early days in State College were characterized by post-traumatic stress, fear, and uncertainty about the fate of her family as well as her own future in this country.



Shortly after her arrival, Oleksandra came to Mid-State Literacy Council (MSLC) with limited English proficiency, little confidence, and a fragile spirit. She was matched with a dedicated ESL tutor and received one-on-one instruction from April – December 2022. Motivated to improve as quickly as possible, she also enrolled in a full slate of intermediate-level ESL classes (9 hours/week) during the summer and fall semesters. This intensive period of study, along with the support and encouragement of her MSLC tutor, teachers, staff, and classmates, allowed Oleksandra to develop into a much more competent and confident speaker of English.

As a result, Oleksandra's life today is dramatically better than when she first arrived. Thankfully, her husband was granted permission to leave Ukraine and has joined her in State College. The couple were able to get full-time jobs with benefits, rent their own apartment, and purchase a car. Recently, Oleksandra passed her driver's license test and earned a promotion at work!

Challenges and uncertainty remain for Oleksandra. But, for now, her hard work and the support of Mid-State Literacy Council have enabled her to become a cherished and fully contributing member of the State College community. War sadly rages in her country, but in our community, Oleksandra lives in peace.

If you would like to tutor a Mid-State Literacy Council student, please reach out using the contact information below.

Contact us to get involved:

814-238-1809

www.mid-stateliteracycouncil.org

mslc@mid-stateliteracycouncil.org

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our financial supporters:



The Hamer Foundation
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