

Citizenship Prep Just a Click Away

Online courses give MLC nationwide reach

Become a U.S. citizen. It's the highest aspiration of many immigrants and refugees in Minnesota. For some, it's also a difficult goal to achieve. The application is a ten-page hurdle packed with complicated vocabulary (imagine filing taxes in a second language), and the cost is steep—\$675.

Then there are the tests of one's English proficiency and knowledge of American civics. Fail one test and your application is delayed. Fail on your second try and you'll have to start with a new application—and another \$675.

Where can future U.S. citizens get help achieving their citizenship goal? Online. Starting this spring, immigrants in Minnesota can turn to free web-based citizenship guides, made possible through the collaboration of Minnesota Literacy Council (MLC) and the St. Paul Community Literacy Consortium (SPCLC).

Anyone can access MLC's free "Study for the U.S. Citizenship Test" materials. Learners can read—and even listen to—civics lessons,



Free web-based programs created by Minnesota Literacy Council and St. Paul Community Literacy Consortium provide convenient self-study lessons for citizenship test preparation. As technology costs decrease, more immigrant families are going online in search of learning opportunities they can fit into their hectic schedules.

reading and writing exercises and quizzes on everything from American government to national symbols. Teacher Ron Mazurowski, SPCLC citizenship teacher, and Susan Wetenkamp-Brandt, MLC's educational technology trainer, created the lessons from scratch to make sure the content is up-to-date and accessible to English language learners.

These web-based lessons can also be accessed on SPCLC's online citizenship preparation program, "Become a U.S. Citizen." It takes learners step-by-step through the citizenship

process, from determining their eligibility through taking their citizenship oath. SPCLC's program is part of a national pilot of Learner Web, an online resource and support network for adult learners. After the pilot, teachers at the five MLC learning centers will introduce their learners to the Learner Web citizenship program.

SEE FOR YOURSELF:

Explore the citizenship course:

- <http://online.theMLC.org>

Learn more about Learner Web:

- www.stpaulopen.learnerweb.org 

The Value of Volunteers

1. BUDGET BOOST

In 2007-08, nearly 3,400 literacy volunteers helped adults in Minnesota learn English and prepare for the GED. Their 167,000 volunteer hours—worth a whopping \$3.2 million in wages—amplify the value of each dollar put toward literacy programs.


2. PROGRAM STRENGTH

Even before the recession, 90% of Minnesota adults didn't get the literacy help they need due to limited program resources. As budgets continue to shrink and demand expands for literacy programs, volunteers keep class sizes low and instruction quality high.

3. RÉSUMÉ RAMP-UP

Adult literacy volunteers become pros at

leading and communicating with multicultural groups—a skill that makes them valuable assets in any workplace, whether they're starting or changing careers.

Become a volunteer today to gain job skills and help adults reach their full potential. Visit www.theMLC.org/Volunteer or contact Allison Runchey at 651-645-2277, Ext. 219 or arunchey@theMLC.org to learn more. 



JOURNEYS EXCERPT:

A Kilometer of Cheese

By Janaly Farias

I will never forget the time I first entered a Mexican store as an eight year old and tried to buy something after I had emigrated from the United States to Mexico, not the other way around. I had trouble with ordinary things like asking to use the bathroom. I had to tell one of my older sisters to do it for me, because they knew more Spanish than I did.

One day my dad sent me to the store to buy leche, in English, "milk." I had a very puzzled expression, so my sister slapped me across the head and said, "It's milk, silly."

"Well, sorry, miss know-it-all!" I answered her back while rubbing my head.

As it turned out, my sister went for the milk.

A few months later, my grandma needed some stuff from the store. It seemed like she trusted my Spanish because she didn't send my sister.

"Bring me one pound of cheese and one liter of milk. Don't forget," she told me with this look on her face that said, "Am I really sending her?"

I started on my way to the store, repeating it in my head over and over again, "One liter of milk, and one pound of cheese..."

When I got to the store, though, I asked the lady at the counter, "Can I please have a kilometer of cheese and a pound of milk?"



This ballpoint pen illustration by adult learner Jeff Daig is featured on the cover and chapter pages of the 2009 edition of Journeys.

The lady at the counter turned red, grabbed her stomach, and fell to the ground. I got really scared. I thought I had done or said something wrong, so I left.

When I got home, my mom said, "Where's the stuff that we sent you for?" She sounded upset.

"I asked her for the stuff, and she turned red and fell to the ground. I got scared, so I left."

"What DID you ask for?" she asked me in a curious way.

"For a kilometer of cheese and a pound of milk."

"Ha, ha, ha! Don't you think that's enough cheese, kid? No one could find that much cheese in a store," my uncle said.

Ten years have passed and I am back in the United States. Whenever I call my grandma or uncle, they always ask me, "Are you done with that cheese you asked for?" I just laugh.

Now I know how Hispanics struggle when they come to the United States.

Janaly Farias of Gaylord, Minn., is 18 years old and is originally from USA. 🇺🇸

"A Kilometer of Cheese" is just one of the hundreds of *Journeys* entries our three editor interns received from adult learners across the state. *Journeys: An Anthology of Adult Student Writing* gives a voice to Minnesota's adult learners year after year. Through words and art, learners share their life stories, struggles and triumphs. The 2009 edition continues this tradition, but its updated format organizes entries by reading level and theme to help teachers use the anthology in their adult literacy classes. *Journeys* is available for purchase May 1. Books are \$5 and can be ordered online at www.theMLC.org/journeys.



REGISTER NOW! 10TH Annual Links to Literacy Golf Open

June 22, 2009
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All proceeds benefit Minnesota Literacy Council. Your \$200 contribution provides six scholarships for tutor training sessions, and a

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Go to www.theMLC.org/golf for more information and to register for Links to Literacy. For sponsorship questions, please contact Susan Godon at 651-251-9111 or sgodon@theMLC.org.



Need Plentiful, Funds Limited for Parent Mentoring

MLC literacy coaches link parent education to children's success

Nearly half the racial achievement gap we see in high school already exists before kindergarten, says James Heckman. But the Nobel Prize-winning economist found that investments in early childhood programs can narrow that gap. That's why the Minnesota Literacy Council (MLC) was eager to join forces with the Minnesota Early Learning Foundation (MELF) on a pilot project that tests the impact of early childhood support on low-income families.

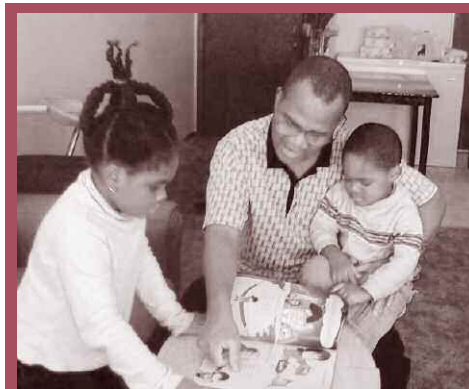
FREE PRESCHOOL, PARENT EDUCATION

The project, called the St. Paul Early Childhood Scholarship and Parent Mentoring Program, gives 3- and 4-year-olds in St. Paul's Frogtown and North End neighborhoods full scholarships for high-quality preschool programs. Their parents receive in-home coaching to help them choose the best early education opportunity for their children. The program was scheduled to run until 2011, but economic challenges interfered and forced MELF's board to cut their 2009 budget by 36%. The project's scholarship program survived the cuts, but the parent mentoring component was sidelined.

Ebyan Abdulle and Gaoib Xiong, MLC home literacy coaches, partnered with MELF in 2008 and have mentored parents from more than 70 families in the program. They show parents how everyday activities, such as grocery shopping or cooking dinner, are opportunities to teach their children vocabulary, counting and spelling. They also connect parents with community resources and give the families free children's books, crayons and scissors.

FACING PROGRAM CUTS

In March, MLC learned that budget cuts ended their parent mentoring contract with MELF, although funds might be available through midsummer. With or without that funding, Ebyan and Gaoib—with literacy council backing—will



TEACHING FAMILIES TO LEARN TOGETHER

During a monthly parent mentoring visit with literacy coach Gaoib Xiong, Sandra reads a story with her father and younger brother, Steven. The family visits the library once a week, and they are starting their own home library with free books they've received from Minnesota Literacy Council. Sandra has even started "checking out" her books to neighbors in her building. Unlike many early childhood programs, MLC believes it is equally important to engage parents—not just children—in the learning process for long-term success.

work with families in the scholarship program through June to ensure parents have the resources they need to continue in-home literacy activities and choose the best early education programs for their children. They will continue mentoring other families through the literacy council's Early Literacy and Families home visiting program. We talked with Ebyan and Gaoib about why parent mentoring is important for families:

Q. How does parent mentoring boost a child's development?

Gaoib: We focus on family literacy – not just tutoring the children, but coaching parents on how to implement literacy in their children's lives. We empower parents to retake the role as their child's first and most important teacher.

Ebyan: Mentoring helps parents become more aware of their children's academic achievement. The most powerful motivation for change is encouragement. Encouragement is the foundation of positive discipline at home.

Q. How does this encouragement help families learn and grow together?

Ebyan: I notice a big change in parents' attitudes regarding the importance of being

their children's first teacher. They become highly engaged in literacy activities with their children. **Gaoib:** Parents take their children to the library more. Children are asking to be read to and are starting their own libraries at home, thanks to our book donations.

Q. What will the lasting impact of parent mentoring be once a child completes preschool?

Gaoib: Mentoring gives parents the opportunity to see what it is like to work with educators. They learn they can meet with teachers when things are good, instead of only when their children are having trouble.

Ebyan: Parent mentoring helps the family meet established goals and ultimately assures the child a greater chance for success in kindergarten.

If you would like to support the parents and families of Minnesota's youngest readers, consider a contribution to MLC using the enclosed envelope or by going to www.theMLC.org/donate. 📧



Remembering Our Founders

It was 1972 when a couple of women in a Roseville church basement decided they could make a difference by teaching adults to read. They formed a team of volunteer tutors who shared their passion, and together they founded the Minnesota Literacy Council. We pay tribute to the literacy contributions and life achievements of two of these founders who are no longer with us.



Ruth Billman

Ruth Billman had already spent more than a dozen years in Guinea Bissau, Vietnam, Timor and Australia carrying out health and literacy mission

work by the time she helped form the Minnesota Literacy Council. After Ruth's family returned to Minnesota, she was elected to be in charge of teacher training for the Minnesota Committee for Laubach Literacy. It was through this work that Ruth met fellow literacy council founders, and in a few years the organization was formed. Ruth gained expertise in writing for new readers and shared this skill with literacy tutors through writing workshops. In 1990, Ruth and her husband opened an eye clinic in Ghana, where she provided reading lessons to patients as they waited to see the doctor. She retired from this work in 1998 at age 80 and returned to Minnesota. Ruth passed away on December 29, 2008.



Avy (Olson) Cole

Avy Cole was an avid reader, and she worked her whole life to share this passion with others. She got her start at a country school and taught first

grade for 13 years. Avy went on to get her master's and doctorate degrees in education. She wrote her doctoral thesis on adult literacy and helped establish the Minnesota Literacy Council. For more than 14 years, Avy directed literacy programs in prisons as an education specialist for the Minnesota Department of Corrections. Avy also served on the board of Laubach Literacy International (now ProLiteracy), an organization that improves lives and communities around the world through adult literacy. In her 70s and 80s, Avy continued to help Minnesotans in need as a member of Salvation Army's Twin Cities Advisory Board. Avy passed away on March 1, 2009.

Thank you for the generous outpouring of support celebrating the lives of Ruth Billman and Avy Cole. If you are interested in making a memorial gift, please use the enclosed reply envelope or contact Linda Vinz at 651-645-2277, Ext. 236 or lvinz@theMLC.org. 📧

HAVE A QUESTION?

Please visit our Web site at www.theMLC.org for more information about the Minnesota Literacy Council. Or direct specific questions to the individuals below at 651-645-2277 or their e-mail address.

Eric Nesheim, Executive Director, Ext. 202, enesheim@theMLC.org

Cathy Grady, Adult Program Director, Ext. 208, cgrady@theMLC.org

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Bharti Wahi, Family Literacy Program Director, Ext. 234, bwahi@theMLC.org

Melissa Martinson, Communications Specialist, Ext. 225, mmartinson@theMLC.org

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Each year, 100,000 children and adults benefit from Minnesota Literacy Council programs and services. At a Literacy Power Hour, you'll discover how literacy is life-changing for so many Minnesotans.

Literacy Power Hour

Join us for a power hour session at the Minnesota Literacy Council main office on May 14 at 4 p.m. or June 18 at 9 a.m. In just one hour, you'll learn why it's so important to share the power of learning.

Go to the News and Events page at www.theMLC.org to view more dates and to register for a power hour. Or call Linda at 651-645-2277, Ext. 236. 📧

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CHALLENGE EXCEEDED!

One year ago, we announced a special partnership with the Frey Foundation. The foundation pledged a dollar-for-dollar match on up to \$10,000 of qualifying individual contributions to the Early Literacy and Families (ELF) program.

We asked for your help to meet this challenge, and you responded with contributions totaling \$12,752. With your generous support of ELF, we leveraged the full matching grant. On behalf of MLC's youngest readers and their parents, thank you!

*Designates Literacy GEMs - donors who "Give Electronically Monthly."

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Hotline Ads Break the Ice for Literacy Partners

Spanish, Somali and English flyers initiate conversations about free English classes



Medical clinics, libraries and other community organizations can request these free multilingual flyers to refer visitors to the Adult Literacy Hotline.

The library. My sister. A brochure at the food shelf. My child's school. La Clinica.


These are just a handful of the ways callers hear about the Adult Literacy Hotline, Minnesota Literacy Council's free phone and online referral service for Adult Basic Education programs. Last year, more than 3,300 people called the hotline to find classes near their homes.

But unmet need remains. According to Literacy Minnesota, upwards of 600,000 adults in Minnesota are eligible for literacy services. To reach these adults, MLC is partnering with community organizations like La Clinica, a Twin Cities multilingual healthcare clinic.

Because 53 percent of the clinic's patients request services in languages other than English, multilingual hotline ads were placed in the waiting room and every exam room at La Clinica.

"Having the materials at hand in our exam rooms makes it easier for our healthcare providers to bring up the topic during a medical visit," says La Clinica Director Gail Kelly. "As we know, many people may not feel comfortable admitting that they have literacy concerns, so it is important to get this information to them in an indirect way."

Veronica, who now takes English classes at St. Paul's Hubbs Center, heard about the hotline during a visit to her health clinic. Her desire to speak English with her three children inspired her to call. "I want to go to college someday," she says, "and I need to learn the language for my future."

If your organization would like to distribute Adult Literacy Hotline information, call 1-800-222-1990. 

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Sharing the Power of Learning



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