

# Read



Orange County Literacy Council

Winter Newsletter, 2013

## The Orange County Literacy Council

· We envision a community where literacy is available to all.

· Our mission is to help adults reach their education, employment and life goals. We do this by providing free, flexible instruction in reading, writing and basic math, English and computer literacy skills and GED preparation.

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[orangeliteracy.org](http://orangeliteracy.org)

## Completing the Circle: OCLC Student Earns GED, Volunteers

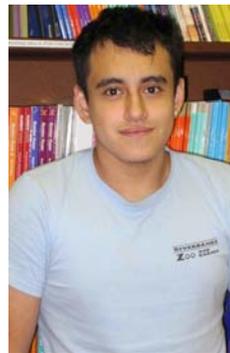
By Patrick Turner

Erick Ramirez has big plans for the next few years of his life, but before he could pursue his dreams, he knew he had to get his GED.

Erick struggled with math and other subjects in school, but when he had to leave school, he knew he wanted to find a way to finish. "I was afraid of not having a profession, of not being socially stable." He knew that people who finish their education tend to make more money and have better life outcomes. He says, "That's what motivated me to come back."

Erick enrolled as a student at the Orange

County Literacy Council in February 2012. After taking the required placement tests, he got straight to work. By the



Erick Ramirez

end of April, Erick had zipped right through his first two subject tests, passing Science and

Social Studies with high marks (in the 86<sup>th</sup> and 88<sup>th</sup> percentile, respectively). He continued to work hard on his remaining subjects saying, "I was nervous about math, but you've just got to be patient and study." In a rush to finish his GED tests before his former classmates graduated from high school, Erick took all three of the remaining tests (Reading, Writing, and Math) over the course of two days in June (this is NOT recommended!)

This set him up for a very suspenseful waiting period; it usually takes

*(Continued on page 4)*

## Welcome Erin!

Meet Erin Flood - OCLC's new Program Coordinator for ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages). Erin replaces Claire Davis, who left at the end of 2012 to go back to school. Erin has quite a bit of experience working with ESOL students, most recently at the high school level as a College Advisor with the National College Advising Corps. Erin is a graduate of Tufts University, with a double major in Psychology and Religion.

While at Tufts, Erin worked with their Jumbo-Janitor Alliance, a program designed to build close relationships with and provide English language support for members of the Tufts Custodial Staff, most of whom speak very little English and are often in need of assistance translating and understanding legal and tax documents, writing correspondence, and improving their general English language skills. She also provided support and instruction for ESOL students and their parents as a Jumpstart Team Leader and an AmeriCorps Program Assistant with Success By 6 in Roxbury, Massachusetts.

In her new position, Erin will be responsible for recruiting and supporting students and tutors in the ESOL program, as well as developing and nurturing relationships with partner agencies. Since joining OCLC in early February, Erin has been busy meeting with current tutors and students and getting new classes started. We're excited to have Erin join the OCLC team!

## OCLC and the Sheltered Learning Program



Mike Wood and Steve Whitted

Steve tells them  
to give it a  
chance, to  
come to one  
class and see if  
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"I know I did"

In November 2011, the Orange County Literacy Council established the Sheltered Learning program. Funded through the Strowd-Roses grant and the Brian and Laurie Brooks Fund, the program encourages former residents of the Interfaith Council's shelters to tutor current residents. The tutors involved in these programs are able to provide positive role models for their students and to understand the challenges of living in a shelter environment. Over the past year, the Sheltered Learning Program has helped eight students from Community House and Homestart.

Steve Whitted has been a participant in the Sheltered Learning Program for almost one year.

Steve came to the program to improve his reading. When he left school years ago, Steve

stopped reading entirely. After several years, he realized his reading skills weren't where they should be. He was embarrassed to ask for help, but he overcame his fears and asked for information on reading classes. That is when he started participating in the Sheltered Learning Program.

Steve and his tutor, Mike Wood, meet twice a week to practice reading texts and newspaper articles. Over the course of the year, Steve's reading has significantly improved, both in speed and quality. Now Steve reads the newspaper almost every day, looking for articles to bring to class. He can go uptown and read all of the signs, or the menus in restaurants.

Steve really enjoys coming to the Orange County Literacy Council offices for his tutoring

sessions. He says that it keeps him off the street and out of trouble. It gives him an opportunity to use his brain and learn new things. He hopes that with his new skills he will be able to get a job. He is starting to learn how to use the computer to create a resume and fill out online applications.

It is clear that Steve enjoys learning, and he tries to encourage those around him to learn as well. He tells others about the programs at the Orange County Literacy Council. He says that there are plenty of people who need this program, but are ashamed or embarrassed to ask for help. They think that they should have learned to read years ago. Steve tells them to give it a chance, to come to one class and see if they like it. "I know I did" Steve smiles.

- Linda Cornelison



## Literacy and Pinterest

When someone mentions the term "social media" a few websites pop into mind: Facebook, Twitter, and perhaps LinkedIn for the more business-savvy. But one website is growing at an explosive pace, with traffic generating over a billion page views per month. It's called "Pinterest" and the site's design is as simple as the concept. Users from all around the world will "pin" content of interest (hence the name "Pinterest") onto a public forum, where other users can interact, engage, and promote that content as well. Users can find whatever it is that interests them, ranging anywhere from advice on designing your wedding to that perfect Key Lime Pie recipe, sure to satisfy any guest. Pinterest has it all and then some.

So it's no wonder that the Orange County Literacy Council wanted to take advantage of one of the largest social media sites available. Pinterest is a perfect platform to share and promote materials useful for both tutors and students. What's better is the intuitive feel and use of Pinterest and how easy it is to navigate the website. OCLC currently has six different boards to choose from and nearly a hundred pins spread among them. The boards are split into categories based on what the user needs. So, for example, if an ESOL student wanted to practice English outside of the classroom, s/he could visit our ESOL board and choose from plenty of pins that are available to help get started.

Pinterest has been and is a great opportunity for the OCLC to strengthen the experience of all those involved in the organization. Plenty of students and tutors have expressed their satisfaction with the website's usability and function. There are seemingly limitless amounts of content and discoveries that users can take advantage of. In this age of ever-expanding knowledge, it's good to know that the OCLC is doing its part to make others aware of Adult Learning and Literacy. You can check out our site at [pinterest.com/orangeliteracy](http://pinterest.com/orangeliteracy).

-Travis Smith

## ESOL for High School Students, Summer Edition

Afternoons at the OCLC office are rather quiet since our students' work schedules typically make morning or evening classes more convenient for them.

However for seven weeks last summer, our office was full of students and energy as we ran a special program for ESOL high school students.

The idea for the program came from Lori Carswell who has been an ESOL tutor with us since 2010. In addition to tutoring with us, Lori has

also tutored ESL students at Chapel Hill High School for the past couple of years and has seen the difficulty these students have learning English and adapting to the demands of high school. Lori and one of the ESL teachers at Chapel Hill High, Anne Tomalin, were worried about their students losing ground over the summer and not being prepared to enter the next grade level when they returned to school in the fall. Since many of these students are between the ages of

18 and 21, Lori and Anne approached OCLC to see if we could offer summer classes, and the High School Summer Program was born.

For three afternoons per week in July and four afternoons per week in August, 11 students from Chapel Hill and Carrboro High attended reading, writing, and math classes led by our volunteer tutors. Some of these students were brand new to the United States and would be starting high

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## Tutors Learn to Use Novels with Students

"What materials should I use?" This is a question we hear almost every day from our tutors, whether they're meeting a student for the first time, shifting gears to work on a new subject, or just trying to keep students interested in their lessons.

The materials and resources tutors use can have a significant impact on our students' learning, so we do our best to provide the appropriate materials for all student to achieve their goals.

It is a regular occurrence for tutors to email, call, or stop by the office for guidance in picking out interesting and challenging materials to use with their students.

Many of our tutors are interested in using novels in their lesson planning, but aren't sure how to

begin. For this reason, OCLC piloted an in-service training for ABE tutors entitled Using Novels with Adult Literacy Students.

In the training, tutors gained knowledge on all aspects of incorporating novels into their instruction. OCLC staff explained how to find a novel at the appropriate reading level for an adult student.

OCLC's Program Director Joy Turner explained how to use novels to work on expanding a student's vocabulary, and Program Coordinator Patrick Turner presented information on using novels to improve a student's fluency and comprehension.

The highlight of this workshop was when the participants got to hear

from Yalitzza Ramos, an OCLC tutor who had been successfully using a series of novels with her student.

Yalitzza talked about her experience using novels in her lesson plans. Yalitzza shared her ideas with us – everything from picking the right book to finding the most helpful companion activities.

Yalitzza did a fantastic job; the other participants found her insight and advice to be immensely helpful.

The program was so well received that we plan to repeat it this spring. For exact dates, please refer to the OCLC website and monthly tutor updates.

*-Patrick Turner*

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# UNC Project Literacy

*Read. Write. Lead. Succeed*



Project Literacy is one of the many UNC student committees under the Campus Y. Founded in 1988, Project Literacy's first program consisted of UNC students working with university staff to improve their educational skills. This program still exists today, known as the Adult GED program and is run by the Orange County Literacy Council. Project Literacy now places volunteers in six programs in the Chapel Hill and Carrboro area.

Bianca Larry, a senior at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, has been volunteering with Project Literacy since she was a sophomore. Although she spent her first year helping with the Adult GED program, she wanted to get more involved for her second year and became the site leader for the Creative Writing Workshops program. She enjoyed her new position. It allowed her both to lead workshops and to organize other student volunteers. According to Bianca, Project Literacy appeals to UNC students because of its variety of literacy-based programs—each with a different focus.

Bianca enjoyed the Creative Writing Workshops in large part because of the people she met through the program. Creative Writing Workshops are interactive for both participants and volunteers; everyone shares their stories and perspectives. Instead of focusing on the quality of the story, the workshops focus on the "heart" of it. The program allows everyone to be heard and is a reminder that all stories are important. They are worth telling and have value for everyone involved. In addition, Project Literacy allows UNC students to interact with a variety of different people in our community. By listening to stories and talking with others, students learn a lot about people they may not meet otherwise.

"One of my most memorable experiences with the Creative Writing Program happened at the men's shelter," Bianca remembers. "Our prompt was to describe a black and white picture of an old house on what looked to be a farm. It was incredible the various stories and fond memories that came from that prompt. Even more, I was struck by how each participant wrote about the prompt, each having his own style to reflect his personality. For me, the workshops are a way to promote literacy but also to create a community and support one another's endeavor to write and be creative."

Bianca believes that she will continue to promote literacy beyond graduation. Through her time at Project Literacy, as well as the Orange County Literacy Council, she has learned that programs like the Creative Writing Workshops are very important for the community. Not only do the workshops let people tell their stories, but they also invite people to take advantage of the other services the Orange County Literacy Council offers. Many people are unaware of the resources that are available in their community, and the Creative Writing Workshops help people better their lives dramatically. This potential to help others improve their lives drives Bianca's passion for literacy education.

*-Linda Cornelison*

*(Continued from page 1)*

about two weeks to receive official GED test scores.

When Erick's scores arrived, it was all good news – he had officially earned the GED! "I felt relieved, because it was a lot of work. I was happy too, because now I could achieve my dreams of going to college, graduating, and getting a job."

The day after he received his GED diploma in the mail, Erick came to the OCLC office and offered to volunteer. Asked what made him decide to volunteer, he says, "The staff is great and I also wanted to help out people who were in the same situation as me. There are people in a lot worse situations than me, with language barriers and other things, and I thought I might be able to help out." Erick's offer came at an opportune time for the Literacy Council – he served as a reception volunteer in our office while several of our staff members were away at a state-wide training in Raleigh. Erick says he learned a lot from volunteering in our office, especially in his interactions with other OCLC students: "I learned that everyone needs help – nobody's perfect. It was good to be social and talk to people. I usually keep to myself, and it was nice to interact with so many people."

Erick's story doesn't end with the GED. He's already enrolled as a student at Durham Technical Community College, working toward an Associate's degree in science. After that, Erick wants to transfer to North Carolina State University to pursue a degree in engineering. He's interested in getting a job in computer hardware engineering.

Erick has advice for people considering working for the GED: "It might seem hard at first, but don't give up! You need to keep trying – even if you fail a test, realize that there's no rush – if you put the time into it, you'll get further."

**We wish Erick well in all of his future endeavors!**

## OCLC Students Become US Citizens

**Congratulations! Ten OCLC students passed their US naturalization interviews and tests in 2012.**

**In addition to demonstrating good moral character and a familiarity with the US constitution, these students successfully showed that they are able to read, write, speak and understand basic English.**

**These students also memorized 100 questions**

**about US government, history, and traditions.**

**We are so proud of:**

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The Orange County Literacy Council helps students prepare for their citizenship interviews and tests. We are looking for tutors to help students study and practice the English that they need in order to become US citizens.

If you are interested, apply online at [orangeliteracy.org/tutors](http://orangeliteracy.org/tutors)



## Meet Tutor Yuman Wang

My name is Yuman and I am currently a sophomore at UNC-CH. I was born in a small town in Southwest China and raised by my grandparents. But because of my dad's work, I moved to the States when I was eleven and learned English through ESOL, just like the students I tutor right now. In terms of education and career focus, I am still waiting for a decision from the business school at UNC as of now. If I get in, instead of utilizing these skills for a corporate business position, I hope to pursue a non-profit career that certainly will benefit from, if not require, these professional management skills. If not, as my counselors have said, I always have some other way to get to where I want to go. Business school is, in my opinion, the best, but not the only way.

*What brought you here to the Orange County Literacy Council?*

It is hard not to look at the bulletin boards on campus when you have awkward 3 hour gaps between classes. Luckily, one of the first flyers I saw was about OCLC and I was intrigued by all of the tutoring opportunities that I can be involved in. I thought: why not? I have 4 months in the summer and I would love to tutor in the community, especially when I'm interested in literacy and helping others. So, before I knew it, I attended training sessions and started to prepare for my first class.

*What was it like to tutor your first class?*

I think I was expecting more students to show up but ended up with a fraction of the class. After the first few uncomfortable minutes, I was fully immersed in the tutoring process. To be perfectly honest, it was nerve-racking to be standing in front of the classroom and teach for an hour and a half with little experience. Surprisingly, at one point I suddenly realized how much I enjoyed tutoring and from there, I was determined to do the best job that I can, no matter how foreign the idea of teaching is.

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*(Continued on page 8)*

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## **And a very special thanks to our speakers:**

David Hartman, Clyde Edgerton, Randall Kenan, Kim Severson, Lori Carswell and Gaby Patino

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school in the U.S. for the first time in the fall. Others needed extra help with understanding math word problems in English.

Still others have been here for years and just needed help with fine-tuning their writing skills. Our tutors worked to get to know the students and their needs and planned their lessons around both real-life and academic skills that the students needed to learn.

According to Lori, who tutored one of the

reading classes, "The students seemed to enjoy working on their English while also gaining skills that they may need in the 'real world' during and after high school – like ordering pizza!"

In addition to learning English grammar, negative numbers, reading comprehension, and yes, how to order pizza, students also learned what it is like to take responsibility for your own learning as an adult.

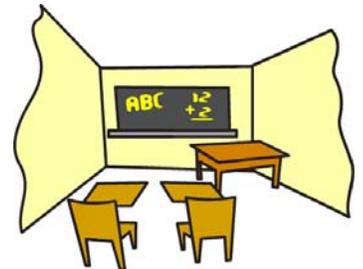
In our classes, there are no hall passes for trips to the bathroom, tardy

slips for coming in late, or threats of low grades for not doing homework.

Our students learned they are the ones who affect what and how much they learn by showing up on time, paying attention in class, and practicing what they're learning at home.

Since some of these students will age out of high school before they can graduate, these are important skills to learn that will serve them well as they move out into the real world.

*- Joy Turner*



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**“So it is with children who learn to read fluently and well: They begin to take flight into whole new worlds as effortlessly as young birds take to the sky.”**

~ William James

(Continued from page 5)

*What was one of the most rewarding experiences you've encountered?*

I distinctively remember the times when my students were so engaged with the material that they forgot the time or even didn't want to leave until they finished. The fact that they were enthusiastic to learn is so great to witness and makes me happy that a lesson that I spent time on actually worked well.

*What was one of the most challenging experiences you've encountered?*

It was difficult to get the students comfortable enough to speak with me and each other. Now, I'm not talking about giving correct responses for the material I'm teaching as much as having a natural conversation. I realized that the key to a successful learning experience is not only absorbing new material, but also developing a sense of trust and security in the classroom setting. If students are not comfortable with me or the other students, how can they learn effectively?

*What have you learned about yourself since you've become a tutor?*

I realized how little I knew about others. I had to figure out how to cater to the learning styles of others and understand the difficulties that others experience. Unexpectedly, I learned a lot about my own learning styles through these experiences and how not to let them influence my lessons. As clichéd as it sounds, you really do have to learn about others to learn about yourself. I'm glad that I was able to do so while helping others, hopefully improving my lessons through this process as well.

- Yuman Wang

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