



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."

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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.