

How English Reunited Mom & Sons

Lincoln Literacy had much to celebrate at its annual awards luncheon June 20th. There were tutors like Donna West, who won the Tutor of the Year Award for her outstanding dedication and effectiveness. There were students like Cheryl Wolfe, who won the Learner of the Year Award for her strides in reading the classic novels. But most moving of all was the recipient of the Mayor's Award for Language & Literacy Achievement.

To get where she is today, Fazela Gailani had to endure unimaginable hardships — including separation from her two young sons. Yet, it was through her perseverance in learning English that she was eventually reunited with them.

In the 1990s, Fazela was a contented young mother in Afghanistan with absolutely no idea that she would one day live in Lincoln. Then trouble came. The Taliban killed her husband and forced her to flee into Pakistan with her

mother and two young sons. Troubles cropped up there as well, and she had to seek refuge abroad. At the last minute, however, her sons were snatched away from her. In 2001, she arrived in Lincoln a heart-broken mother with an elderly mother to care for.

Weighed down by her cares, Fazela determined that she would make the best she could of her new life. She started classes at (see p. 3)



Fazela Gailani, Mayor's Award Winner

Bryan Health Opens Door to English Lessons

Bryan Health, one of the region's largest medical providers, has a top notch staff that comes from all over the world. Aware that some of their immigrant employees have yet to fully master English, Bryan's Education and Environmental Services departments invited Lincoln Literacy this spring to come and offer English classes for employees whose cleaning work plays a critical role in infection prevention at Bryan's two campuses.

However, a medical center is a busy place. The classes would have to take place before or after work shifts. No one knew if employees would be willing to put in extra time on top of a full work day to advance their understanding of English. To answer the question, a 15-week pilot project was devised. On March 23rd, a Lincoln Literacy team met with slightly anxious Bryan Health

staff members to enroll and assess them. Each found the other likeable, and soon the classrooms were filled with laughter.

From that point on, the 90-minute weekly classes were well attended and highly productive. Thirty-one Bryan workers enrolled in (see Bryan Health, p. 2)



Bryan Health West staff celebrate their achievements

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If You Can Read This, You Can Surely Help!

Lincoln Literacy depends on volunteer tutors to get the job done. We offer highly effective training and support to the volunteers who teach our students. Tutors have a wide range of choices, from serving in classrooms or as one-to-one tutors. For more info, click "Get Involved" at our website. lincolnliteracy.org.

A Tutor's Tale: From One Immigrant to Another

By Fred Schelert, Volunteer Tutor and Board Member



Fred Schelert

As a ten-year old immigrant boy coming to America from Germany, it would have been a far-reaching prediction to say that someday I would be tutoring a refugee mother of six from Afghanistan in the English language.

My family, consisting of mother and father with six children ranging in age from five to fourteen, arrived in Hebron, Nebraska, in the spring of 1952. None of

us spoke a word of English. Six months later, my father died of liver complications. My mother was left to raise six children on her own.

Fast forward to Lincoln Literacy in 2011. Development Officer Victoria Welles, who also oversees volunteers for the group,

introduced me to Laila Ayubzai, an Afghan refugee mother of six. Much like my family's situation, her children attended school and became proficient in English. Laila is extremely proud of and devoted to her children. It was now her turn to "catch up."

To say that Laila is highly motivated falls short of her focused drive to learn and improve her language skills. I recall one of



Laila Ayubzai, reading aloud at our Read-a-thon

our first meetings. Though she could barely read English, she had as her goals to write checks, use the phone book, look up words in the dictionary and apply for jobs. She has always set high goals and embraced challenges. Once-a-week meetings were not enough for her. Not shy about asking for help, she requested we meet at least twice each week. I agreed.

Laila is a quick and determined learner. She has made incredible progress since our introduction. She is now a full-time student at Southeast Community College. Her aspiration is to be a pharmacist.

On many occasions, Laila has expressed her appreciation for the tutoring provided through Lincoln Literacy. As in many one-to-one matches, a mutual friendship has developed. She considers my wife and me a part of her extended family.

The common thread I see with my mother and Laila is a fierce motivation to create an improved future for self and family. The drive to be significant and attain a sense of independence is rooted in all of us. Laila is a fine exemplar of that spirit.

A Student's Tale:

Boyang Zhao of China says he and his wife, Wenjie Jiang, are grateful to have met Joyce Hahn. "Whenever my wife and I have any questions, she will answer us promptly and patiently. I like her smile ... and her energetic and positive spirit."



Joyce Hahn, left, with Wenjie Jiang

◆ Bryan Health

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the classes. Nearly 90% percent of those who enrolled completed the course. One made the leap to Southeast Community College classes before the pilot was done.

At the end of the 15 weeks, post-assessment tests showed that more than half of the participants had gained at least one level on the Basic English Skills Test, known as BEST. This was surprising, as it normally takes a full school year to do so.

Some even climbed by two levels. One of these superstars, Cedrick Zabuka, originally from the Congo, in central Africa, revealed that English is not his second language, but his fourth. In addition to French, the language of education in the former Belgian colony, he speaks two indigenous tongues.

On the final days of classes, celebrations were held at both

Bryan Health campuses. Amid international food and music, Bryan Health management and Lincoln Literacy staff congratulated the participants for their hard work and achievement. Each received a certificate. Said one student: "To me the class was very good. The teachers are very nice and kind and now my English is much better. My family is proud of me."

Classes will resume in late August, and will be open to all staff.



Bryan Health CEO Kim Russel and VP-HR Jan Garvin stand by a map showing employees' home nations.

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Lincoln Literacy. In addition to basic English, she began to study for the U.S. citizenship test with our volunteer instructor Judge Warren Urbom and his late wife Joyce. She also learned how to use a computer.

And that changed everything. One day, via the Internet, she discovered that her boys were alive and well and living in Denmark. Her joy at finding her sons was phenomenal. Lincoln Literacy staff remarked that the often somber Fazela seemed to be floating in air.

With her U.S. passport in hand, she was able to travel to Denmark to briefly reunite with her sons, now full grown. Today, fourteen years after her arrival, she continues her studies, no longer as an English language learner but rather a full-fledged student.

Grace Lutheran Church kindly hosted the awards luncheon. All the winners are listed below.



Ali al Lamlom, Little Learner of the Year, with mom



Nearly 100 people gathered at Grace Lutheran for the awards event

2015 Lincoln Literacy Awards

- Judy Ellingson Award:** Lisa Jurgensmier & Carol Knolle-Faulkner
- Tutor of the Year Award:** Donna West;
Honorable Mention: Marjorie McCabe
- Lois Poppe Award:** Jim Holechek
- Outstanding Volunteer Tutor:** Cathy Sayre
- Student Leadership Award:** Christina Vuong
- Learner of the Year Award:** Cheryl Wolfe;
Honorable Mention: Wenjie Jiang
- Little Learner of the Year:** Ali Al Lamlom
- Mayor's Award for Literacy Achievement:**
Fazela Gailani; Honorable Mention: Aida Sigowa
- Champion of Literacy Award:** TMCO
- The Bette Boellstorff Service Award:** Jeremy Hollman
- Distinguished Service Award:** Joyce Hahn



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The Art of Writing

Experts say that art is an important part of early childhood education. It contributes to many things — environmental awareness, cognitive development, and the motor skills needed for writing, among others. In Lincoln Literacy's FLAIR program, immigrant and refugee children get plenty of art opportunities. Thanks to a generous donation of art supplies from former LPS music teacher Marilyn Armbruster, every FLAIR child can have an art kit. It includes crayons, pencils, sharpeners, paper, and, of course, Elmer's Glue.





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Our mission is to assist people of all cultures and strengthen our community by teaching English language and literacy skills. Why not join as a member or sign up to become a tutor today?

Lincoln Literacy is proud to be affiliated with:



Lincoln Literacy and City Libraries Renew Summer Family Literacy

A partnership that took off last year found new wings this summer as Lincoln Literacy and Lincoln City Libraries teamed up to offer a twice-a-week family literacy program for immigrants and refugees.

Fifteen adults and 23 children from all over the world took part in the program, which ran Tuesdays and Thursdays from June 2nd through July 16th.

Each day, parents dropped off their children in the Bennett Martin



Public Library's fourth floor auditorium and then went to the computer lab, where Lincoln Literacy tutors showed them their way around the English language, computer keyboards, and the Internet.

Meantime, Lincoln Literacy teachers Rik Minnick and Shelly Patrick worked alongside Jodi Rethmeier, Vicki Wood, and Miranda Melson of the Library to give all the children a fun, active, story-filled summer, ending with a great family field trip to the Lincoln Children's Zoo.

The program was made possible by grant support from the Colleran family and United Way.



Feeding the goats at Lincoln Children's Zoo

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- ◆ Leave a legacy for literacy! Designate a portion or percentage of your estate to LL, helping ensure our future. Call us for details.

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