

**BIG NEWS INSIDE!**

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# Giving Immigrants a Voice Since 1992

## The ILC Honors Immigrant Heroes Getting Us Through the Pandemic

It's not news that 2020 was hard. Really hard. It's very easy to notice all the awful, but as Mr. Rogers said, if you "look for the helpers," there is plenty of good to be found. The Immigrant Learning Center looked for, and found, plenty of helpers to honor at the Immigrant Heroes Award Benefit held online on April 6, 2021. Three Immigrant Heroes received awards, and all immigrants who were everyday heroes were honored.

Many of the essential workers in this country are immigrants. Despite being more likely to lose their jobs and more likely to get sick and even die from COVID-19, immigrant essential workers have been working hard to get us all through this pandemic. They tend to patients in nursing homes, stock shelves in grocery stores, deliver packages, research vaccines and more. Many of The ILC students who you support with your donations are essential workers, and several of their stories were shared as well.

The three awardees were Abdulkader Hayani, an out-of-work tailor and refugee from Syria who sewed and donated more than 2,000 cloth masks; Monique Nguyen, an immigrant from Canada who co-founded the MassUndocuFund that raised \$1.5 million and distributed grants to undocumented immigrants in all 14 Massachusetts counties; and



Winners of The ILC Immigrant Heroes Award: Monique Nguyen, Abdulkader Hayani and Niall Lennon

Niall Lennon, an immigrant from Ireland whose work at the Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard made possible more than 15 million COVID-19 tests and counting.

To learn more about these Heroes, The ILC students who are essential workers, research on immigrant essential workers and more go to [www.ilctr.org/heroes](http://www.ilctr.org/heroes). You'll also be able to watch (or re-watch) recordings of the moving and inspiring event.

## Preparing for the Future of The Immigrant Learning Center

This November, The Immigrant Learning Center will begin its 30th year. I could never have imagined all that we would accomplish when we opened our doors in 1992 with three teachers and 60 students.

With your support, we've helped more than 11,000 new Americans thrive in this country. We've added a Public Education Institute and partnered with George Mason University to create the Institute for Immigration research so that Americans might know the social and economic benefits of welcoming immigrants.

We have weathered many storms, including a global pandemic that forced us to move classes online, and emerged as strong as ever. We are financially stable. We own the building where we are headquartered, and our endowment gives us a healthy financial cushion in case of emergencies. Yet as we look forward to welcoming back students in-person this fall, I sense it's time for a change.

I want to spend my time making sure The Immigrant Learning Center maintains its commitment to excellence for the next 30 years. With that in mind, the board of trustees and I decided to hire Vince Rivers, a long-time supporter and board member, as executive director to oversee the day-to-day operations of The Immigrant Learning Center and help me execute my vision for the future. I hope you will join me in welcoming him.

### Diane Portnoy

Founder and CEO, The Immigrant Learning Center

### Meet Vince



Newly appointed The ILC Executive Director Vince Rivers with The ILC Founder and CEO Diane Portnoy

I could not be more thrilled for this opportunity to help Diane prepare The Immigrant Learning Center for its next stage of growth. After a successful, rewarding career in banking and investment management, I wanted to point my career in a direction that has a larger social return. I was raised by educators, so education has always been high on my priority list, and I've been committed to The Immigrant Learning Center for many years.

I clearly remember my first introduction to The ILC. It was in the late '90s when a friend of mine brought me to International Day. This annual event is an opportunity for students to celebrate their and their fellow students' cultural heritage. I missed most of the displays, demonstrations and food that day because I was so enthralled talking with the students. They told me about their lives and the tremendous impact that The Immigrant Learning Center had on them. I knew that was the kind of impact I wanted to have, and I've been a supporter ever since. I still get goosebumps thinking about that day.

Whether we've met at a golf tournament, awards benefit, International Day or not yet, we've been on this journey together for as long as you've been part of The ILC family. Thank you for being there with me, and for partnering with me in the future to give immigrants a voice.

### Vince Rivers

Executive Director, The Immigrant Learning Center

## From Generation to Generation, the Immigrant Spirit Keeps Giving Back

Ely Kaplansky wants others to have the support his family needed. His parents, Wolf and Barbara Kaplansky, were Polish and met at the end of WWII as they were being released from a German concentration camp. They married and eventually settled in Israel where Ely was born. When he was three years old, the family moved to Massachusetts for yet another new start.

Thinking about that journey, Ely says, “My parents and I have had the honor and good fortune of being here,” but the Kaplansky’s initially struggled to find their way in this country. His father attended night school to learn English and prepare for the citizenship exam while his mother learned the language

on her own. Ely clearly remembers how hard it was for his parents. He donates



Successful immigrant entrepreneur Ely Kaplansky honors his parents by donating to The Immigrant Learning Center.

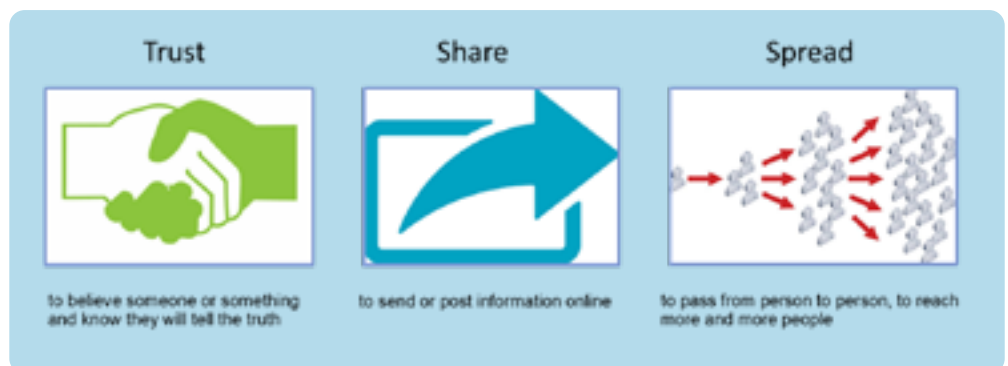
to The Immigrant Learning Center in their honor.

Ely was introduced to The ILC in 2019 when he was nominated for The ILC Immigrant Entrepreneur Award in Business Growth. He left high school at the age of 17. By the age of 22, he had started his own insurance company, which has since become one of the largest independent, locally owned agencies in the Northeast. *Entrepreneur Magazine* named Kaplansky Insurance one of the best entrepreneurial companies in the nation. Our students are lucky he’s decided the best way to help other immigrants fulfill their dreams is by supporting The Immigrant Learning Center.

## Supporting Students During the Pandemic, In and Out of Class

The Immigrant Learning Center supports our students inside and outside of class. During the COVID-19 pandemic, this has included helping them access vital public health information. “They may not have the access to the right information or know what information to listen to, and a lot of the information is in English,” pointed out The ILC English teacher Rachel Soule.

She decided to teach a unit on health in January, early in the winter term, so she could talk about COVID-19 safety and vaccinations with her students. Her first discussions with her students revealed that she needed to go more in-depth than she had planned. At least half of her students, many of whom were vulnerable frontline workers or living in high-risk neighborhoods, were skeptical of the vaccine, and it was clear they didn’t know where to look for reliable information. One student shared a Facebook post that claimed the vaccines would alter people’s genes.



This illustration shows some of the vocabulary from the lesson “Online Vaccine Information.”

To properly address all her students’ concerns, Rachel collaborated with other teachers at The ILC to develop lessons on media literacy, misinformation and basic facts about the COVID-19 vaccines. They spent hours making the materials accessible to English language learners. Each teacher also had to adapt the materials for their classes’ English skill levels.

Their efforts paid off in meaningful ways. After the lessons, students

expressed more openness to the vaccine, and the student who had shared the alarming Facebook post said she was happy to have better places to get information.

Educators everywhere will be able to benefit from all this hard work when The ILC makes these materials available for free on ShareMyLesson, a website created by the American Federation of Teachers to make teaching resources available for educators.

## From Restaurant Server to Scientist, English is the First Step

Misael doesn't know you, but he thanks you. "It opens a lot of doors to me to learn the language. It opened a lot of doors and lot of opportunities," he said about The ILC. "They teach me a lot. They helped me a lot. Thank you for that!"

Misael travelled by himself from El Salvador to Boston to pursue a better life for him and his family. That "better life" did not come easily. Without any knowledge of English nor a high school degree, he struggled for three years with low-paid work in restaurant kitchens. His prospects started looking up when Misael enrolled in The ILC's English classes.

He started in Level 1 English class with his fellow beginners and studied hard for two years. As his English improved, he moved up into better paid restaurant jobs. He wanted more, so he juggled English classes, his job and GED classes to achieve his high school equivalency diploma.

Now, Misael is working in a lab as an animal technician and studying biotechnology in community college. It's a challenging subject for anyone, but especially for a non-native English speaker. Misael compares learning scientific terminology to learning a whole new language. He's grateful to have a job where he can use the new terms and ideas that he learns in class.

"Especially right now, with the situation we have right now with COVID-19, it's a really good place and time to study biotechnology," explained Misael. He wants to work on creating new medicines. His extraordinary commitment to his

education is truly paying off for himself, his family, and his community. The ILC is proud of students like Misael who are using their skills to make a difference!

"I'm so dedicated because I want to have a better future here. Also, I want to have a profession here. I don't see myself working at a restaurant my whole life ... Hopefully in two or three years, I see myself working in a hospital or maybe in a lab."



Misael came to the United States without a high school diploma or any knowledge of English. He's now working in a lab and pursuing a degree in biotechnology.

## New Podcast Brings You Stories From Immigrant "JobMakers"

What's it like to start a new business from nothing? In some ways, it is startlingly similar to starting a new life in a new country. You can hear the first-hand experiences of successful business owners and innovators who have done both in the weekly podcast, JobMakers, a new partnership between The Immigrant Learning Center Public Education Institute and Pioneer Institute.

Each week on the JobMakers podcast The ILC Public Education Institute Director Denzil Mohammed finds out what makes these immigrant entrepreneurs tick.

The interviews follow the foreign-born founders' journeys from their home countries to their new lives in the United States to becoming an entrepreneur. They share what motivated them to start their businesses, what

obstacles they overcame on their road to success, how they've contributed to our communities and more.

Many of JobMakers' guests are past nominees or winners of The Immigrant Learning Center's Barry M. Portnoy Immigrant Entrepreneur Awards. From Christina Qi, who started a hedge fund in her dorm room, to Amar Sawhney, who has created more than 4,000 jobs, the interviewees have extraordinary experiences to share with you.

JobMakers is hosted on Ricochet, a platform for conservative voices, and most major podcast platforms. New episodes are released every Thursday at noon. You can also listen to their stories on The ILC website: [www.ilctr.org](http://www.ilctr.org)





# Making Accurate Immigration Data Accessible to All

The Immigrant Learning Center’s website now features a collection of the most sought-after data called “Immigration Quick Statistics,” which is continually updated with a wealth of resources for those who want to know more. [www.ilctr.org/immigration-quick-statistics](http://www.ilctr.org/immigration-quick-statistics)

## Who do you think of when you think about immigrants in Greater Boston?

Do you think of people from China, Dominican Republic, India or Haiti? What about Canada? Does your imagination match this list of the 10 largest immigrant groups in Greater Boston?

- |  |  |
|--|--|
|  1. China              |  6. El Salvador   |
|  2. Dominican Republic |  7. Vietnam       |
|  3. India              |  8. Canada        |
|  4. Haiti             |  9. Guatemala    |
|  5. Brazil           |  10. Cape Verde |

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Diane Portnoy

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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.

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