



# EXTRA EDITION SPRING 2026

## WORDS TO LIVE BY

The quarterly newsletter of the  
Literacy Volunteers of the Montachusett Area



WHAT'S INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

**New Program Assistant**  
**Journey of Persistence**  
**Bingo Night**



## WORDS FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

**Zwanieke Visser**

We typically share our newsletter on a quarterly basis, but today I'm reaching out with a special edition—because we have not one, but three important updates to share with you.

First, after 53 years of service to the Montachusett Area, we are thrilled to welcome our very first Program Assistant. Although we had many strong applicants, it quickly became clear that we had found the right person in Tracy. Welcome, Tracy—I'm so happy to have you on our team!

Second, I recently had the pleasure of reconnecting with a former student whose journey many of you may remember. He was once recognized as the Massachusetts Adult Student of the Year—an honor that was truly well deserved. But his story didn't end there. Today, he is advocating for others through a nonprofit organization he founded, continuing to inspire us all.

And finally, while perhaps not as inspiring, it is certainly important—we have an update to share about our upcoming Bingo fundraiser, including a new date and location. I hope you'll join us! The board and I are working hard to secure some amazing prizes, and it promises to be a fun and meaningful event.

Thank you, as always, for your continued support. Wishing you all a wonderful spring—hopefully without any more snow!

Warm regards,  
Zwanieke



# MEET TRACY, OUR NEW PROGRAM ASSISTANT

*We're excited to welcome Tracy, who joined our team on April 7 as our new Program Assistant! Tracy will be working with us for 10 hours per week, thanks to a generous grant from the Community Foundation of North Central Massachusetts. In her role, she will primarily support student intakes and assessments, helping us better serve learners from the very first step of their journey. Tracy was also recently certified as an ESOL tutor and will begin working with her first two students this month—we're thrilled to have her contributing in multiple ways!*



Hello! I'm Tracy Nguyen, and I recently joined Literacy Volunteers of the Montachusett Area as a Program Assistant. I was born and raised in central Massachusetts and mostly grew up in the Leominster and Fitchburg area my whole life. I graduated from Clark University in Worcester and have a background in business, but what truly drew me to this organization is its mission and the personal connection I have to it.

I come from a family of immigrants from Vietnam, and growing up, I often heard stories from my grandmother about her journey to becoming a U.S. citizen. She worked closely with volunteer English tutors who helped her learn the language, prepare for her citizenship test, and build confidence in navigating daily life. Seeing the impact that support had on her always stayed with me.

Because of that, being part of an organization like LVMont feels incredibly meaningful. I am passionate about giving back to my community and supporting adult learners as they build independence and new opportunities through literacy and language. I'm especially excited to contribute both through my role and as an ESOL tutor."



# A STORY OF PERSISTENCE

“My name is Hamed Zarei, and my journey has never followed a straight line.

For more than 20 years, I worked in IT and software engineering, eventually becoming the CEO of a hospital ERP software company for 11 years. I built systems that helped hospitals operate more efficiently, but even in those successful years, I felt a pull toward something more human — something that connected technology with dignity, access, and inclusion.



Ten years ago, I immigrated to the United States. I arrived with deep experience and leadership, but like many newcomers, I had to start from the bottom. My first job here was general labor. It was humbling, but it taught me how to rebuild. Within a few months, I learned how to network, how to present my skills, and how to open doors again. After six months, I earned my first professional job in the U.S. and began rebuilding my career. Then everything changed.



In 2019, I suffered a workplace accident — an 18 foot fall that broke 54 bones, including my skull, spine, knee, hands, and fingers. The impact permanently damaged my dominant left hand. I spent four months in the hospital and in rehabilitation, much of it during the COVID period, when isolation made recovery even more difficult. I had to relearn everything with my right hand: writing, typing, daily tasks, even how to hold a table tennis paddle. But I refused to let disability define my limits. I trained, adapted, and pushed myself until I earned a place on the U.S. Para Table Tennis Team. That experience reshaped my purpose. I understood what it meant to be capable yet overlooked, skilled yet underestimated, willing to work yet blocked by systems not designed for people with disabilities. I also understood how powerful technology can be when it becomes a bridge instead of a barrier.



That is why I created Ability IT Sustainability. It began simply: repairing and donating laptops and tablets to children and communities who had no access to technology. What started as a personal effort grew into something larger — more than 150 devices donated so far, supporting students, libraries, and

nonprofits. Our first steps are clear:

- Give technology a second life through secure, responsible IT asset disposition
- Give people a fair first chance, especially people with disabilities who deserve meaningful, dignified employment



But these are only the foundation.

My true long term mission is to use these digital devices as tools to teach digital literacy, cybersecurity awareness, and AI skills — the knowledge people need to compete, to grow, and to build a better future. Technology is changing fast, and communities that are left behind today will be locked out tomorrow. I want to change that.



This work is personal to me. It's about inclusion. It's about opportunity. It's about preparing people — especially those who have been overlooked — for the future that is already here. Ability IT Sustainability is more than a nonprofit. It's a movement to rethink waste, rethink inclusion, and rethink what's possible when technology becomes a pathway to dignity and opportunity.

And this is only the beginning." - Hamed



# BINGO UPDATE: NEW DATE AND LOCATION!



Please note that our Spring Bingo fundraiser has a new date and venue. We hope you'll join us on June 3 at **Thirsty Robot Brewing Company** for an evening of fun, community, and friendly competition—all in support of our literacy programs. We look forward to seeing you there!

A vibrant red poster for a "BINGO NIGHT" event. In the top left corner is a white logo featuring a stylized letter 'V' inside a red circle with a crown on top. The main title "BINGO NIGHT" is written in large, bold, white, sans-serif capital letters. Below the title, in a smaller white font, is the text: "Join us for an evening of fun, excitement, and fantastic prizes at our Bingo Night!". Underneath that, in bold white text, are the words "Games | Prize | Party". A white rectangular box contains the date "JUNE 3, 2026" in red. To the left of this box are two circular icons: a red arrow pointing right and a calendar icon with a checkmark. At the bottom left, in small white capital letters, is the text: "MONEY RAISED BENEFITS THE LITERACY VOLUNTEERS OF THE MONTACHUSETT AREA". The right side of the poster is dominated by three overlapping bingo cards in blue, green, and red. In the foreground, there are several colorful bingo balls with numbers: a red ball with the number 8, a green ball with the number 9, and a blue ball with the number 24. A white, torn-edge paper graphic with the text "LET'S JOIN!" in red is positioned in front of the balls. The background is decorated with colorful confetti and streamers. In the top right corner, the "THIRSTY ROBOT BREWING COMPANY" logo is visible, featuring a gear and a star.