

# Literacy VOICES

**Literacy  
Volunteers**  
Stamford/Greenwich, Inc.  
*Opening Doors Through Literacy*

FALL/WINTER 2010 • VOL 6

## Stepping Out Experiencing America Through Music and Dance

You can hear the music of Louis Armstrong reverberating through the classroom. Billie Holiday sings *St. Louis Blues* while Langston Hughes reads, *The Negro Speaks of Rivers*. The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre performs *Revelations* and the lyrics of *Brother Can You Spare a Dime* conjure up stark images of The Great Depression.

Stepping Out, an EL/Civics course, enriched ESOL students' knowledge of American culture and its connection to history through the exploration of art forms that grew their roots in America. Students studied Reconstruction, The Great Depression and The Harlem Renaissance, gaining a deeper understanding of the rich music and dance traditions that were shaped by eras that transformed life in America. "For children and adults, the American experience comes alive through exposure to and appreciation of the arts. They provide a unique entrée into learning that showcases our multi-cultural heritage, something often overlooked in our current education system," stated executive director and course instructor, Diane Rosenthal.

Before enrolling, students Sonia Sisti and Yelena Fridman were unaware of the impact and influence



*Students attend Alvin Ailey*

African Americans had on our cultural heritage. "Jazz and blues were healing - a way for African Americans to express their struggles and sorrows. It is healing for me to hear this music as a native of Argentina," said Sisti. Fridman added, "When I lived in Moscow, I had heard of jazz festivals, but I didn't know the deeper meaning behind blues and gospel. I can now relate to the musicians. It took practice, education, patience, and the desire to deal with painful emotions to express themselves through their music."

The EL/Civics program, funded by the Connecticut State Department of Education, has enabled students to explore America through diverse perspectives. Instructors Barbara Decker and Mary Jenkins brought their unique talents to teaching. Jenkins' class read biographies about cultural icons in United States history. Decker, a retired nurse mid-wife, talked with students about the importance of preventative health care and brought them to affordable clinics in our community.

Marilyn Collins, education director, captured the program's spirit. "Students participated in community service, wrote letters to soldiers in Iraq, visited the President Lincoln exhibit at the Bruce Museum and saw the Alvin Ailey Dance Company perform. We want our students to not only be confident in their language abilities, but proud to be Americans. EL/Civics classes encourage them to step-out of the classroom and discover the world around them."



*Students attend Lincoln Exhibit Bruce Museum*

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## Reflections

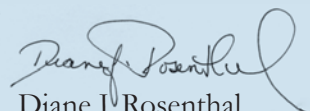
This summer two wonderful events happened – my son’s wedding and the opportunity to teach again. At my son’s wedding, I was overcome by the feeling that while one phase was ending another was just beginning. And as I started teaching my class, I remembered the magical feeling I had many years ago when I met my students for the first time.

This summer, for the first time at Literacy Volunteers, we offered a class called “Stepping Out” that taught American history through the lens of art forms generated by this country’s diverse heritage. And for many of the students, it was the first time they had studied America in this way. The arts, especially dance, are my passion, and I truly believe that they hold the key to helping adults and children become enthusiastic and eager learners. Pressures to teach to the test and funding limitations have reduced the prominence of the arts in today’s schools, resulting in a void in students’ learning and lives. This summer I marveled as students who were born in other countries opened their hearts and minds to American culture and history — jazz, blues, modern dance, and the writings of African American philosophers and poets.

Can you imagine a classroom in which every person is engaged and focused? An environment that encourages students both to look inside themselves for inspiration and to be curious about a world outside their own experience? This kind of classroom isn’t imaginary – it exists wherever the arts play a significant role in learning, and it happened this summer.

At Literacy Volunteers, we witness first times every day – an acceptance letter to college, a job, passing the citizenship exam, a family reunited after years of separation. Take, for example, Andres Parrado, a young man who decided to leave Colombia to join his mom in Stamford. This fall he walked into Princeton University as a college freshman with a \$100,000 scholarship in hand. He is the first in his family to attend a US college.

At my son’s wedding, my husband and I shared the joy of watching our first-born child get married. The “Stepping Out” course was the first time I taught after many years away from the classroom. First times open up new ways to discover the world. At Literacy Volunteers, we are committed to making the first time our students return to school an experience so powerful that it leads to a life time of learning. Sincerely,



Diane J. Rosenthal  
Executive Director



## Looking Forward

### Writers’ Café

December 15, 2010 at UCONN  
6:00 – 8:30 p.m.

### Tutor Training Workshops 2011

Stamford evening session starts  
January 11  
Greenwich day session starts  
February 2

### Student Registrations 2011

Stamford: January 6, 19, 26  
Greenwich: January 27

### SCRABBLE® Challenge Fundraiser

May 18, 2011  
Greenwich Country Club  
6:00 – 9:30 p.m.

### Student/Volunteer Recognition Night

June 22, 2011 at UCONN  
6:00 – 8:30 p.m.

# Education –The Gift of Hope



**W**hen Ligia Zeeman came to America from Peru in 2001, she felt alone. “My first priority was to learn English because no one understood me,” said Zeeman. “My father told me about the United States. I wanted to discover what made it a great place to live and work.” So Zeeman immersed herself in everything that had to do with English and America by watching television, listening to the radio, reading, going to the movies and talking to others.

A friend suggested Zeeman attend classes at Literacy Volunteers where she has been a student for four years. “Tutors care about and connect with their students. Classes are small. At LVSG, I learned English so rapidly that I now feel confident in everyday life. I never want to stop improving.”

Zeeman graduated from Santa Maria Catholic University in Buenos Aires with a degree in Human Resources, and then continued her education, graduating from Lima’s Geraldine Fashion Design Academy. Her dream, to be an accomplished seamstress, hit a roadblock once she came to America and she couldn’t buy sewing needles because she could not ask for them in English. That frustration fueled her desire to learn. Today, Zeeman works as a seamstress and fashion designer with a growing clientele. Zeeman is grateful for all she has achieved and demonstrates it by speaking at tutor workshops, serving as a translator for new students and volunteering at LVSG’s annual SCRABBLE® fundraiser. “You’re never too old to learn! My being at LVSG started a whole new chapter in my life. I am a married, happy woman with a wonderful husband.” Zeeman admits, “It is harder for someone my age because we have families to attend to and bills to pay. Without people’s contributions I would never have gotten the vital, important gift of hope.” Zeeman achieved the greatest moment in her life in March, 2010 when she became a United States citizen.

## Student Credits Bridges Program For Giving Him Clear Direction

**D**ennis Tolliver is humble, laid-back and charming. He admits he wasn’t always that way — after dropping out of high school in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, he says he began to have “a mind being led in 20 different directions.” However, he decided to go back to school, get his GED and most recently participate in CompTIA A+ computer training that teaches entry level Information Technology skills that include building and troubleshooting a personal computer from the ground up. “Now I have one clear direction in my life — and I owe it all to LVSG,” states Tolliver. “I usually don’t finish what I start, but this time I did. The best feeling I ever had was when I showed my family that I had passed my certification exam.”



Tolliver, now 25, has had an interest in computers since he was 17. A friend told him about the CompTIA A+ training program and he jumped at the chance to learn. “It opened my mind to the importance of preparing for the future one step at a time instead of taking multiple steps at once,” remarked Tolliver. Now he is a co-teacher in the program working beside fellow certified instructors John Lord and Erik Drale. “I’m still learning, but now I also give input and act as a liaison between the current students and teachers, John and Erik. Through this experience, I learned I can teach people. I want to teach the IT course on my own one day.”

The enthusiasm Tolliver exhibits is due to the instruction and attention he received from Lord and Drale. “Erik was the first one to ask me how I was doing if I came in one day feeling down. It is important to have someone care for you as a person and not just as a student. I would tell others who like working with computers to give it a try — we’re here because we want to learn. The fact that I am more relaxed in general conversation is just an added benefit and certainly a confidence booster,” he said. As for his future, Tolliver says, “I’d like to get a good, full-time paying IT job and just keep moving forward with the positive direction this program and the people at LVSG have given me.”



*Lucy & Nat Day Team*



*FactSet Winning Team*



*Board member Penny Grayson*

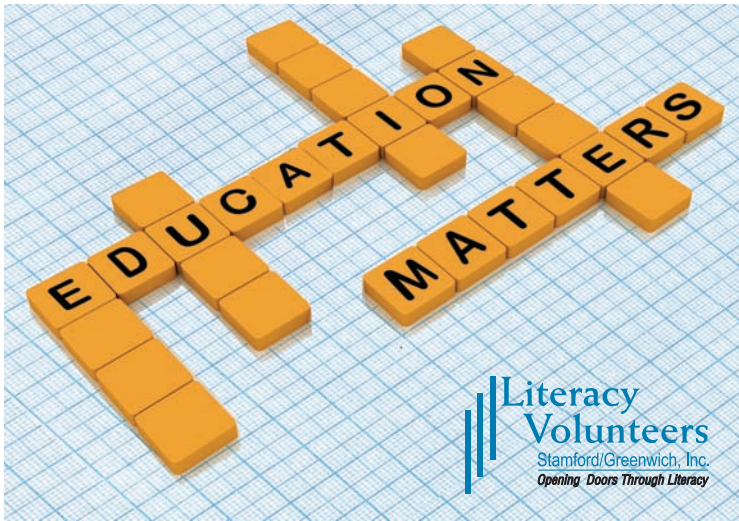


# Education “Scores” Big at 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary SCRABBLE® Challenge

“**W**hen I was born in 1952, I had nothing. For 47 years I was in a dark place because I could not read or understand the small things to do on my job,” stated LVSG student Jeanna G. to a hushed audience of 220 guests gathered for Literacy Volunteers’ 10th Anniversary SCRABBLE® Challenge held on May 6, 2010 at the beautiful Greenwich Country Club. Immediately, the group knew that they were here for an important cause – to raise funds to support Literacy Volunteers’ education and job training programs for our community’s most vulnerable residents – those living in poverty and with limited education. Guests bid on wonderful silent auction items arranged by Board member Penny Grayson, listened attentively as students spoke of the difference education has made in their lives and engaged in lively and competitive SCRABBLE® play. Together they raised \$96,000.

The most important goal for the evening was to garner support for vital education programs that empower LVSG’s students to obtain jobs with a future and become contributing members of our community. The entire LVSG family is grateful to those who continue to demonstrate their belief in the power of education to transform lives. “It is especially important in challenging economic times that our neighbors with limited education can return to school and obtain credentials that can lead to employment with a future. We are deeply grateful to all of the corporate, individual and local businesses who contribute to the event year after year, and to our Platinum Benefactors – Pitney Bowes and Thomson Reuters,” stated executive director Diane Rosenthal. LVSG student Jeanna G. concluded the evening by eloquently describing why education matters. **“Literacy Volunteers has made my heart open wide. I can read. I can help my grandson with his homework. I can do my job with confidence. My whole life is brighter.”**

<p><b>Corporate</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. FactSet #5</li> <li>2. FactSet #4</li> <li>3. FactSet #1</li> </ol>	<p>●</p> <p>●</p>	<p><b>Friends &amp; Family</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Day #1</li> <li>2. Grayson #2</li> <li>3. Day #2</li> </ol>
<p><b>Congratulations Top Scoring Teams</b></p>		



# SCRABBLE® Challenge 2011

Join us for the 11<sup>th</sup>  
Annual SCRABBLE® Challenge  
on May 18, 2011 at the  
Greenwich Country Club.

For more information on how you can support  
Literacy Volunteers by joining  
a winning team call 203.324.5214

## Princeton-Bound Teen Motivated by Mom's Passion for Learning

**E**ighteen year old Andres Parrado arrived in the United States in 2008 to build a better life. But the greatest influence on his decision to immigrate was the example set by his mother Lindelia, Literacy Volunteer's 2009 ESOL Student of the Year. "My mom got married to an American. He persuaded her to come here. When I heard how hard she was studying to become an optometrist, her profession in Colombia, I was motivated by her passion to learn and decided to move here myself."

Even though Andres studied English in Colombia, his transition to the United States was difficult. He attended the Shelter Program at Westhill High School, where he took ESOL classes. He also studied English with his mother four nights a week at Literacy Volunteers.

As his English improved, he began to take classes that would prepare him for a career in mechanical engineering. "With encouragement from my mom and my ESOL teacher, who both told me that college was the key to success, I turned to the internet to search for educational opportunities that offered job security. I saw a scholarship offered by Proton Energy Systems, a private company that works with hydrogen as a renewable resource, and applied for it."

Andres also applied to top-tier colleges, including Princeton, Yale and Cornell and was accepted to all of them. Then Andres received a life-changing letter from Proton informing him that he was one of five students selected to receive a \$100,000 scholarship to attend the college of his choice. "I chose Princeton, because it would offer me a great undergraduate education and

fantastic opportunities to do research with the faculty." He was also told that he was chosen from among a select group of students to participate in Princeton's Bridge Year Program in Serbia, helping ethnic minorities integrate into Serbian culture.

Now, happily enrolled as a freshman, Parrado stated, "I love the opportunity Princeton has given me. I am grateful that LVSG and the Stamford Public Schools opened that door. I want to attend graduate school and get a PhD. I would advise other young people from similar backgrounds to set clear goals, start working hard to achieve them, and just do it!"



*Andres Parrado on the Princeton Campus*



# Target on Fashion

## LVSG Partners with National Retailer to Help Youth Dress for Success

“**P**roject Runway” took place right here in Stamford this summer as Literacy Volunteers and Target teamed up to present a unique fashion show designed to give local young adults, both in and out of school, a glimpse at what clothing is appropriate on the job and what isn’t.

“If you look good, your potential employers will treat you better,” instructor Takeia McAlister told the crowd who had assembled to watch as team leaders from Target’s Stamford store modeled fall fashions appropriate for the workplace. The show was part of a larger work readiness training program, Bridges to Success, offered by LVSG and supported in part by a grant from the Fairfield County Community Foundation. Bridges prepares young adults ages 16 – 24 for job interviews, teaches them how to conduct job searches, write resumes that will attract a potential employer’s attention and obtain nationally recognized certification in customer service from the National Retail Foundation or as IT technicians from Cisco Systems.

Over 60 young people from lower income families

have participated in the program with many obtaining jobs, internships or returning to school. McAlister came up with the idea of a “fashion show on a budget” as part of her curriculum. “Dress and appearance have a bigger impact on our lives than we realize. Teens should always dress with success in mind,” stated McAlister.

Six team leaders from Target chose appropriate clothing from the store, keeping in mind price, comfort, and style while also meeting the main criteria of workplace appropriate dress. The outfits ranged in price from \$30 to \$70 and came from Target’s Merona collection. Emily Korb and Adrienne Lebo, Stamford store team leaders, said that in addition to supporting a great organization, they participated because, “Target has a community focus, especially on literacy and youth employment. We wanted to partner with LVSG not just from a community and branding standpoint, but also for the potential job opportunities we can offer students,” noted Lebo. Students stated that they felt more confident and ready to ace the job interview. The enthusiasm demonstrated by those gathered indicated that LVSG and Target hit a bulls-eye on all fronts.

## Health Literacy Classes Teach Life-Saving Lessons

“**H**ow do you get health insurance?” “What are co-pays?” “Why should I care about preventative medicine and eating right?” For students at Literacy Volunteers, and for many people across the country, these are questions that are often confusing and frightening, and if not answered correctly, can lead to overwhelming financial hardships and life-threatening illnesses.

Dominic Francese, a former LVSG tutor and Master’s Degree candidate in Public Health at Southern Connecticut State University, decided to incorporate health literacy into his English language curricula. “It is vital that my students, many of whom are also parents of young children, understand the importance of maintaining good health and how to utilize the U.S. health system. I spoke to classes comprised of Hispanic, Russian, Creole, Ukrainian and Polish native-speakers and asked about basic medical issues that they didn’t know how to communicate. I found that many students were dependent on their families, especially their children. They didn’t know how to talk to their doctors or read prescription labels. This is a frightening situation,” stated Francese.

Health literacy, as defined by the Partnership for Clear



Health Communications, refers to the ability to read, understand and act on health information. These are the skills that all people need to find their way to the right place in a hospital, fill out medical and insurance forms, and communicate with healthcare providers. It is estimated that ninety million American adults have limited literacy, including 70% of the immigrant population, making understanding health

communications nearly impossible. Low health literacy disproportionately affects the poor, the elderly, and members of minority and immigrant communities and is associated with poor health outcomes, low levels of preventive behavior, and financial burden.

To combat this growing epidemic, Francese filled his language lessons with information on navigating the healthcare system, asking the right questions of healthcare providers, filling out insurance forms, following medical instructions, and participating in preventative activities such as exercising, eating healthy foods, and managing stress. Francese remarked, “Through health literacy education we are contributing to building healthier families and stronger communities.”

# Welcome New Board Members

Literacy Volunteers is pleased to announce the addition of two new members to its Board of Directors.



**R**ichard “Cookie” Thomas brings an extensive background in teamwork training, human resources and conflict resolution following a more than thirty-year career at Pitney Bowes. “Cookie”, as he likes to be called, successfully trained Pitney Bowes manufacturing employees in areas

such as conflict resolution, workforce planning, employee assessment and selection, and workforce diversity.

Now retired from Pitney, Mr. Thomas owns his music business, and is a familiar voice in our community. He performs for local businesses, corporations, non-profits and at private events. He has also done voice-overs as well as print and video acting assignments for major corporations including PricewaterhouseCoopers, Cigna, Merck, Pitney Bowes, General Electric, Fuji Film, and Bridgeport Hospital. He is affiliated with The Stamford Chamber of Commerce, The Greenwich Chamber of Commerce, The Better Business Bureau and the Connecticut Minority Suppliers Development Council. He serves on the Board of Directors of SoundWaters. Cookie states, “I wanted to become involved with Literacy Volunteers because of my past experience at Pitney Bowes with helping employees become more efficient in English and math. As today’s workforce becomes more competitive and with technology changing so rapidly, workers need to be constantly upgrading their skills. I have been a longtime supporter of LVSG and I share their clients’ passions to become proficient in English in order to succeed in today’s workplace.”



**V**ictoria Hackman brings to the Literacy Volunteers’ Board of Directors an extensive background in global marketing and public relations through her work with Leo Burnett, GlaxoSmithKline, Richardson Vicks, and Proctor and Gamble on the Oil of Olay, Clearasil

and Pantene brands.

She joined UNICEF as marketing and sales director for their Greeting Card Operation in the USA, Canada, Latin America, and Asia, developing income generating projects for women. She was a consultant to Children’s Television Workshop for the expansion of Sesame Street into China, Russia, Mexico and South Africa. Locally, Victoria has worked at the Historical Society of the Town of Greenwich, the Friendly Connections program at Family Centers, and Greenwich Adult Day Care. She is also on the board of the Japan Society of Fairfield County, Greenwich Chaplaincy Services, Greenwich Arts Council and the Late Life Issues Committee. She volunteers at Nathaniel Witherell where she helps lead the Traveling Art for the Elderly discussions. Victoria states, “I joined the board of LVSG for two reasons - having worked internationally, I am interested in assisting people from other countries settle in the USA. And, as an immigrant myself, I can understand, even when English is one’s native language, how difficult moving to a new country can be.”

## Lisa and Rachel Look for the Right Job

*An original story by Consuelo Cabrera, Claudia Lopez, Kathlen Mayorga, Kabwe Mangabu  
Students in the Workskills ESOL Class at Family Centers*

**L**isa is a young woman 26 years old. She has finished college and volunteers part time as a secretary in a lawyer’s office. She’s organized and capable. She likes to read in her free time. She’s cheerful, professional, goal-oriented, punctual, loyal and polite.

Rachel is 23 years old. She has not graduated from college. She changes schools often. She’s not very organized. She is grumpy in the mornings. She is not punctual and goes out partying every night. She’s not yet ready to be responsible.

Lisa applies for the same job as Rachel. She is ready



for her interview. She brings her resume and references. She dresses in a casual suit and wears high-heeled shoes. She wears no jewelry or perfume.

Rachael is not ready for the interview. First of all, she came late and did not dress properly. She wore a tight dress with a low neckline. She wore a lot of makeup, a lot of jewelry and strong perfume. Plus, she forgot to turn off her cell phone.

Lisa got the job and Rachel did not.

# Fairfield County Community Foundation Grant Prepares Young Adults to Succeed in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Workforce

Over the past few years, LVSG has expanded its programs to address the unique job-readiness needs of lower-income and immigrant young adults who are often underserved in more traditional educational settings and may lack the knowledge on how to access systems that can guide them to new career and educational opportunities.



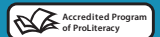
To bridge that gap, LVSG was awarded \$15,000 in funding from The Fairfield County Community Foundation (FCCF) to prepare 15 young adults ages 16 to 24, half of whom do not speak English as their first language, for 21st Century jobs. Students accepted into the program study for either Customer Service or CompTIA A+ certification, both nationally recognized credentials that offer a boast when seeking employment in today's highly competitive job market. In addition, students create career portfolios containing resumes, cover letters and job search information. At the end of their course-work and training, LVSG assists students in identifying job opportunities and internships based on their desired



career paths and guides them through the application and interview process. Students have been successful in obtaining employment at Target, Radio Shack, CVS, Fairway and Whole Foods.



LVSG is a partner agency of United Way of Western Connecticut and United Way of Greenwich.



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