

READ. LEARN. GROW.



2014 - 2015 | **ANNUAL REPORT**





Letter from the **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

Dear Friends,

It's been a big year for LVGH. I'm almost not sure where to start.

We introduced some new programming. We transformed one Literacy Center and moved another. Then there was that giant step we took on April 20, 2015.

And none of it would have been possible without your generous support. So let me start there, with a big thank you for making things possible; and this year, for making what once seemed impossible a reality.

Only a small percentage of the information we consume today is the written word - 9% in 2010 versus 26% in 1960. Mastering digital literacy skills is no longer optional. And it no longer simply means knowing one's way around a keyboard or being able to create a Word document. Today, digital competencies include broader skills in social networking, audio-visual skills, and the critical skill of evaluating digital information.

Although we have integrated technology into our instruction for many years, we recognized the need to do more, to ensure that our students had the broad, multi-dimensional literacy skills they need to function in today's society and workplace. We introduced a third core program, Digital Literacy, to complement our ESOL and Basic Literacy programs. This year, every ESOL and Basic Literacy student was also enrolled in Digital Literacy, and participated in weekly digital literacy classes. With your help, all 840 of our students learned new digital literacy skills, alongside their

new language literacy skills. They all finished the year much better prepared to navigate our technology-rich world.

If you haven't been inside the Hartford Center in a while, you might need to ask directions. Our new entrance is safer and more welcoming. There are new computers in our computer labs, and a new, dedicated computer classroom. We added soundproofing and extended walls on the noisier classrooms, and reconfigured offices so that quieter spaces were reserved for classrooms. There are new blinds on the windows, and fresh paint – some of it a trendy orange - on the walls.

And if you're looking for the Wickham Center, you'll have to cross Burnside Avenue to our new home in the educational wing of the New Covenant United Methodist Church. We now have classrooms. We have new laptops. We have the largest enrollment in Wickham since we opened the program in 2005. And, we have partners who are as committed as we are to our students' success.

Wickham has become a unique model of collaboration. New Covenant has been the catalyst, gathering together a blend of agencies that provide an array of services on site, including the kinds of support services our students need to help them commit to their studies. With Food-Share, Legal Aid, AA, NA, East Hartford Adult Education, and LVGH already part of this unique cooperative, students can participate as volunteers or consumers, or both, in community meals, nutrition and cooking classes, and the Elderly Box Program. They have access to legal and

substance abuse services. Between East Hartford Adult Education and LVGH, the full continuum of adult literacy services is available: ESOL, Basic Lit, GED, Citizenship, and morning, afternoon and evening classes. And there will be more services to come, as the collaborative continues to grow.

April 20, 2015 was an historic day for Literacy Volunteers of Greater Hartford. On that day we took a giant step toward securing the future of this organization. With the firm financial grounding made possible through your loyal generosity over the years, coupled with a generous bequest from past tutor and Board member, Beverly Heckel, we were able to establish an endowment fund. Today, the Literacy Volunteers of Greater Hartford Fund at the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving is worth a half a million dollars. Over the next few years we will be working to build it up to \$1.0 million.

The work we do every day is important work. For our students, for the employers in the region, and for the health of our community. What we do makes this a better place for all of us to live. This year, with your support, we continued doing that good work, and took important steps toward making sure that we will be able to do it for as long as it needs doing. A fully literate Greater Hartford will not happen overnight, nor can we do it alone. Thank you for being our partners in this vision, for empowering our students with the knowledge and skills they need to enrich not only their own lives, but our community.

Carol "CJ" Hauss
Executive Director

Our Students

837 students were enrolled in 2014-2015



53% were ages 25-44



33% were male



25% were ages 45-59



67% were female

Our Impact

467

Students improved their basic English literacy skills

10

Students enrolled in community or technical college

64

Entered a high school completion program

24

Students were employed or were promoted

6

Students became U.S. citizens; 5 others began the process

102

Increased involvement in their child's education/school

98%

of students with at least 12 hours of instruction achieved at least one goal

LVGH BY THE NUMBERS

2014-15

A Community Effort

Our Volunteers



Nearly **200** Volunteer tutors donated **16,450** hours



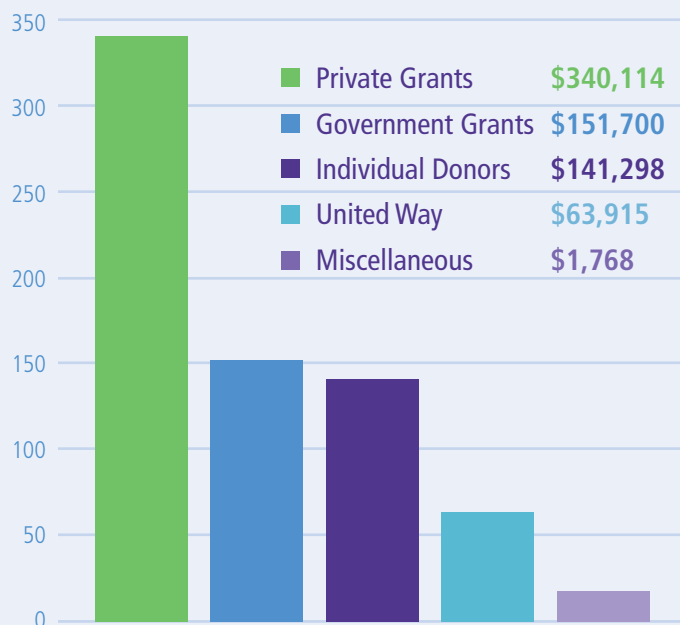
Estimated value of tutor hours: **\$440,695***

*valued by Independent Sector at \$26.79/hr. for CT



Youngest volunteer: **19**
Oldest volunteer: **84**

Our Supporters



Digital Literacy



of students gained digital literacy (computer) skills.



29 students had no previous experience with computers



10 opened their first email account



22 applied for jobs online for the first time



235 used the internet for learning for the first time

Ashley, a 23-year-old Hartford native, didn't plan to start a family while she was still in high school. But like many of her peers in Hartford, where the teen birth rate is three times the state average, Ashley found herself with a newborn son at the age of sixteen. School had never been easy for Ashley, and becoming a mother only made things more complicated. Although Ashley says she was lucky to have a supportive family, there were not sufficient supports in school for her to balance her responsibilities as a mom with the duties of being a full-time student. Soon, she had no choice but to drop out of high school.

Despite the challenges she faced, Ashley was determined to move forward with her life. "I knew I had to set an example for my son," she says. "If I finish school, he has to finish school, too!" She enrolled in Job Corps, and also took classes with the local public adult education program. However, Ashley says, "I had trouble focusing in larger classes." Then, in 2013, a family member told her about the GED program at LVGH. She decided to give it a try.

"When you step through the doors here, the first thing you see is a smile," Ashley says. "It's a very positive place. Everyone keeps you motivated and takes the time to help you." She noticed that many of her classmates were older adults. "They showed me that it's never too late to change your life and go back to school," she says.

"I knew I had to set an example for my son."

Working with our staff, Mark and Rose, and with her tutors, Edlyn and Ginger ("I love them," she says), Ashley began preparing diligently for the GED and working on other goals. This past March, she earned her driver's license. She plans to take the GED later this year. And after she reaches that milestone? "I'm going to college," Ashley tells us, without a hint of doubt in her voice. She's interested in studying architecture, and says that the first house she's going to build will be for her mother, who was so supportive of her during tough times. She'd also like to work with youth in her hometown. "I got involved in some things I shouldn't have when I was younger," she says. "I would like to do something to help Hartford kids stay on the right track."

While her life may not have gone as planned, Ashley now feels that she is on the path to success, and is excited about what's to come. "I've learned that you have to have a Plan A and a Plan B, because you never know what will come your way," she says. "Nothing can stop me."



Student Spotlight
Ashley R., *GED student*
Hartford Literacy Center



Volunteer Spotlight **Martha Lott**, ESOL Tutor

Almost ten years ago, a local newspaper article about Literacy Volunteers of Greater Hartford caught Martha Lott's attention. Still working full-time as a special education teacher, Martha wasn't ready to volunteer just yet, but with the end of her 27-year career looming, she resolved to keep LVGH in the back of her mind. For over two years, that newspaper clipping stayed on Martha's refrigerator, a reminder that her lifelong journey as an educator could continue even after retirement. "I had been an educator for my entire life," Martha says. "Even when I was in high school, I did educational activities with kids as a camp counselor... It's what I was meant to do."

Finally, in 2007, Martha pulled that old news clipping down from the fridge and called LVGH to sign up for one of our tutor trainings. As soon as she began tutoring a class in our English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program, she knew she had come to the right place. After teaching children for almost thirty years, working with adults who were learning English was a welcome new challenge.

"ESOL was something new for me, and teaching adults is very different than working with kids," Martha says. "You talk to them as equals; there are no behavior issues. My students are so excited and motivated to learn... They are mature, serious, and have very specific goals they want to reach. It's rewarding to see them work so hard for a chance at a better life."

When asked about the most challenging aspect of tutoring with LVGH, Martha noted that in any given class, students come from multiple countries, with widely varying cultures and educational backgrounds. Figuring out how to teach a class that might include one student who grew up in a refugee camp with little formal education sitting beside another student who completed high school in her home country is a challenge for any tutor, even a seasoned educator like Martha. However, Martha says, that diversity is also what makes her classes so engaging. "I love learning about the different countries where they came from, and the students love learning about each others' home countries and about their new home – America. Everyone shares their stories, and it helps to keep things interesting."

"It's what I was meant to do."

What advice would Martha share with a new volunteer tutor? It can be challenging at first, she says, but new tutors should "stick it out and get to know your students. They will tell you what they need." She also points out, "Always come in prepared. You can't wing it – the students will know!" Finally, she adds, "You can really get creative - there are so many resources available for you to take advantage of, from the staff at LVGH, to the computer lab, to countless ideas on the internet." Overall, Martha says of her tutoring experience, "You get back more than you give. I always leave happy. LVGH has become a big piece of my life."

If you're interested in learning more about the life-changing experience of tutoring adults, please visit www.lvgh.org or call us at 860-233-3853.

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2014 - 2015

VOLUNTEERS

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Student Spotlight
Momena A., *ESOL Student*
 Wickham Literacy Center

Seven years ago, Momena left her native country of Jordan to begin a new life in America with her husband. Life in Jordan, where she grew up with fourteen siblings, was extremely difficult. While she enjoyed her work as a nurse, Momena says she received little support from her family, and that overall, there were few opportunities for women in her country. “I felt that I had no control over my own life,” she says. Her husband assured her that they would have a better life in America.

But soon after arriving in the U.S., Momena found that life here was not as easy as she had been promised. Since she did not speak any English, she was completely dependent on her husband and his family, and felt isolated and alone. In 2013, she decided to move with her young son into a women’s shelter. The staff there told her that the first step to creating a new life for herself would be to improve her English. Upon this realization, Momena immediately began practicing English on her own, and signed up for an English class at the local community college. Soon, her English had improved enough that she was able to apply for housing assistance and move into a new apartment with her son.

In early 2014, determined to continue improving her English, Momena signed up for twice-weekly ESOL classes at LVGH’s East Hartford location. At LVGH, she says, she is “always learning; the tutors always keep me working. Now, I know more difficult words and have better understanding... and I don’t have to ask as many questions.” She says that the tutors and her classmates keep her motivated, and she is grateful for the supportive environment.

“This is my life.”

As her English improved, Momena’s confidence grew tremendously, and she gained the courage to continue taking steps towards a better life for herself and her son. By the fall of 2014, her English skills had improved enough that she was ready to study for the U.S. citizenship exam. With the help of our partners at East Hartford Adult Education (which hosts a variety of classes in the same building as LVGH’s Wickham Literacy Center), Momena became a U.S. citizen in December. “Everything was black before,” she says. “[Becoming a citizen] felt like starting my life. It feels like something good is coming soon for me and my son. This country helps me to look to the future. This is a good country for women and kids; it protects them.”

Momena’s next goal is to return to the medical field; she recently enrolled in the medical assistant program at the local community college. “I cried on the first day of college,” Momena says. “I am an Arabic lady who can prove my life, I can do more. I am not under the control of anyone. This is my life.”

In addition, Momena’s long-term dream is to own her own restaurant, because she loves to cook and wants to share the food from her native country with those in her adopted country. Seven years after leaving home, it seems that Momena is finally experiencing a taste of the American Dream.



Student Spotlight

Ekaterina L., *ESOL Student* Hartford Literacy Center

Four years ago, Ekaterina (or Kate, as her friends call her) was preparing to begin a career as a dentist in her home country of Russia. But she couldn't forget the months she had spent, several years earlier, as an exchange student in the United States. She'd loved her time in America, and dreamed of returning. So Kate made the brave decision to say goodbye to her family in Russia, pack up her belongings, and begin a new adventure in the U.S.

Kate soon discovered that, due to differences in dental training requirements between Russia and the U.S., she would need to complete two additional years of residency before she would be allowed to practice dentistry in her adopted country. She also learned that she would have to earn a good score on the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) exam in order to gain acceptance to a residency program. While she found a community among other Russian immigrants in Hartford, she quickly realized that in order to complete her training and begin her career here, she would need to improve her English skills.

"Because I would go to a Russian grocery store, and I had a Russian-speaking roommate, I did not have the opportunity to practice English very often," she says. While she knew some English, she didn't feel comfortable making small talk – a key skill for dentists! – and was still unfamiliar with many of the cultural differences between the two countries.

"It broadened my mind."

It would have been easy for Kate to become discouraged at the challenges before her, but she faced them with enthusiasm and determination. "I really do not mind having to do the extra work," she says. "The culture is different, the insurance system is different, the way people communicate is different. I wanted to learn these things so that I could become a better dentist." A friend told her about LVGH, and she immediately came into the Hartford Literacy Center to sign up for classes.

"Coming here has been more than just studying English," Kate says. "I received so much support from the tutors and the other students. I made new friends. I learned about American traditions and culture. It broadened my mind." She also says that her tutor, Carol, went way above and beyond. "She started a conversation class just to help students like me get more speaking practice. She helped me learn how to write emails the way that Americans do. She did mock interviews with me to help prepare for my residency interviews. It would have been a nightmare to go through those interviews without Carol's help."

After about a year of taking English classes with LVGH, Kate took and passed the TOEFL exam with flying colors, and can now continue with her dental training. She is now interning as a dental hygienist and applying to residency programs. "The English classes at LVGH made this possible," Kate says. "I am excited for my future in America."

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Program Director Mark Briggs and Volunteer Stephen Morris discussed LVGH's programs in a fall 2014 WTIC radio interview.

This report recognizes gifts received between July 1, 2014 and June 30, 2015. We apologize for any inadvertent errors or omissions in this report. Please report errors to Shannon Houston, Assistant Director, 860-233-3853.

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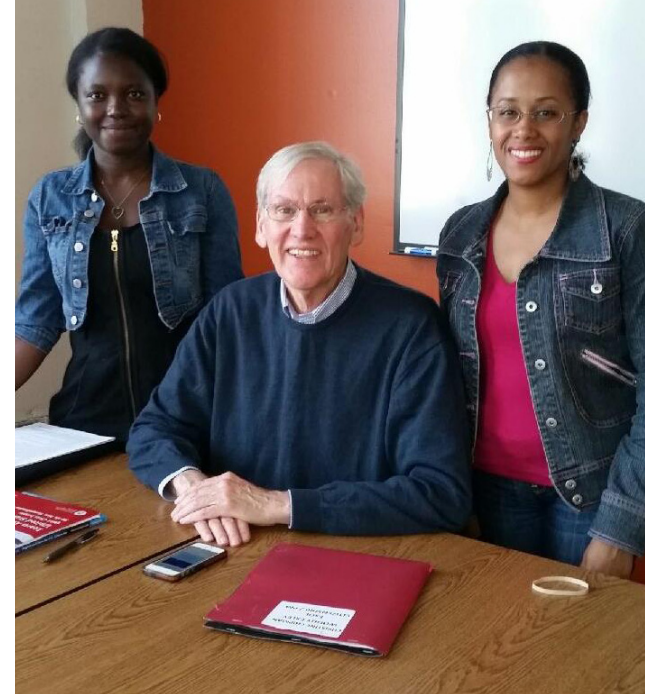
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A volunteer team from Berkshire Bank helped to re-paint our Hartford Literacy Center in November.



Our 6th Annual Read. Learn. Grow. Gala

was held on March 28, 2015 at The Farmington Club. 160 guests enjoyed an evening of delicious food, drinks, silent auction, and dancing to The Colbys Band. Max Reiss of NBC Connecticut pumped up the crowd as this year's master of ceremonies. Thanks to your involvement, the event raised almost \$45,000 (net) in support of our adult literacy programs!

READ.LEARN.GROW

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READ.LEARN.GROW

6th Annual Read. Learn. Grow. Gala/ *continued*

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Linda Wenkert
Whole Foods Market
Yale Repertory Theatre
Zahner's Clothiers

Event Photography

Donated by:
Matthew Lin, New Vibe Studios

SAVE THE DATE! Our 7th Annual Gala will be held April 2, 2016 at Farmington Gardens.



LEAVE A LEGACY

LEAVE A LEGACY FOR LITERACY

We are so grateful to the volunteers, board members, and friends over the years who have chosen to leave a lasting legacy by making bequest provisions in their wills to LVGH. This is an exceptional group of individuals determined to keep working towards a stronger, more resilient, fully literate Greater Hartford for as long as it takes. In fact, it was their generosity that enabled us to establish the Literacy Volunteers of Greater Hartford Endowment Fund at the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving.

You can join this special group by pledging to include LVGH in your will with a gift in any amount. By setting aside a little something for LVGH in your estate plans now, you will help to ensure that all adults in our region have the opportunity to build critical skills and improve their lives for years to come.

For more about how to include LVGH in your planned giving, please visit lvgh.org/leavealegacy or talk with your financial advisor.



Former ESOL Tutor and board member Beverly Heckel left a generous bequest to LVGH in her will. Her incredible gift, along with those of other committed supporters, helped us to establish an endowment fund that will enable us to continue our work for as long as it takes.

LVGH STAFF

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2014 - 2015

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Please visit our profile on Guidestar.org for a full financial summary.



Hartford Literacy Center

30 Arbor Street
Hartford, CT 06106
Phone: (860) 233-3853
Fax: (860) 236-1640

Wickham Literacy Center

16 Church Street
East Hartford, CT 06108

Wintonbury Literacy Center

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