

Impact Update Fall 2020

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Giving Immigrants a Voice

New Americans want to make their voices heard



Barok, from Nepal, passed the exam in September.



Yan, from China, passed the exam in August.



Joniel, from Haiti, passed the exam in September.

With the 2020 election coming up, many people are looking forward to casting their ballots and making their voices heard. Few people are as excited as the immigrant students in our citizenship classes. For students like Yan, passing her citizenship interview in August means “I can vote in November,” she said. “So exciting! First time in the U.S.” People born in the U.S. might take this right for granted, but immigrants must work hard to become citizens and gain the ability to vote.

It wasn't an easy process for Yan or her classmates. The COVID-19 crisis shut down our in-person classes. It also led to delays in citizenship interviews and cancelled citizenship ceremonies. Dramatic increases in immigration fees were on the horizon. Our immigrant students were very motivated, but the challenges were steep for this year's class. (continued page 5)

English is essential for essential workers

Veronica remembers her arrival at Logan Airport in 2016 with her husband and baby as a scary and confusing time. Coming from Colombia, she did not know any English. She remembers the experience as “terrible when you have to survive, and you are scared, and some people get angry [that you don’t speak English].”

On her own, she learned enough to survive. To take her to the next level, Veronica started English classes at The Immigrant Learning Center last fall. By March, her English was good enough to get hired by the Environment Service Department at Massachusetts General Hospital. She continued her English classes with The ILC online, which she says is particularly helpful for a mom at home with her young son. Cleaning is not a glamorous profession,



The ILC student Veronica keeps others safe at Mass General Hospital.

but this pandemic has taught us that it is an essential service we should all be grateful for. Cleaning a hospital is particularly risky. Veronica contracted COVID-19 in April, followed by her husband, son and in-laws. “Every day was an uncertainty about how the next day would be,” she said. Her biggest fear was that she and her husband would be incapacitated and there would be no one to care for her young son. Being able to communicate with her doctor in English gave her a little boost of confidence during a scary time.

After three weeks, Veronica returned to work cleaning bathrooms and procedure rooms. She worries about contracting the virus again, but her family needs the income, and she takes pride knowing the work she does keeps other people safe.

Honoring the past, building a brighter future

“It made my heart sing.” That’s how Claudia Owumi describes her experience of participating in last summer’s Immigrant Student Success two-day webinar for educators. She knows, both as a teacher and from personal experience, how important it is to support immigrant success. Her late husband, Dr. Joseph Akpojewe Owumi, Sr., was an immigrant from West Africa. Claudia saw how he struggled to adapt to life in the United States, and she decided to make a donation to The ILC in his honor.

Claudia had her own opportunities to feel like a foreigner during the 15 years she and Joseph went to Africa to help fight the AIDS epidemic. She also knows many immigrants who have benefited from The ILC’s English classes and other programming and is “overwhelmingly grateful” for the services The ILC provides. Although she donated to The Immigrant Learning Center in honor of her late husband, Claudia was also honoring the values her parents instilled in her, specifically “For what was given to you, much is expected.”

We at The ILC are deeply honored by what is given to us by Claudia and every donor. We strive every day to meet and exceed your expectations and the expectations of those we serve, and we couldn’t do it without you.



Claudia donated to The ILC in honor of her late husband, Dr. Joseph Akpojewe Owumi, Sr.

Nothing stops this volunteer from making a difference

When things fall apart, many of us turn inward to focus on protecting ourselves and our families. Anne Walsh is one of those special people who turn outward in a crisis. She has four children and a class full of kindergarteners who depend on her, yet when everything started shutting down in March Anne says she, “immediately thought of all [The Immigrant Learning Center] students who would be losing so much of what they have been working so hard on.” She knows how hard The ILC students work and how much learning English means to them because she’s been volunteering here since 2002.



The ILC volunteer Anne Walsh offers a lifeline for students during the pandemic.

Anne offered to help and was quickly paired with a couple from Brazil, Jonathan and Ilka. Every week she has a 30-minute phone call with each of them to supplement what they are learning in The ILC online classes. Those phone calls were not just about learning English. Anne was a lifeline who helped Jonathan and Ilka understand their changing reality. With Jonathan who lost his job early in the pandemic, Anne talked about job skills and did mock interviews as well as worked on vocabulary, reading, writing and American culture. Ilka is a health care worker in a nursing home, and Anne spent the first few weeks helping her understand the new medical vocabulary she was hearing at work and how to speak with patients. They also worked on grammar, vocabulary and listening skills.

Even 30 minutes a week can make a big difference. Jonathan wrote to his teachers saying, “The ILC has been doing a fantastic job. It’s not just about business, English classes, it’s human, human to human, to study at ILC has been a privilege and I really appreciate it. Also I’m extremely glad and thankful in special to Anne Walsh. She is

awesome, meticulous, extremely professional, I couldn’t imagine to have an opportunity like that. I can improve my English conversation skills with her, she teaches me new things each week.” For her part, Anne says, “I feel so fortunate to have this connection with The ILC. It’s been an absolute pleasure to work with them [Jonathan and Ilka].”



The ILC students Jonathan and Ilka are extremely grateful for Anne’s help.

The ILC is eternally grateful to Anne and all the other volunteers who have been helping our students through this crisis. Anyone interested in volunteering should contact Trish Micheli at pmicheli@ilctr.org.

The ILC honored by the Library of Congress

The Immigrant Learning Center is the recipient of the Library of Congress 2020 Literacy Award American Prize. These awards honor organizations doing exemplary, innovative and replicable work to expand literacy and promote reading, and comes with a \$50,000 donation. The International Prize was awarded to the International Rescue Committee, Inc. Pakistan Reading Project in New York.

Three former winners were given Special Response Awards: the National Center for Families Learning in Kentucky, Pratham Books in Bengaluru, India, and Room to Read in California. The Immigrant Learning Center is honored to be included in this group of outstanding organizations working to promote literacy and respond to the needs of our time.



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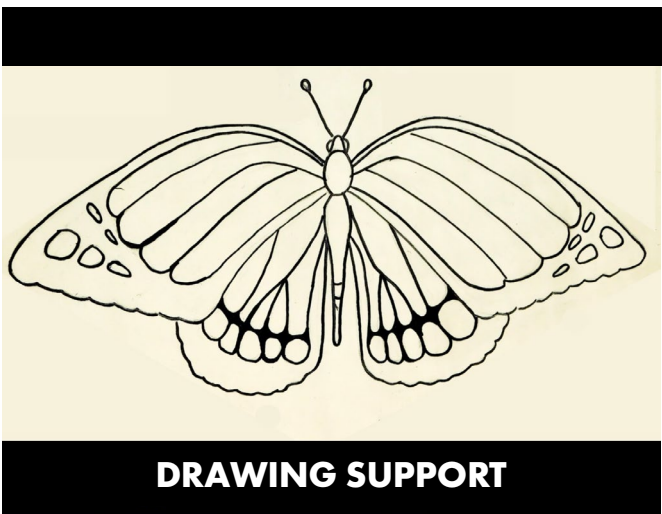
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The ILC stands against hate and bias

Middlesex District Attorney Marian Ryan invited The ILC Founder and CEO Diane Portnoy to join her new, 22-member Anti-Hate, Anti-Bias Taskforce. DA Ryan was spurred to create the taskforce by a series of alarming incidents in Middlesex County, including anti-Semitic graffiti and someone allegedly driving into a crowd of Black Lives Matter protestors in Newton. The inaugural meeting was held, like most things these days, via Zoom on August 26.

Among the lawmakers, faith leaders, community advocates and other stakeholders, Diane is there to bring the immigrant voice. This is a role Diane and The Immigrant Learning Center have played since the founding of The ILC. If you'd like to take a stand against hate in your community, you can join us with our "We Stand with Our Immigrant Neighbors" window signs, which are available for free on our website, at <https://www.ilctr.org/drawing-support/>. Print one out, color it in and hang it in your window to show that you also stand against hate!



This coloring page is part of The ILC's Drawing Support campaign for families to combat prejudice. Available at www.ilctr.org/drawing-support.

Happy Birthday!

Happy belated birthday to Klara Horackova who raised \$355 in June from friends and family on Facebook in honor of her birthday. She told us, "It is amazing what you do," but we think she's the amazing one. She found us all the way from the Czech Republic and cared enough about the work we do to educate Americans on the benefits of immigration to dedicate her birthday to us. If you have a Facebook account, doing a fundraiser could not be easier. To learn more, contact The ILC Director of Development Mark Correia at mcorreia@ilctr.org or (781) 322-9777.



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Diane Portnoy

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New Americans (continued from page 1)

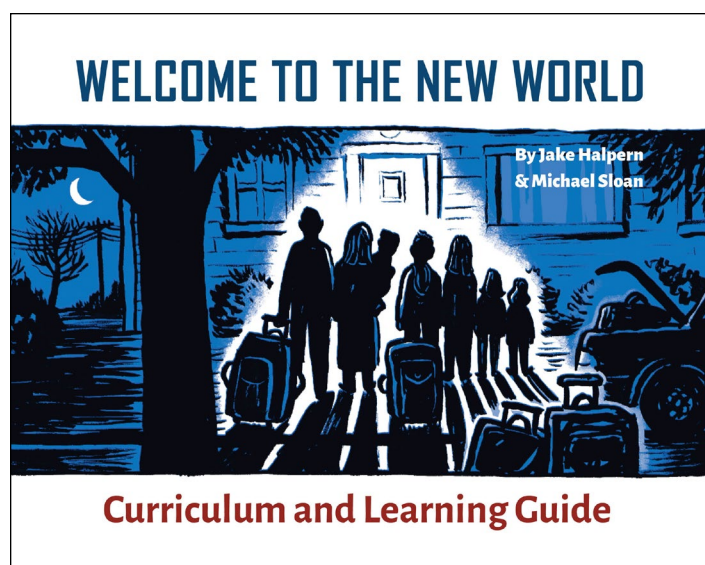
Luckily, through your support, The ILC was able to quickly pivot to online classes and even offer extra assistance to our citizenship students outside of class. The ILC teachers and volunteers have been reaching out to students through whatever channels their students can access, whether that means phone calls or WhatsApp or, of course, Zoom. Once citizenship interviews and naturalization ceremonies resumed, seven of our students attempted to gain their citizenship.

Every one of them succeeded. Yan practiced for her interview in one-on-one, hourlong FaceTime calls every week. When she was interviewed, she was proud to recognize all the questions from her practice sessions. After her socially-distanced citizenship ceremony, Yan can finally vote in November. “Thank you, The ILC, the teacher,” she said. “You let me pass the interview. So exciting.” We’re excited for her, and all our new American students!

Teaching migration in graphic new ways

You impact the lives of teachers and students throughout the United States. Because of your support, a record number of educators, more than 400, participated in this year’s two-day Immigrant Student Success online workshop free of charge. Participants were especially delighted to hear they would all receive a free copy of the graphic novel *Welcome to the New World*, published by Metropolitan Books, and the accompanying curriculum, published by The Immigrant Learning Center. The curriculum contains nine lesson plans to help educators use the novel to teach students in grades seven through 11 about migration, the Syrian Civil War, empathy and other topical subjects.

Before it was a novel, *Welcome to the New World* was a Pulitzer-Prize-winning editorial cartoon in *The New York Times*. Written by Jake Halpern and illustrated by Michael Sloan, it documents the lives of a family of Syrian refugees, whom Halpern shadowed for four years after they arrived in the United States. This “cartoon” is not intended to be funny. The illustrations help to humanize the sometimes-difficult subject matter, and the curriculum teaches students how to analyze this unique genre. This fall, The ILC will host two more webinars on this novel in partnership with the author and the Anti-Defamation League’s No Place for Hate program.



The ILC created this curriculum and learning guide to accompany the new novel *Welcome to the New World*.

This exciting partnership kicks off a series of curricula that will introduce immigration-related topics in U.S. schools. All of them will be available on The Immigrant Learning Center’s website as well as the American Federation of Teachers’ website, ShareMyLesson.com.

Thank you donors!

It is with our deepest thanks that we recognize the following community groups, corporations, foundations and individuals that made financial and in-kind contributions to The ILC between March 1, 2020 and September 18, 2020.

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The Immigrant Learning Center is a not-for-profit corporation supported by tax-deductible charitable contributions and, in part, by funding from The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education; Mystic Valley Elder Services, Inc., the Massachusetts Executive Offices of Elder Affairs and the Federal Administration on Aging; and the cities of Malden and Medford, Massachusetts.