

SPRING 2026

WORDS TO LIVE BY

The quarterly newsletter of the
Literacy Volunteers of the Montachusett Area



WHAT'S INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Welcoming new tutors
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From the old days.



WORDS FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Zwanieke Visser

It has been a long winter here in the Montachusett area—at times it felt like spring might never arrive. As the season begins to change, we're also seeing exciting new opportunities for our organization and the adult learners we serve.

I'm very pleased to share that Literacy Volunteers of the Montachusett Area has been awarded a **\$20,000 grant** from the Community Foundation of North Central Massachusetts. This generous support will allow us to **hire a part-time assistant** to help expand our programs and strengthen the services we provide to students and volunteers. At the time of writing, interviews are underway, and we look forward to welcoming a new team member soon.

We're also preparing for one of our favorite community events—our **Spring Bingo Fundraiser** on May 7 at the Mill City Pub. It's always a fun evening, and the funds raised help support our tutoring programs throughout the year. If you or your business would like to donate a raffle basket or bingo prize, we would be very grateful—please reach out!

Finally, please help us spread the word about our work. Our **next ESOL tutor training** begins April 11, and we would love to welcome new volunteers who want to help adults in our community build their English and literacy skills.

Thank you to our volunteers, students, donors, and community partners for making this work possible. With your support, we're looking forward to a bright spring ahead.

Warm regards,
Zwanieke



TUTOR REFLECTIONS



I completed the training in October 2024 and was lucky enough to tutor two different students since then. Even more than improving English, I am the most grateful for becoming their friend. The people we help often are isolated and don't have family here. ESOL is just a bridge to building community for people who need it the most.

The most memorable moments are when a student has mastered what they struggle with the most. For example, my French-speaking student struggles to pronounce "th" but with a lot of practice and dedication she has come a long way! I love to celebrate the small things because they add up to big things. - Faith

WINTER HIGHLIGHTS: NEW PROGRAMS

This winter has been an active and engaging season for Literacy Volunteers of the Montachusett Area. Our conversation circles in Leominster and Fitchburg and the tutoring group in Gardner continued to provide welcoming spaces where English learners can practice speaking, build confidence, and connect with others in the community. These informal gatherings remain one of the most popular ways for students to strengthen their language skills while forming friendships.

This winter also featured several creative **new learning opportunities**. We offered a **Winter-Themed Beginner English class online**, designed especially for students just starting their English journey. Through seasonal topics such as winter weather, clothing, and winter activities, participants practiced essential vocabulary and simple conversations in a supportive virtual classroom.

Another highlight of the season was **Jim's Song of the Day**, a creative project led by one of our dedicated tutors. For 58 days, Jim emailed 19 ESOL students a daily song—complete with lyrics, videos, and a short note explaining the singer, the song's history, or its place in American culture. Students could listen, read along, and explore new vocabulary through music. The series concluded with "Ringo," a 1964 hit by Lorne Greene that once reached #1 on the U.S. Billboard Hot 100.

Students loved the experience. One learner shared, "I always listen to the songs he sends. I like it. Please keep doing it." Another said, "I add them to my Spotify playlist and listen while driving. It helps me improve my vocabulary and learn more about U.S. culture."

Creative approaches like this show how language learning can happen in many ways—through conversation, community, and even music. We are deeply grateful to the volunteers who bring such creativity, dedication, and enthusiasm to their work with our students.



FREE LAPTOP FOR STUDENT

We're excited to celebrate Student S, who recently received a free laptop and 9 months of internet access to support their learning. This opportunity was made possible by the Office for Refugees and Immigrants and the Massachusetts Broadband Institute, helping expand digital access for adult learners in our community. Student S's dedication and commitment make her a great match for this opportunity—we can't wait to see what she accomplishes next!



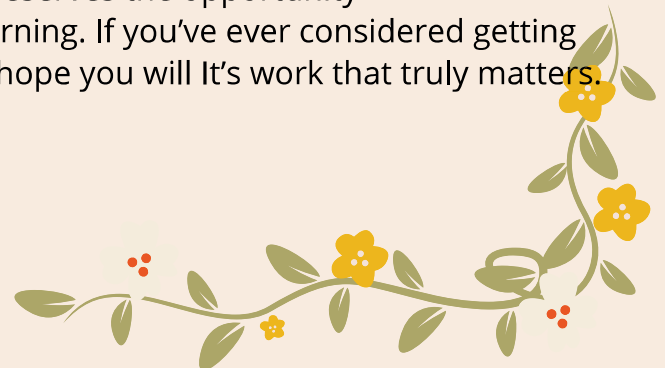
A WORD FROM OUR BOARD VICE PRESIDENT

My involvement with the Literacy Volunteers of the Montachusett Region (LVMont) started with a simple belief that literacy can change the direction of someone's life. Serving on the Board has given me a meaningful way to support that mission and give back to the community.

Literacy isn't abstract. It's filling out a job application, reading a note from a child's teacher, or understanding a bill that arrives in the mail. These everyday moments matter, and for many adults, they don't come easily. What inspires me most are the learners who show up week after week while balancing long work hours, family responsibilities, and all the challenges of learning as an adult. They put in the effort. They keep going even when it's hard. That kind of perseverance deserves our support.

I'm inspired by the people who make LVMont run. Our tutors give their time generously and build real relationships with learners. Our Executive Director works hard to keep everything moving, coordinating programs, and supporting tutors and learners. As a Board, our role is to support that work and ensure the organization stays strong. We consider sustainability, growth, and how we can continue to meet the needs of the community. Serving as Vice President is rewarding because the impact is real and visible. This isn't abstract work. You can see the difference literacy makes in someone's independence.

I'm proud to be part of the Literacy Volunteers of the Montachusett Region. It's an organization built on commitment and the belief that everyone deserves the opportunity to keep learning. If you've ever considered getting involved, I hope you will. It's work that truly matters.



MEDIA SPOTLIGHT LEADS TO NEW TUTOR TRAINING

A recent article about Literacy Volunteers of the Montachusett Area in the Sentinel & Enterprise brought welcome attention to our work—and an exciting increase in interest from potential volunteers.

We were thrilled to hear from so many community members who want to help adults in our region improve their English and literacy skills.

Because of this surge in interest, we scheduled an additional ESOL Tutor Training this winter in cooperation with our colleagues at the Worcester affiliate. By partnering together, we were able to offer training sooner and ensure that new volunteers could begin working with students more quickly.

Six new volunteers are currently participating in the training and will be ready to begin tutoring by the end of the month. We are grateful for the growing support from the community and excited to welcome these new tutors as they begin making a difference in the lives of adult learners across the Montachusett area.



GET READY FOR FUN

MILL CITY PUB

BINGO NIGHT

Enjoy a great evening with bingo, physical games of skill and chance, raffles, great food / drinks and amazing prizes, all while supporting literacy in our community



Cost to play:
Bingo cards: \$2, 3/\$5
Games: \$10
50/50 raffle: \$5
Prizes: up to \$600 each

THURSDAY MAY 7

AT 06:30PM - 8:30PM

@ Mill City Pub, Fitchburg

THIS EVENT SUPPORTS THE LITERACY VOLUNTEERS OF THE MONTACHUSETT AREA

FROM THE OLD DAYS...



6—Sentinel-Enterprise, Fitchburg, Mass., Wednesday, April 14, 1976



CHECKING OVER DETAILS of the upcoming tutor training workshop for the Montachusett Affiliate of the Literacy Volunteers of America are left, Mrs. Olive Oliver, a tutor involved in the program for three years and Miss Phyllis Peirce, chair-

woman of the Montachusett Affiliate. The workshop opens on Wednesday, April 21 at 6.30 p.m. at the Fitchburg Youth Library. Persons interested in becoming a tutor are asked to call Mrs. Henry Maki, 612 Elm St. (Sentinel and Enterprise Photo)





Literacy Volunteers of the Montachusett Area (LVMont) is an affiliate of Literacy Volunteers of Massachusetts



THANK YOU TO ALL OUR GENEROUS SUPPORTERS.

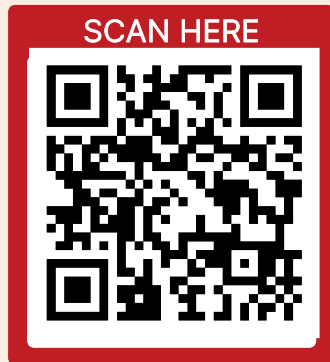
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Fitchburg Senior Center
Leominster Veteran's Memorial Center
Fitchburg Art Museum
Gardner Public Library



"We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give." – Winston Churchill