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THE CHANGE AGENT

Adult Education for Social Justice:
News, Issues, and Ideas

FINDING OUR VOICES

The Change Agent is a publication of The New England Literacy Resource Center/World Education, 44 Farnsworth Street, Boston, MA 02210 (617) 482-9485. Coming out three times per year, each issue focuses on a different topic that is relevant to learners' lives. This online magazine is designed for ESOL, ABE, GED, and adult diploma classes. In New England, online access to *The Change Agent* is available free of charge through NELRC's affiliated state literacy resource centers. Contact us at <https://changeagent.nelrc.org/contact-us/> to learn how to access the site.

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Our Series on Immigrants and Immigration:

Issue #56, August 15, 2022: "Our Immigration Stories"

Issue #57, November 15, 2022: "Creating New Community"

Issue #58, February 15, 2023: "Finding Our Voices"

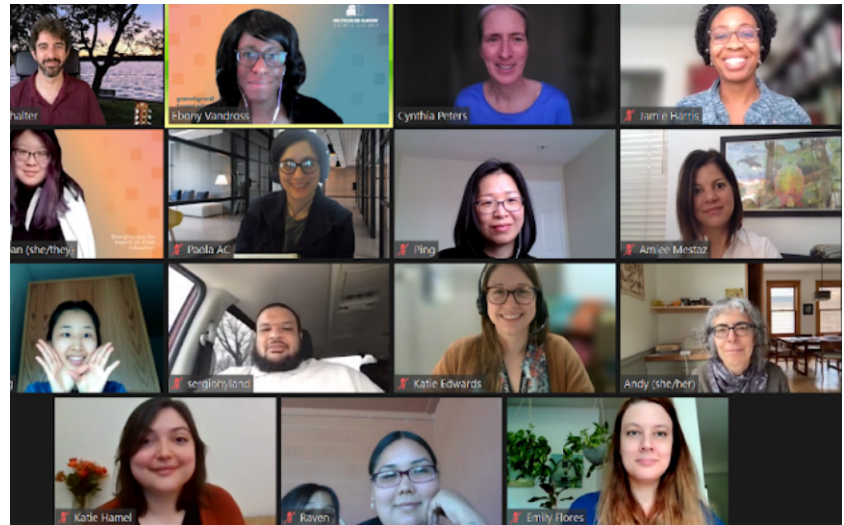
We want to thank an anonymous funder for their generous support of the Immigrants and Immigration series of *The Change Agent* and the [Transforming Immigrant Digital Equity \(TIDE\) project](#). The TIDE project proposes an ESOL ecosystem that interweaves digital equity, immigrant and refugee inclusion, and language justice. *The Change Agent* is a partner in this effort by bringing the voices of immigrant and refugee English language learners to the center of the conversation.

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Big Thanks to the Editorial Board for Issue #56:

From left to right, starting at top: David Buchalter, teacher at Genesis Center, RI; Ebony Vandross, World Education; Cynthia Peters, *Change Agent* editor; Jamie Harris, World Education; Shirley Doan, World Education; Helen Paola Almanzar Comas, student at Genesis Center, RI; Zuanping Zeng, student at Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center (BCNC); Amiee Mestaz, teacher at Gila Crossing Community School, Laveen, AZ; Hwiyoung Gwon, student at BCNC; Sergio Hyland, *Change Agent* contributor, Philadelphia, PA; Katie Edwards, Howard Community College, Columbia, MD; Andy Nash, adult education advocate, Cambridge, MA; Katie Hamel, teacher at BCNC; Raven Lewis, student at Gila Crossing Community School, Laveen, AZ; Emily Flores, San Antonio Public Library, San Antonio, TX.



Education Is Power

Amber Nguyen

BEFORE YOU READ: What are your thoughts on the title?

When I came to America seven years ago, my English level was very low. I had a job working at a supermarket, and the union provided English classes. I made friends with a nice Chinese guy named Peter. His job was to clean the building where I was studying English. He was retired, but he still wanted to work two days a week.

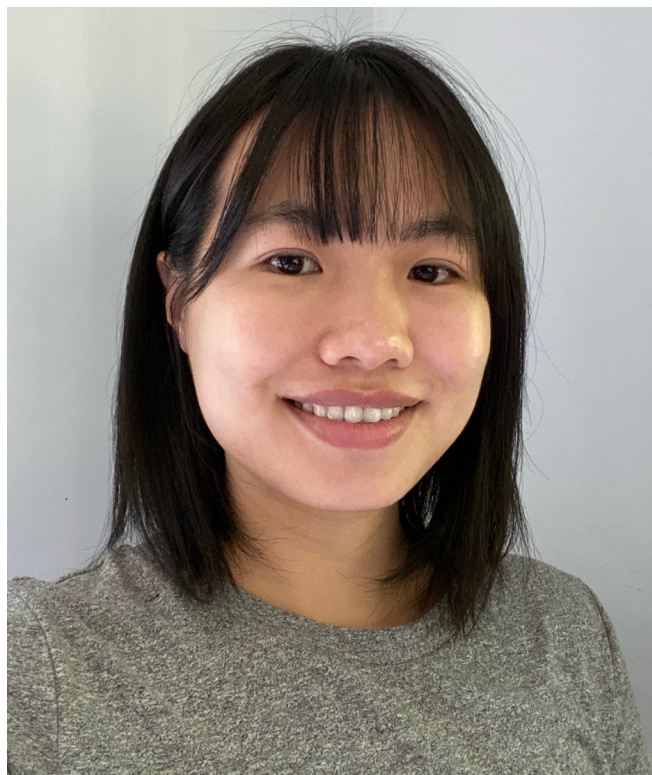
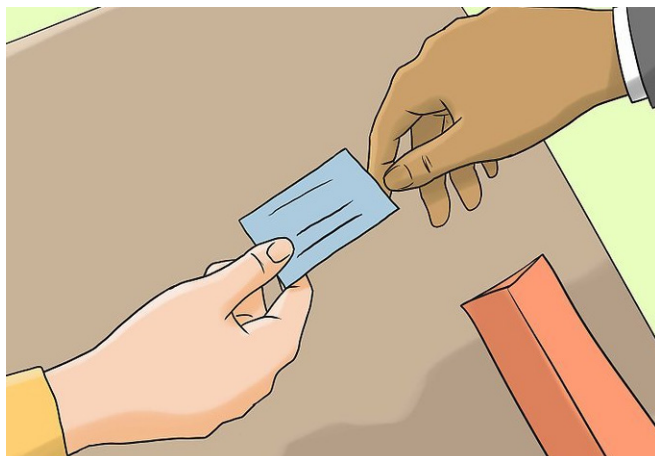
One day, he handed me a note. The note said, "Education is power. Keep learning and get your GED." This note inspired me so much! After three years of studying English, my teacher said it

One day, he handed me a note.

was time for me to get my GED. I decided to prepare for this journey, but I found out that I was pregnant.

I stopped going to school. I was busy with my new baby. I was sad thinking I would not get my GED. All I did was take care of my baby and go to work two days a week on my husband's days off.

Four years later, I remembered Peter's note: "Education is power." I decided to go back to



school. I realized that it doesn't matter how busy or old I am, I still can keep fighting for my dreams. I know that I still have a long way to go, but I won't stop as I did in the past. I will get my GED, and I will keep learning because education is power.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. In a few sentences, re-tell Amber's story in your own words.
2. What does Peter do for Amber, and what impact does it have on Amber?
3. Has anyone ever made a small gesture towards you that turned out to have a big impact in your life? Tell the story.
4. Write a note of encouragement to yourself or to a classmate.

Amber Nguyen is an ESL student at the BEST Hospitality Training Center and is a member of the hotel workers union, UNITE HERE, Local 26. In addition, she takes Kaplan GED classes online. She is from Vietnam. She is so grateful that she has met so many good people who offer help when it is needed.

Crossing the Line

Taking Steps to Communicate

Asuka Kondo

BEFORE YOU READ: What steps have you taken to communicate with others?

An Imaginary Line that I Could Not Cross



I remember how nervous I was when I attended an event in my son’s class for the first time. It was almost nine years ago. I could not speak English, and so I could not communicate with

others. No one spoke to me. I felt alone. It is hard to join a new community.

When I remember that time, I don’t think people were avoiding me. If I spoke to someone, they probably would have welcomed me. But it felt like there was an imaginary line between me and other people, and I could not cross that line. I did not know how to communicate in English, and so I hesitated to take the first step forward to cross the line.

Time to Move Forward

As my children grew up, I started asking myself, “I wonder if I will spend my life here and not communicate with others.” I realized that if I did not take steps to connect with others, nothing would happen. I decided it was time to move forward.



I decided to take an English class at Project Learn three times a week. I have made new friends from other countries in the class. I am



enjoying learning English with classmates and learning about their backgrounds.

I took another big step when I joined a book club with my neighbors. I cannot say that I always understand what they are talking about, but being a member of this book club is meaningful for me.

I decided to take these steps to start communicating. I am crossing the lines to connect with my community. I am not waiting for people on the other side of the line to come to me.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. In this essay, the writer uses the metaphor of “crossing a line.” What is the line she cannot cross at first? What steps does she take to cross the line?
2. What is a “line” you have had a hard time crossing? What did you do about it?

Asuka Kondo is a student at Project Learn of Summit County in Akron, OH. She has been in the U.S. for nine years. She lives with her husband, son, daughter, and two dogs. She likes reading, gardening, shopping, and making things with her hands. She is from Tokyo, Japan.

Speaking Up about My Housing

Martha Salas

BEFORE YOU READ: Have you ever had a problem with your housing? If so, what did you do about it?

Rats, Mice, and Trash

I moved to this apartment building in 2012. Over these years, I have seen many things happen in our building. They are not pleasant, and that is NOT acceptable. There were rats and mice, trash on the floor for many days, extremely dirty carpets, and walls that needed painting.

In our building, when we need something repaired, we call the landlord. However, he usually does not answer the phone. If we leave a message, he does not usually call back. If the landlord decides to fix something for us, he usually takes three to six months. Many tenants fix things by themselves.

I Reached Out for Help

One day, I got tired because these things happened very often to us. I decided to ask for help. I went to the Latino Economic Development Center (LEDC). The LEDC helps the neighborhood in many ways. In my case, they helped me bring inspectors from the DC government to see our building. I also contacted my representative at the Advisory Neighborhood Commission. These authorities took action in our building. They made sure that the landlord made big changes at our building.

The landlord had never listened to us until now. Even though I am very busy at school, I will continue to speak up about my building because there are other issues to resolve.

Martha Salas is from Lima, Peru. She is a student at the Carlos Rosario Public Charter School in Washington, DC, where she is learning English so she can help communities speak up. This piece was originally published in Issue #50 of The Change Agent, "Stand Up and Be Counted," p. 41.



What Can You Do?

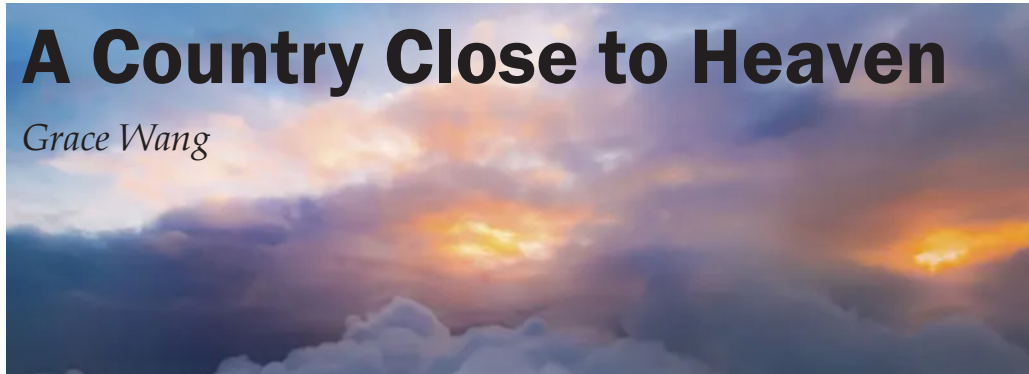
What was the problem Martha faced, and what did she do about it?

Do some research online and see if you can find 1) a community organization that might be able to help with local housing problems, and 2) a local government official (for example, a city councilor or someone in the mayor's office) who could support you.

If you have a problem with your housing, talk to your neighbors to find out if others are having the same experience. Write an email to the community organization and/or the government official. You could also call or visit them. Report back to the class about what happens.

A Country Close to Heaven

Grace Wang



Introduction

Everyone has different experiences when they come to the U.S. In my experience, this country has given me freedom, equality, and respect.

Freedom

I am a Buddhist. When the U.S. president is sworn in, he puts his hand on the Christian Bible. But I am free to join any religious organization I want.

Furthermore, my kids have more free time to play because there is less homework. In this country, your kids can play almost any sport.

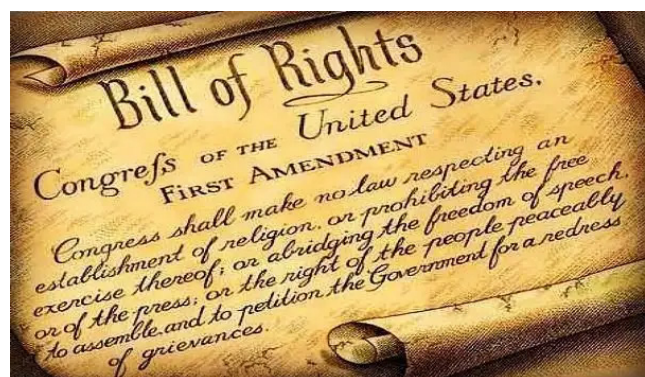
Warm reminder: Try going to the YMCA to find out what sports they have. Do not worry about your English. You will find patient and friendly staff who will help your child find an activity!

Equality

Wow, it is amazing that you can hear someone criticizing the president in public! You can write to a senator and get a response! You can comment freely on politics! Whether you are a dignitary or just plain folk, you are protected by the First Amendment. This idea that everyone has freedom of speech made me start to like this country.

The Declaration of Independence says, "All men are created equal." I know that racism still exists, but this country is still growing.

Warm reminder: Use your voice. Speak up for what you believe. Vote if you can. This country invites your participation.



Respect

As a new immigrant, I need to deal with all kinds of complicated things. And my English is very poor. But wherever I go – the bank, the store, and the doctor – the staff are always patient with me! I feel respected.

At my free English lessons, I receive the selfless help of the church people. When I first attended church services here, the people gave me friendly suggestions. They gave me ideas that helped me with my sons, and they helped me find the Chinese restaurants and shops to buy what I needed.

Warm reminder: If you have a problem in life, try visiting your local church. There are many caring people who can help you. When you receive care and respect, pass it on to others.

Conclusion

Freedom, equality, and respect make this a country close to heaven. As immigrants, we can enjoy those qualities of our new nation, and we can do our part to make them stronger.

Grace Wang is a student at Bossier Parish Community College in Bossier City, LA. Grace came to America in 2015 with her sons. In China she had a retail company, and she hopes to open a new company here in the U.S. Grace's sincerest dream is that her move to America will give her sons a better and more prosperous life. She simply wants to be a good mother.



Photo by Shawn Read, BCNC.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. In the title, the author refers to “a country close to heaven.” What does the metaphor “close to heaven” mean?
2. What evidence does the author provide to back up her claim that the U.S. is close to heaven?
3. In the “Coexist” image on p. 6, which symbols do you recognize? What do they represent?
4. The author mentions freedom of religion and speech, which are rights guaranteed in the First Amendment to the Constitution. Do some research to find out what other rights are guaranteed in the First Amendment.
5. The author offers “warm reminders” or advice to readers. What is your advice? Collect your class’s advice on a Google doc and share it on a slideshow or on a poster to display in your program.

Advocate for What You Want

Carolyn Allen

BEFORE YOU READ: What does *advocate* mean? Share a time you had to advocate for something.

At my last job, we had a big problem. The place was never clean. The bathroom was nasty and smelled terrible. The guy who was supposed to clean it never did. He just walked around the warehouse as if there was nothing to do. The kitchen was a mess. The refrigerator had things growing inside it.

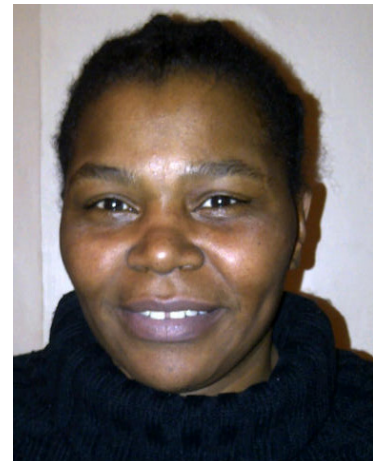
I got some women together and we went to see the supervisor. We went to him and asked him to talk to the janitor about the health of the people in the warehouse. I was a little nervous that he would not listen to me, but he did.

After our talk with the supervisor, things got better. Our bathroom and lunchroom were clean. It felt so good to have a clean refrigerator that I went and bought some food just to put it inside. The floor was so clean you could eat off of it.

We had a problem at my workplace, and we advocated for a change. We asked our supervisor for a cleaner warehouse, and we got it. Soon after, however, the supervisor got laid off and so did I. The company went out of business

It was a new experience for us women that the bathroom and lunchroom were clean.

Carolyn Allen is a student at Brooklyn Adult Learning Center, where she has gotten her confidence back and is eager to gain knowledge and receive her GED. She has always been a hard-working, loving, dependable mother and wife. Her goal is to become a social worker in the future. This piece was originally published in Issue #36, "Good Jobs, Not Just Any Jobs," p. 36.



Taking Action at Work

Problem:	What Can You Say?	What Can You Do?

Fill out the chart. Name some problems you have had at work and some things you could say or do about that problem.

Learn English and Join a Union

Amina Jama

BEFORE YOU READ: What is a union? Share what you know about unions.

When I came to America, I didn't speak English at all. I got a job at Spaulding Rehabilitation Hospital as a housekeeper. The supervisor always gave me a hard time because of the language barrier. He gave me bad evaluations. He would not help me because he couldn't talk to me.

For my second job, I was hired by a food service company. As a worker at this company, I am a member of UNITE HERE (the hotel and restaurant employees union). Two months into my new job, my supervisor told me to do a job that was not my responsibility. I explained my problem to my union, and they spoke to witnesses and corrected the situation. They spoke to the company manager, who fired the supervisor.

Because I was able to communicate in English and because I had a union, I received justice.

My manager gave me a promotion because he saw that I was a hard worker. Now, I earn more money and have a better life, all because I can read, write, and speak English better.

I advise everyone to get an education and to join unions if possible. Education gives you more opportunities, and unions defend workers against unfair situations (like the one I had).

Amina Jama is a student at the Notre Dame Education Center in Boston, MA. She is originally from Somalia, and she has been in this country for 15 years. Her educational goal is to finish the HiSet and start her own business. This piece was originally published in Issue #45, "Career Pathways," p. 41.



Advice for the Workplace

What did Amina and Carolyn do?	What happened?

Fill out the chart. List the strategies that Amina (p. 9) and Carolyn (p. 8) used to address problems in the workplace. Then list the results of those strategies. What would you do?

Organizing for Our Fair Share

A Worker Talks about the Struggle to Bring a Union to a Hotel in Boston

Nestor Garcia

BEFORE YOU READ: Read the title. What is “organizing”? What does “fair share” mean?

Work Hard and Organize

In my life, I’ve been a janitor, an airport worker, a welder, and a hotel worker. Now I am a union organizer. I fight for working people to have a good job with decent pay and dignity.

I believe everyone should be empowered to have their fair share. Everyone should be able to support their family and realize their dreams. If you are willing to work hard, you should be able to make it here in the U.S. But working hard doesn’t mean keeping your mouth shut and doing your job. Part of the hard work is fighting for what is right.

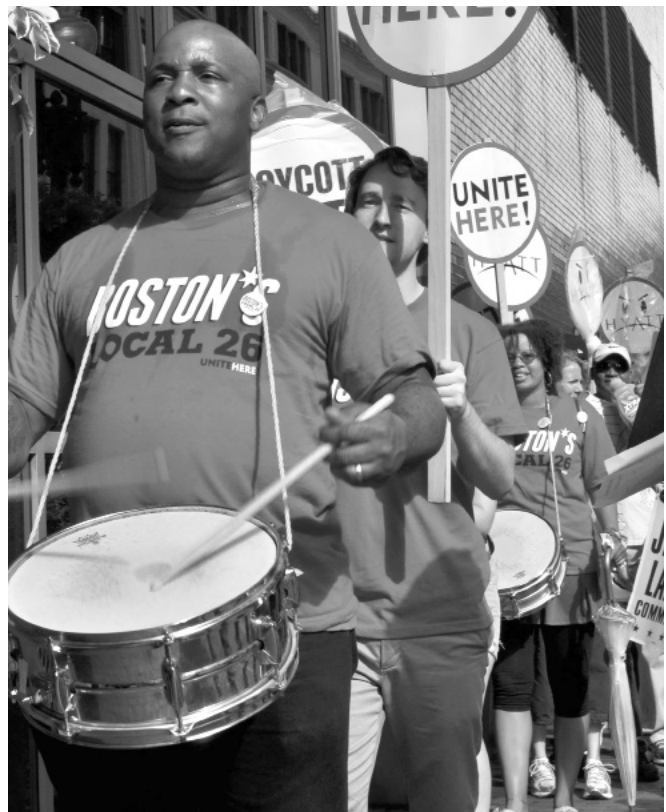
For example, the real estate developers come to our city to make money in the big hotels. They are just thinking about how much profit they can make on each room. As a union, we say to them, “This is not just a place to make

money. This is a community. We live here and shop here, and our children go to school here. The wages you pay us circulate through the whole community and make this a better place.” We want them to know we are a community, not just a way for them to get rich.

Part of the hard work is fighting for what is right.

Bringing the Union to the “W” Hotel

Before I started working in hotels, I was a welder. I helped build the “W” Hotel. But the economy crashed and there were no welding jobs. I trained to become a prep cook and got a



Nestor Garcia leading a march of his union.

job working for \$15 per hour at the “W” Hotel. As a welder, I had been making \$36 per hour.

When I started working at the “W,” it was not a union hotel. Working conditions were not good. They didn’t pay overtime. They fired people for no reason. The cocktail waitresses had to wear short skirts and high heels. They worked 10-hour shifts. They had to put up with a lot of disrespect and harassment. The housekeepers had to clean 18-20 rooms per day. It is very strenuous work.

We had no set schedule, so we could never make plans because we never knew when we were working from one week to the next. I was paying \$116 per week for my family’s health and

dental insurance. Even with health insurance, when my wife had a baby, we had to pay a \$2700 deductible.

Five of us started talking. We held meetings with other workers. We met off the premises – secretly – at the McDonald’s or the food court across the street. We didn’t want management to know because we knew they wouldn’t like it, and they’d find a way to punish the leaders. We brought housekeepers and cocktail waitresses together – people who had never had any reason to talk to each other before. But now we found out what we had in common – low wages and no respect. And we found we could connect around the idea of making the “W” a better place.

Many Challenges...then Victory

The hardest thing about organizing a union is convincing people that they have rights. We brought in documents and charts that showed how much money the hotel was making off of us. We showed people that we were only asking for what was fair.

We spent three months having meetings at all times of the night in order to reach all the shifts. I remember the day we had our union vote. It was May 11, 2010. We won by a huge majority.

It took about a year, and then we started seeing the benefits of being in a union. Family insurance decreased to \$12 per week. The hotel put \$7.20 per hour into a trust fund to pay for our pensions, education, and other benefits. The hourly pay for a prep cook went up to \$18.45. We had job security, seniority, clear work schedules, and other protections. And the cocktail waitresses no longer have to wear high-heeled shoes, and they got new uniforms – much more dignified!

Most importantly, we had a *grievance procedure*. If you feel like you aren’t being treated right, you are not alone. As a union, we back each other up.

About three months after we got the union, people started feeling more comfortable. They got more outspoken. They had a clear understanding of their rights and a way to fight for them.



Hotel workers on strike in Boston.

I felt pretty good. I had done something for my fellow human beings. My wife worried that I would get fired. But all those co-workers, they trusted me. I became a shop steward. And now I am an organizer with the union, and I am trying to help other hotel workers get organized to bring in a union so they can fight for their rights.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. How did the union organizers accomplish their goals? Be specific.
2. Why does Nestor say at the end that he felt “pretty good”?
3. What is a *grievance*? Why would it matter to have a *grievance procedure*? Why might it make a difference to you as a worker if you had a union backing you during a grievance procedure?

Nestor Garcia was from the Dominican Republic. When he wrote this, he had been in the U.S. for 21 years. He held a number of jobs, including organizer with UNITE/HERE Local 26 in Boston. He has since passed away. A longer version of this article was published in Issue #36, “Good Jobs, Not Just Any Jobs,” p. 48.

Community Demands Justice

After an Immigrant from Bangladesh Is Killed by Police

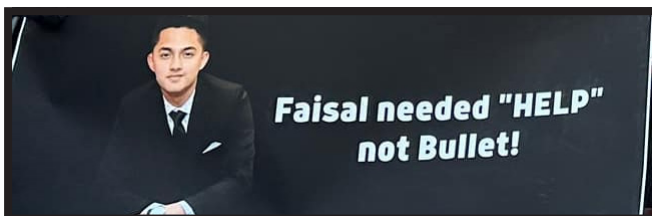
Cynthia Peters



Photos by Ryan Nguyen and Cynthia Peters.

Sayed Faisal was 20 years old. He was a student in Boston. He was an only child. He came to the U.S. with his parents from Bangladesh in 2015. He studied computer science and worked at CVS. On January 4, 2023, he was shot and killed by police. They said he approached them with a knife. This portrait (above) was made by David Fichter. (He is standing on the right.) Fichter knew Faisal when he was a teenager and they worked together on a mural.

People from the Bangladeshi community and others stood in front of Cambridge City Hall on January 9, 2023. They demanded “Justice for Faisal.” They said the police should not have killed Faisal. He had been feeling distress. He was hurting himself with the knife. The police chased him. People said the police should have other strategies for helping someone who is feeling distress. They said, he “needed help, not [a] bullet.”



AFTER YOU READ: Look up Cambridge HEART (<https://www.cambridge-heart.org/>). Learn about an alternative to policing when someone is having a mental health crisis.





The Bangladesh Association of New England wrote on Facebook, “As a community, we are all in this together. We are hoping that we will raise our voices together and bring the best possible outcome for Faisal’s family.”



Many people are advocating for the city to give money to community-based teams to respond to mental health crises. Cambridge HEART is one example (see the box on p. 12). What do you think? Discuss, research, and write about it.

Latinos and Police Violence

Nancy Lozano

BEFORE YOU READ:

1. Discuss what these phrases mean: “speak up” and “raise our voices.”
2. Look up these vocabulary words: *sympathy*, *threatening*, *manner*, *allegedly*, *discriminate*.
3. Share what you know about the Black Lives Matter movement.

Afraid to Speak Up

Black people are not the only race that has problems with police. Latinos also have problems with police. As Latinos, we show our *sympathy* to the Black Lives Matter movement. But we don't want to speak up about our own problems with the police. We are afraid because many of us are immigrants in this country. We protest for immigration reform more than we protest police shootings of Latinos.¹

Two Police Shootings

Now and then, you hear about a Latino getting shot. For example, there is the case of Oscar Romero in Los Angeles. A police officer shot him because “he moved his arms in a *threatening manner*,” according to the Los Angeles Times.² Another Latino, Antonio Zambrano Montes, was shot by police because “he was *allegedly* throwing rocks at passing cars.”³ We as a community should not let the police treat us this way.

We Should Unite

Therefore, Latinos should not focus only on immigration issues. We should march and raise our voices about police violence as well. Police *discriminate* against African Americans and Latinos. We should unite with each other to stop this from happening.

Sources: 1. NPR, 7-27-15, “Despite Spotlight on Police shooting, Incidents with Latinos Often Forgotten”; 2. “Latino police shootings



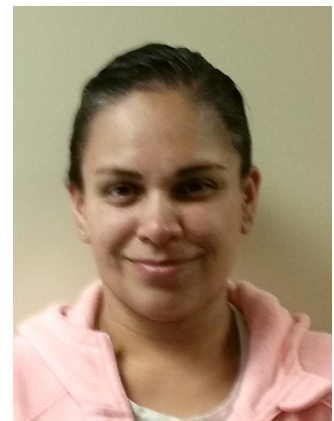
Antonio Zambrano Montes was killed by police for allegedly throwing rocks. Photo: Twitter.

stay under the radar” adapted by Newsela, 8-12-15; 3. <www.cnn.com/2015/09/11/opinions/reyes-antonio-zambrano-montes>.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. Look closely at how the author uses quotes and sources. What are some similarities and differences in the way she uses the three sources.
2. Discuss how the use of sources affects the strength and credibility of her essay.
3. Notice the use of “for example” and “another” in the second paragraph. How do these words help the reader make sense of the text? Notice the use of “therefore” in the third paragraph. How does this word help the reader transition from the previous paragraph to this one?
4. See another article that addresses discrimination against Latinos in Issue #57, p. 6, “A Better Life Despite Discrimination.”

Nancy Lozano is a HiSET student at North Kansas City Schools in Kansas City, MO. She has two wonderful children and looks forward to passing her test. This essay was originally published in *Issue #42*, “Talking about Race,” p. 49.



Legalize Undocumented Immigrants

Juan Bunay

Introduction

There are 12 million undocumented immigrants in this country who deserve to be legalized. They contribute to our society by doing hard jobs and paying taxes. We should have immigration reform so that they have a pathway to citizenship. We should remember that they are human beings.

They Contribute to the Economy

They came to this country to work hard and have better lives, like past immigrants. Undocumented people often do the work that Americans don't like to do. For example, they do hard labor as construction workers and landscapers. They pick fruits and vegetables. They work as babysitters and housekeepers – taking care of people and even giving love. And believe it or not, many undocumented immigrants pay taxes. Legalizing all of the undocumented people would mean even more taxes for the U.S. government.

The fee to apply for citizenship is \$680. Multiply that by 12 million people and think how much that would add up to!

With legal status, these immigrants would boost the economy. They would be able to visit their families, which means they would buy travel tickets and gifts to bring to their families. All of this economic activity would create more jobs.

We Need Immigration Reform

Some people who disagree with me might argue that these undocumented people, once legalized, would take American people's jobs. That will not happen because almost all of these people already have jobs!

People say this is the land of opportunity. Let's make it true! Congress should pass an immigration reform bill that gives undocumented immigrants a pathway to citizenship.



A march for immigrant rights in Philadelphia, 2017. Photo by Joe Piette from Flickr, CC-BY-NC-SA-2.0

Immigrants Deserve Human Rights

Undocumented immigrants are human beings. It's time to give them all legal status. They deserve freedom and rights, and it would be good for our country too!

AFTER YOU READ: What are some examples of immigration reform that people are advocating for in your community or nationally? What do you think immigration reform should look like? Invite a local immigration rights activist to speak to your class or program.

Juan Bunay is a student in the Adult and Continuing Education Department at the Borough of Manhattan Community College in New York City. He is from Ecuador. This piece was first published in [Issue #38](#), p. 22.



No Difference in the Differences

Kaizar H.



Photo by Fernando Butcher from Flickr. CC 2.0.

BEFORE YOU READ: Share a time you felt different from others. Were you able to find common ground? If so, describe how.

Feeling Different

Standing out from the crowd or being noticed always makes me distressed and uncomfortable. I wear neutral colors and blue jeans. Wearing a mask has helped me feel more comfortable. It hides my skin color, although not completely.

Sitting on a bench in Central Park is my refuge from the city. I look at the cherry blossoms, birds, and squirrels. I stay as long as I can to absorb the views. I remembered my first visit to Central Park. Was it the same feeling? No. During that first visit, I endured feelings of loneliness, frustration, confusion, and disillusionment.

My First Experience

When I was growing up, I watched Hollywood movies, so visiting the iconic Central Park was my teenage dream. Unfortunately, my first visit

to Central Park disappointed me: I lost my way, had to walk for a long time, and felt tired and chilled. My teenage dream didn't run as smoothly as a movie. I didn't fall in love with the Big Apple right away. The dog poop and trash bags on the sidewalks always annoyed me. Moreover, the dark walls in the subway, the steep stairs, and the unfamiliar smell irritated me. I was worried about my safety when the Asian hate crimes started.

In addition, the unfamiliar pronunciation and tone of voice made me feel small and homesick. I lacked the confidence to socialize, so I changed from an extrovert to an introvert. I smiled politely or stayed silent when I couldn't understand somebody. I apologized or asked people to repeat words, and that got me down every day.

A Step

When I started taking ESL classes, my friends asked me, "Won't ESL classes be a waste of time? Not for me! *I loved exploring the world through the window that was opened in my ESL classes.*

I had classmates from different countries, cultures, and backgrounds. Do you think that our differences define us or make a barrier between us? One of my classmates was elderly. She faced many difficulties with the technology of Zoom classes. For example, she had a hard time with the mute/unmute button. Sometimes we could hear a toilet flush in the background. But her persistence and resilience paid off. Within six months, she presented a PowerPoint about her country – including videos!

Similar Struggles

We learned together to improve our English. We supported and encouraged each other. I noticed that many adult learners are women, and we have similar difficulties. We don't feel confident talking with other parents at our kids' schools. We are nervous about daily activities like doctor's appointments and grocery shopping. But in this class, we shared, we learned, and we grew together.

We Rise by Lifting Each Other

Everyone learns at a different pace, but sometimes I got frustrated with my classmates. They asked my teacher to repeat the same thing over and over again. It was especially hard when we had to complete a group project within a time limit. I was so anxious for the slower learners to catch up. I was a little pushy.

One day in the small group, I explained something again and again to my classmate. She couldn't understand, and the other classmates gave up. Later, she asked me why we were in the same group most of the time. I responded with a question. I asked, "How do you like being in a group with me?" She didn't answer, but for some reason, we both laughed out loud. Our misunderstanding disappeared. I realized that we are mothers, we have dreams for our kids and families, and we make mistakes sometimes.

Even though there are many challenges and difficulties, we are committed to working hard and to being patient with each other. We are more



"Uplifting Staircase" in Takoma Park, MD. Photograph by muralist Nancy Caralyn Illman, of her artwork. CC 4.0.

similar than we are different. Learning not just English but also respect and patience united us, so we could be good friends together.

No Difference in the Differences

Since then, whenever I go to Central Park, I can see that people who visit here come from different backgrounds with different intentions. Despite our differences, we have something in common: we want to have a beautiful moment in Central Park, as well as in our life. Our differences don't define us. In the end, our hard work will pay off.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. Explain the metaphor in the *bold italics* sentence (bottom of p. 16). What "window" does ESL class "open"?
2. Describe a time you have felt connected to others despite differences.

Kaizar H. is in the ESL Class at City College of New York in New York City. She moved to NYC with her family from Myanmar in 2019. She has also taken online classes at the New York Public Library, where she found writing is her passion. Living in New York City can be challenging, but support and hard work make it easier.

English Class: My New Family

Mina Aslami

BEFORE YOU READ:

1. What do you think it means that the author's English class is her "new family"?
2. An adjective is the part of speech that describes a noun. As you read, notice the adjectives in **bold**.

Excited But Crying

My husband and I came from Afghanistan. We landed in New York City. We took a bus to Amherst. I was so excited to see so **many new** things: **tall** buildings, **green** trees, and **huge** highways. I was excited to be here, but I was crying and missing my family.

Not One Word of English

I did not speak **one** word of English before I arrived in the United States. When I took my **first English** class, I drew on paper the words that my teachers wrote on the board. I brought them home, and my husband and my brother translated for me.

Not Alone

My teachers and mentors in English class were very supportive and kind. They helped me with their smiles. They were always patient with me. They were helpful in the class *and* in my personal life. For instance, I recently had to move to a **new** apartment, and they all helped me search for an **appropriate** place.

Even though I am away from my country and my family, the connection to my English class helped me feel that I was never alone. My teachers, tutors, and classmates were my **new** family. I am so grateful to these **amazing** people.

Mina Aslami came to the U.S. from Afghanistan in 2012. She is a student at the Literacy Project in Amherst, MA. Mina's goal is to improve her language proficiency to pursue college-level education in the U.S.



AFTER YOU READ:

1. What emotions does Mina express in the first paragraph? How do you know?
2. In the second paragraph, what strategy does Mina use to start learning English?
3. According to the information in the third and fourth paragraphs, in what ways does Mina's English class act like family?
4. Note the adjectives in **bold**. Circle other adjectives that you see. Write your own sentences with adjectives. Try writing a few sentences that have more than one adjective in a row. (For example, in this article, you see "**many new things**" and "**first English class.**")

Integrating into My New Community

Loubna Mouyarden

BEFORE YOU READ:

1. The verb *to integrate* means a) to combine one or more things so that they become a whole, and b) to bring together different groups in society so that all groups have equal participation and opportunity. What do you think the author means by the title?
2. Use integrate (and its opposite, *segregate*) in several sentences.

Immigrating to the U.S. helped me learn about other beautiful cultures. Before I came to America, I didn't know a lot about other nationalities in the world. I spoke French and Arabic, but no English. My culture was confined to the Mediterranean region.

When I came to the U.S., I learned about other cultures and countries. At my school, the Community Learning Center (CLC), I have made many friends, and I have beautiful teachers. My friends at school are Haitian, Spanish, Brazilian,

We sometimes meet each other and take a walk together with her dog.

Chinese, and Iranian people. That's why I'm happy at CLC. I can practice English with people from all over the world. During break time, I talk with them about

their cultures. I learn about their food, customs, and traditions. We sometimes show each other pictures to get to know each other's family members.

I also connect with non-immigrant people, like my neighbors. For example, I live on the first floor of my house, and my neighbor who is not an immigrant lives on the second floor. We sometimes meet each other and take a walk together with her dog.



Now, I'm focusing on my goal which is to become a nurse through the Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) program at CLC. I want to get a better job in healthcare so I can help other people.

In the end, like any immigrant in the U.S., I'm trying to integrate into this new society, and I'm happy to do so.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. What specific strategies does the author use to connect with people in the U.S.?
2. Are there parts of U.S. society that you want to integrate into and other parts that you would prefer not to integrate into? Discuss.

Loubna Mouyarden is a student in the ESOL Level 4 class at the Community Learning Center in Cambridge, MA. She is from Morocco, and she has been living in Cambridge for two years. She works at TJ Maxx as a cashier.

Make Your Voice Count

A Story of Student Leadership

Matias Rodriguez

BEFORE YOU READ: Learn some new words:

- Council: a group of people who come together to make decisions. They might be elected or chosen.
- Councilor: a person who serves on the council.
- PowerPoint: a software program that you use on the computer to design slideshow presentations. You can add pictures, videos, and text to communicate your message.
- Petition: a request or a demand. Often, many people will sign a petition to make it more powerful.

We Noticed a Student Missing in Class

Our night classes run from 5:30 pm until 8:30 pm. Most students attend classes at night because of their busy work schedules. One evening, a student leader named Francine Raymond was in her math class. She noticed that another student was missing a lot of classes.

We Found Out What was Wrong

When her classmate returned a few weeks later, Francine asked if everything was okay. The student explained that she got in a bike accident on her way home from school. (She has to ride her bike because the last bus leaves before her class is over.) She was hit by a car, and she got a head injury. Francine was sad to hear this terrible news. She asked, "If the bus ran later, would you take the bus instead of your bike?"

"Of course," she replied.

At the next Student Leadership Council meeting, everyone said they felt bad about what happened to the student. The members wanted to do something to make it safe for students to travel to and from school.



More Problems

While we talked, two other students came forward with other problems. One of them said that the bus stop across from the school had no shelter. While waiting for the bus, people have no protection from the sun or rain. (In Tucson, it can be very hot, and there are also heavy rains in the rainy season.) Another student came forward and said that there were no lights at another stop. She did not like waiting for the bus in the dark. She felt unsafe.

We Did Something About It

We decided to contact our city councilor. Her name is Regina Romero. We prepared for the meeting by practicing our public speaking. And we learned how to present information with PowerPoint.

At the meeting, we presented the concerns of the students. Ms. Romero was happy to learn

about what we had done. We got her support and the support of other city officials.

Now we have one new bus stop and lights at two bus stops! There is still more work to be done. The bus route hours are still too short. We started a petition, and the Student Leadership Council will continue to work on this issue. I'm so proud to be part of this project. It not only helps the community now, but will also help generations to come!

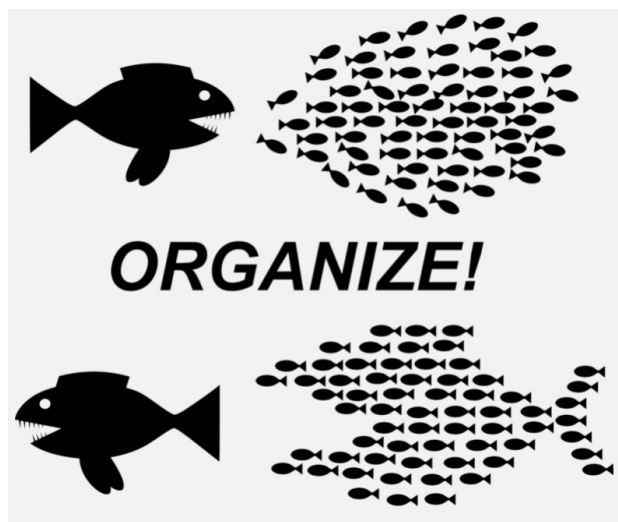
Matias Rodríguez was born in Tucson and is a GED student at the El Rio Learning Center of Pima Community College. He is an Ambassador for Adult Education and an AmeriCorps and Student Leadership Council member. He assists the Civics and Student Leadership Team and is also a representative for Pima Community College's Inter Campus Council (ICC). This article was originally published in Issue #43, "Transportation."

AFTER YOU READ: Matias and others on the Student Leadership Council organized themselves and others to make a change. Look back at the text. In the box below, write a list of the steps they took. This is called "organizing." Study the image in the box below. What does it say about organizing?



Thanks to the organizing work of student leaders at the El Rio Learning Center in Tucson, AZ, the city added this bus shelter to the bus stop across the street from their school. They are still fighting for a bus schedule that better meets students' needs.

Steps for Organizing



List the steps that Matias and the other students took to organize for better transportation:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

Parents, Technology, and School Problems and Solutions

BCNC Level 1 ESOL Classes

BEFORE YOU READ: Why is it important for parents to know how to use computers? If you are a parent, what is the role of technology in your life and in your children's life?

Introduction

Parents should be part of their children's education. Parents are children's first teachers in life. Sometimes children do not do their homework. Sometimes they forget their homework at school. Sometimes the homework is hard, so parents ask the teacher how to help the children do homework. It is important to have good communication with your children's teachers. Digital communication (like Zoom, TalkingPoints, email, or WeChat) is excellent because it is fast and efficient.

But there are also problems when you use digital communication. We are students from two Level 1 ESOL classes at Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center (BCNC). We will share some of the problems with using technology for communication, and some solutions.

Problem 1: No Computer

Some parents don't have computers or tablets. They just have phones. Phones are small and hard to use.

Solution:

The government, a community organization, or school can give you or loan you a computer or tablet. Or you can buy one. At BCNC, there are computers that we can borrow.



Problem 2: Hardware and Software Are Difficult to Use

For some older people, apps and computers are difficult. We learn slowly. We need more time to study. If we don't understand the app, we don't use it.

Solution:

Schools can give technology classes in many languages to parents. They can teach parents how to use computers, apps, and how to connect to WiFi. Schools can teach parents online or face to face. Schools can communicate with apps that parents already know, like WeChat and WhatsApp. Parents can use YouTube videos to learn. (BCNC makes videos in Chinese language.)



Problem 3: Internet Problems

Sometimes, the WiFi connection is not good. We can't connect to Zoom. We can't hear the teacher because of bad WiFi.



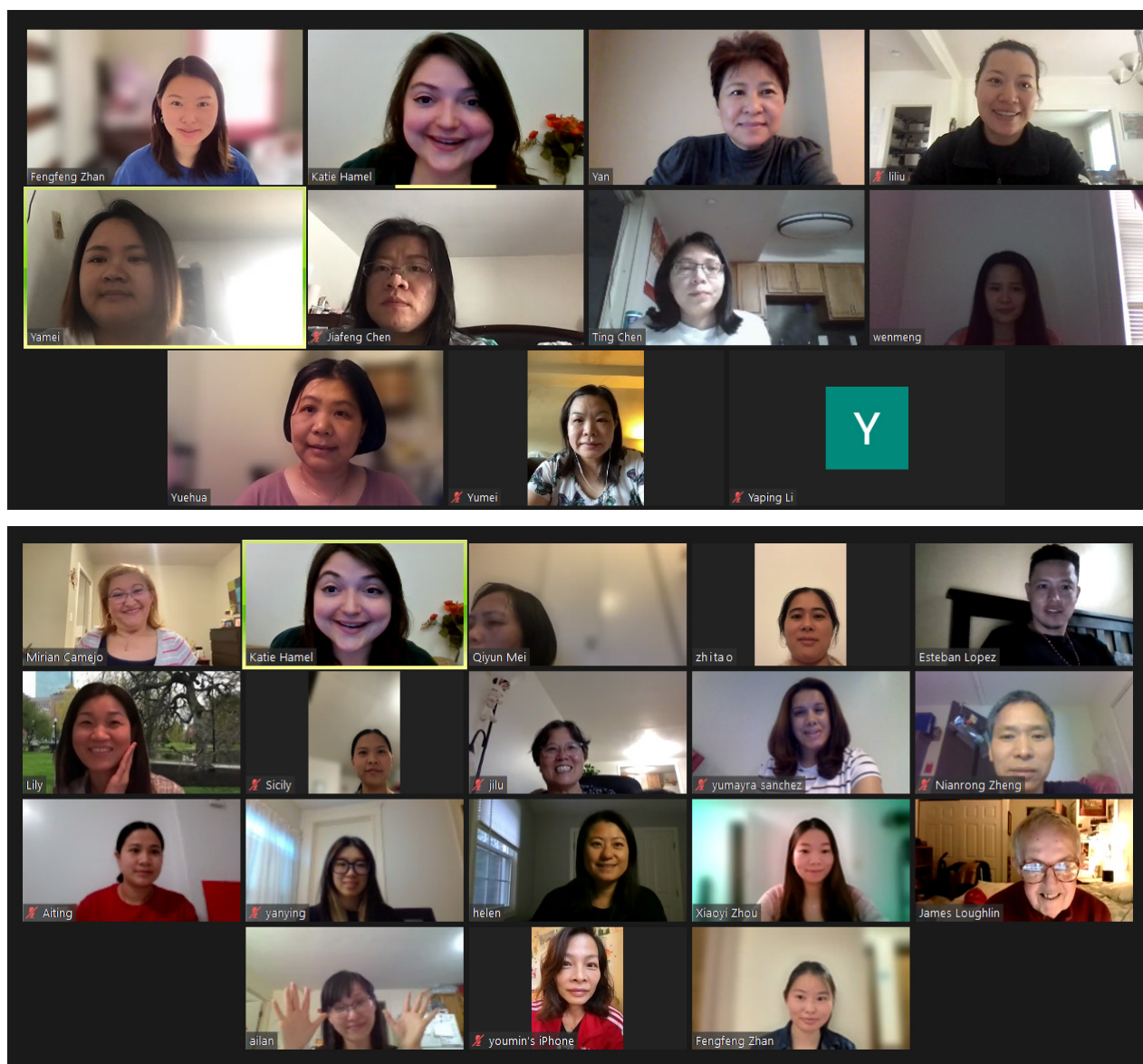
Solution:

Sometimes, you can borrow a hot spot from your library. The government can help you pay for the internet and make sure the signal is strong. There is a new government program that helps you get good internet access for \$30 per month. Click on <https://www.fcc.gov/acp> for help.

Problem 4: Language Problems

Language translation apps are sometimes bad. They don't give clear translations. They don't say what you want to say.





Solution:

Schools can ask parents or students to volunteer to help with translations, or it can be a paid job.

English class for parents is a good idea. We need to have a chance to practice listening and speaking English. The government can give more free English classes for parents.

Family Services can help with translations. They can help with other things too, like helping parents fill out a housing form, go to a government office, or go to the hospital.

This article was written collectively by the morning and afternoon ESOL classes at Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center in Boston.

AFTER YOU READ: Choose a few of the problems listed in this article and explore the solutions. For example, where in your community can you borrow a computer or other device, or buy one at a reduced price? How do you apply for reduced-price internet at <https://www.fcc.gov/acp>? Collect the information and share it on a poster or in a presentation with other students in your program.

Wake Up a Little Later

Lisa Langdee

BEFORE YOU READ: What are the advantages of online learning?

Changing to online learning was a little hard for me at first. I had trouble with my internet, and I missed seeing people’s faces. However, there were also advantages.

For example, I could wake up a little later than usual because I didn’t have to take a bus to the college. Also, I didn’t have to spend time getting dressed to go to in-person classes. This meant that I had enough time to make breakfast for my kids. Usually, if I had in-person classes, my kids would eat breakfast at school, but they don’t really like the food there. With the extra time before class, I can make them a good breakfast.


After they go to school, I make breakfast for myself. Then, I still have more time before class starts, so I organize my room and do the laundry. Overall, learning online is more convenient for me. I like not having to get up very early in the morning, but I also miss learning in-person!



AFTER YOU READ:

1. According to Lisa, what are the advantages of online learning?
2. Read the box below. Make a class project of collecting and sharing breakfast menus and recipes.

Lisa Langdee is a student at Literacy Source in Seattle, WA. She is from Thailand, and she moved to Seattle in 2010. She speaks Thai and English. She likes reading, shopping, and cooking. Right now, she is not working outside the home because she is taking care of her three kids. She wants to improve her English and then get a job.



What’s for Breakfast?

In this photo, Lisa’s three children enjoy a waffle breakfast. Based on what you know about waffles *and* what you see in the pictures, list the steps Lisa probably took to make waffles.

What do you eat for breakfast when you have extra time in the morning? What do you eat for breakfast when you’re in a hurry? List the steps for how you prepare the meal.

Driver's License

Lourdes Aparicio

BEFORE YOU READ: What steps do you have to take to get a driver's license?

I needed to buy a car. I was in the U.S. for three months, and I needed a job. I needed to go to school to learn English. To do these things, I needed a car.

To buy a car, I first needed a driver's license. I watched a driving program online. It was free. I learned the rules for how to drive in the U.S. I studied online for one month until I learned all the rules about driving. Then I took the written test. I passed the first time!

After I passed the written test, I had a learner's permit. Then I asked a family member for the car, so I could take my driving test. I already knew how to drive. My sister taught me in Ciudad Juarez.

After I got my license, I studied online about how to buy a car. I watched videos on YouTube about the importance of credit and how to pay a fair price. With a car, I could get my first job and start school.



AFTER YOU READ:

1. What steps did Lourdes take to get her driver's license? How does having a car make a difference in her life?
2. How did Lourdes use YouTube? Have you ever used YouTube to learn something? Explain.

Lourdes Aparicio is a student at Ysleta Community Adult Learning Center in El Paso, Texas. She is studying English and Computer Science, and she wants to take her citizenship test next year.



What Is Credit?

Lourdes watched YouTube videos about the importance of credit. Credit is your ability to buy something and pay for it later, sometimes with interest. For example, if you buy a TV with your credit card, you walk out of the store with the TV, but you don't pay for it until your credit card bill comes due. Or if you get a loan to buy a car, you use the car while you pay the bank back for the loan. The better your credit is, the more you can borrow. How can you establish good credit?

One Day in the New Term

Lily Wang

BEFORE YOU READ: What is one advantage and one disadvantage of online learning and of in-person learning?

Morning: Full of Confidence

February 1 was the first day of the second week of the 2022 spring semester, which is also the Chinese Lunar New Year. When I woke up, I saw the sky outside was so blue. I felt good. I had two classes that day: English 1A in the morning and Communication 1A in the afternoon. I felt full of confidence.

I sat in front of my computer ten minutes before the start of my first class. When I saw the teacher and the students, I greeted them, and I

When I woke up, I saw the sky outside was so blue. I felt good. I had two classes that day.

felt elated. The class went on pleasantly and smoothly. I was especially happy that the professor wished us a happy Chinese New

Year. When the class was over, I looked out the window. The sky seemed bluer, and the scenery looked more beautiful.

Afternoon: Confidence Crushed

The afternoon Communication 1A class was not online. After two years of online courses, this was my first in-person class. I thought I might learn better in a face-to-face class. But after four semesters of online classes, I did not feel good about going to school.

First of all, I needed to prepare an hour in advance. I had to leave enough time to drive to school and find parking. I had to prove that I was vaccinated and wear a mask at all times. One student forgot to wear a mask and could only sit outside the door of the classroom.



There were more challenges. On Zoom, the teacher shares her screen, and she typed words on documents. However, in person, she wrote on the board. I was not used to seeing her handwriting, and I could not understand some of the words she wrote.

The most frustrating part for me was the last part of the class. She asked people to work in pairs and communicate about their personal background. All of the students in this class (except me) speak English as their first language.

My partner was a young man with an unusual and very long name. When it was our turn to go up in front of the class and introduce our partners, I could not remember

I said, “I call my partner Handsome Boy.” Then all the students laughed.

his name. I said, “Excuse me, I cannot remember my partner’s long name. I am a Chinese student. English is my second language, and I am nearly 60 years old. So I call my partner Handsome Boy.” Then all the students laughed.

Night: A Mental Struggle

I looked at my teacher. Her face was serious and unhappy. I felt awkward. Although I tried to keep the rest of my talk light, it made me lose

I have deeply felt the advantages and disadvantages of online and in-person classes.

confidence in the class. I went back home and after a night of mental struggle, the next day I decided to drop the class.

To this day, I have deeply felt

the advantages and disadvantages of online and in-person classes. I thought about it carefully and told myself, “I already like online classes. They have become part of my life in just two short years. This is something I didn’t know before. I found a new way to learn.”

AFTER YOU READ:

1. In your own words, describe Lily Wang’s day. What happens in the morning, afternoon, and night, and what decision does it lead to?
2. What does Lily find hard about in-person classes? Be specific.
3. Have you had an awkward or embarrassing moment in class? How did you handle it? How did your teacher handle it? What would have made it less awkward?

Lily Wang is a student at Alameda Reads in Alameda, CA. She came to the United States from China in 2014. One day, three years later, something embarrassing happened because she couldn’t talk with American children in English, so she made up her mind to learn English. She just graduated from Laney College with an Associate’s degree. She continues to study English at Alameda Reads.

Which Way to Go?



Work with a partner and tell the story of a time you had to make a decision. Share the details of how you decided. Take turns listening and talking. When it’s your turn to listen, ask questions so that you encourage your partner to share more details.

After you each take a turn speaking and listening, take notes about what you said.

Write a paragraph or an essay based on your notes.

Share it with your partner for feedback. Revise!

Immigrants and the Internet

Helen Paola Almánzar

Immigrating to another country is kind of scary. You don't know where to start when you arrive at a new place. There's a feeling of starting from zero. It could make you feel excited or anxious or both! In this situation, the internet can help.

Use Apps to Stay Connected

When I first came to the U.S., the internet was a lifesaver. During the Covid-19 lockdown in 2020, I could stay connected with my family in the Dominican Republic. I felt less alone and homesick. It was not the same as being face-to-face with my loved ones, but at least I could see them on the screen and hear their voices. It was a relief to know they were fine.

I use apps like WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook to see what is happening in the lives of my family and friends. Social media keeps me close to my network of friends. I feel more connected to them than in the past when we just had phone calls.

Find What You're Looking For!

When I arrived in this country, I wanted to start practicing my English, but I didn't know where to start. I called the library but couldn't find the answer I was looking for. As an introvert, it was difficult to ask the right questions. So instead, I used the internet to find an English class. I found one in my neighborhood. I felt comfortable because they spoke Spanish. I called them, and that was how I began to make a connection with my local community.

When my husband moved to Providence, RI, he wanted to find new friends in the area. He used websites (like www.MeetUp.com) to find others interested in computers and cooking, his hobbies. This is how my husband connected to the community.

Here is a tip for new immigrants: Don't just search for immigrant groups. Do what my husband did and find people with the same interests and hobbies. This is a great way to meet people in your new community. It helps you merge with your new society.

Get Help Belonging to Your New Place

One of the positive things about being an immigrant is that you can create yourself again. You can learn a new language, discover a new culture, and find new ways of living. You will have to find a new job, figure out where to buy groceries and clothes, find schools for your kids, learn to drive on neighborhood streets and wide highways, navigate public transportation, and understand how to pay your bills (online or by mail). These daily routines make a life. They help you belong to a place. If you don't know where to begin, the internet is an incredible tool.

The internet can help you find answers to your questions. Using Google search, you can find articles on any topic in any language. You can use YouTube to look up how to make things or fix things. On Twitter, you can read and comment on all kinds of discussions. You can find online places to buy or sell just about anything – used or new. The internet helps us be independent and self-reliant.

Government Offices in the Palm of My Hand

As an immigrant, I find it useful that the internet makes government offices available in the palm of my hand. When I started my citizenship process, I went to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services website. It provides all kinds of information and resources about your immigration options, as well as tools to help you prepare the forms and find citizenship classes.



But Beware!

Keep in mind that the internet can be also be overwhelming. It provides almost too much information, and let me tell you, it is confusing and frustrating sometimes! For instance, you might accidentally apply for a job that no longer exists. You could get incorrect information about where to pay your bills. You might find an apartment to rent, but the address is wrong. All these things can waste time.

Sometimes websites are not just incorrect, they are dangerous. Bad websites give fake information. Sometimes, they might promise you prizes and gifts, but really they are just trying to get your credit card information. Even worse, sometimes they pass on “viruses” that can mess up your computer or your phone. So before you enter a website, look for sites that are secure. Look, for example, for those sites that end with: “.net,” “.gov,” “.edu,” and that start with “https.”

A Final Thought

The internet is a powerful tool for immigrants. We can learn new things, meet people, and make connections in our local community, all while staying connected with our friends and family in our original home. It’s true that moving to a new country can be scary, but the internet can help make everything more familiar.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. According to the author, what are some of the main ways immigrants can use the internet?
2. When you use the internet, what are two things you should beware of, according to the author.
3. What are some positive and not positive experiences you have had using the internet?

Helen Paola Almánzar is an ESOL student at the Genesis Center in Providence, RI. She is from the Dominican Republic, and has a degree in Architecture and International Business. She has a passion for the arts and loves to travel and spend time with her family.

Camila Makes a Difference

Rachel Riggs

This story is fictional.

BEFORE YOU READ:

1. According to digitalinclusion.org, *digital equity* is when all people and communities have the technology they need to fully participate in our society, democracy, and economy.
2. What or who has helped you get access to technology and the internet? Have there been obstacles? Describe them. Your ability to navigate around these obstacles is called *digital resilience*.

Many Talents and Skills

Camila lives in Kentucky. She is from Cuba. She is a single woman and has big goals for her future. Right now, she works as a room attendant at a hotel. Camila has a lot of talents and skills. She is very friendly and she is a creative thinker. When there is a problem at the hotel, she thinks of unique solutions to fix it. Camila is bilingual, too. She speaks Spanish and Haitian Creole. She is learning English, and she practices every day.

A Major Obstacle: Digital Divide

There is one big problem that Camila has. It's called the digital divide. "Digital" relates to technology and "divide" means separation. The digital divide is what separates the people who can connect or have access to things online and those who can't. This divide is serious. It impacts access to important services, jobs, education, and connecting with other people.

For Camila, the digital divide makes it difficult to make doctor appointments, take English classes, and talk to family in Cuba. She connects to the internet on her phone at work, but it's not a good place to do her personal calls or studies. When she gets home, the connection is weak, and sometimes there isn't a connection at all. She can't study, read the news, or talk to her family at



home. She's separated from the online world.

Camila needs to find reliable internet access and a laptop. After doing some research, she finds out that she lives in a "redlined" neighborhood. "Redlined" means that the internet service companies do not put good internet in Camila's community. Redlining is unfair. It blocks communities from the services they need. It's not just the internet, though. Camila needs a device with a larger screen, like a laptop or desktop computer. She can't do everything she needs to do on her smartphone. She wants to practice using a computer so she can get a job at the hotel reception desk.

Helping Herself and Her Community

Camila is very good with technology. She has a lot of digital skills. She posts images and videos on social media. At work, Camila writes emails for her co-workers and helps them fill out online forms. Camila volunteers at a community center. She gives digital literacy classes to teach others how to use the internet. She teaches them how to search for information, apply for jobs online, and use video calls to talk to their families.

People need more than digital skills to have digital equity, though. They need the internet and devices. Camila knows how to use the computer but she needs to have one at home. If she gets a

computer and internet at home, she will be able to study, find and apply for new jobs, read the news and talk to her family.

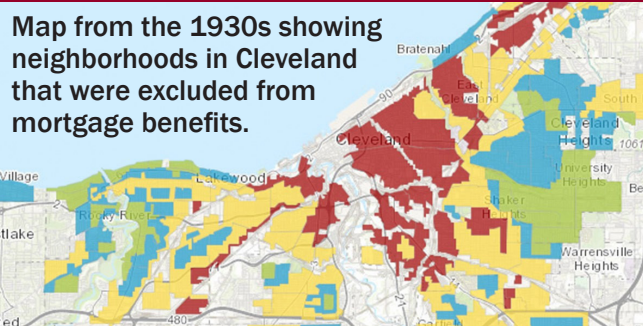
Fighting for Digital Inclusion

Camila has ideas for how she can help her community. She wants to help them build *digital resilience* to adapt to the digital world. She uses her language and culture to create resources that other immigrant families and individuals can use. She shares information about the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), which makes it possible for people to apply for low-cost internet and devices.

Camila is a special person in her community. She cares about others and works hard to help everyone. She is learning more about digital inclusion so her community can be part of a digital society. Camila is helping her community bridge the *digital divide*.

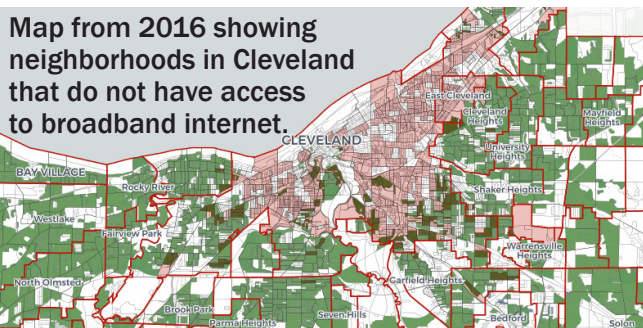
AFTER YOU READ:

1. What digital skills does Camila have?
2. What is the problem in Camila's neighborhood? And how is Camila helping her community?
3. Go to bit.ly/tcudev or scan the QR code with your phone to practice the vocabulary from the story.
4. Explore these resources:
 - Learn more about technology at the Digital Skills Library: <https://digitalskillslibrary.org/>
 - Choose a computer for your accessibility needs at AbilityNet: <https://abilitynet.org.uk/news-blogs/how-choose-computer-your-accessibility-needs>
 - Find non-profits that refurbish computers at AFTRR: <https://aftrr.org/map-locator/>
 - Find an affordable computer at PCs for People: <https://www.pcsforpeople.org/get-tech/>
 - Find low-cost offers for internet in your area at EveryoneOn: <https://www.everyoneon.org/find-offers> and getinternet.gov.



As part of the New Deal in the 1930s, the Federal Housing Authority (FHA) offered aid to people to buy homes. However, it was mostly white people who benefited from this aid. The FHA thought it was too risky to loan money to Black people. The neighborhoods marked in red are where mostly Black people lived. The FHA refused to offer them these subsidized loans. This practice was called "redlining." Read more at <https://www.history.com/news/housing-segregation-new-deal>.

Source: Case Western University, retrieved from <https://www.communitysolutions.com/access-denied-impact-clevelands-digital-divide-students/>



Big internet companies are more likely to provide high quality internet access to wealthier communities. Communities with fewer economic resources have less access to fast internet, and so they have less access to all the resources available online. This is called "digital redlining." The area in red on this map is where more than 35% of the people live in poverty. There is little access to high speed internet in these neighborhoods.

Source: <https://www.digitalinclusion.org/blog/2017/03/10/atts-digital-redlining-of-cleveland/>

Rachel Riggs is a Technical Advisor for the EdTech Center @ World Education, where she supports projects that help teachers and learners use technology. She works from her home in Augusta, Georgia. Before her job at World Education, Rachel taught English to Speakers of Other Languages for ten years.

Connectivity for All

All People, Documented or Not, Should Have Affordable Internet Access

LaKeisha Davis Ed.S.

BEFORE YOU READ: How does internet access make a difference in your life?

A Government Program Designed to Make the Internet More Affordable

For millions of Americans who are undocumented immigrants, the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) provides access to affordable broadband service. Unfortunately, undocumented individuals sometimes shy away from government programs like the ACP and have challenges accessing these vital services. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) should make sure that undocumented immigrants feel safe accessing ACP benefits, which could improve their quality of life.

How Does It Work?

The FCC set up the ACP program to help close the “digital divide.” The digital divide refers to the gap in technology access between those who have more income and those in poverty. This gap can affect individuals’ ability to find jobs, learn new skills, complete school assignments, and connect with family members. A household is eligible for the Affordable Connectivity Program if the household income is at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (see chart on next page) or if it is receiving assistance from another government program. The benefit provides a discount on internet service and a discount on purchasing a device. The ACP program helps families afford the broadband service necessary for work, school, and healthcare opportunities, which is critical in today’s society.



Some May Feel Reluctant

Although the ACP is designed to help everyone, undocumented immigrants might feel nervous about using it. This reluctance is not surprising when you consider what some lawmakers say. For example, Nathan Simington, a member of the Federal Communications Commission, wrote that he was concerned about undocumented immigrants participating in the ACP. He said that their inclusion would be “another avenue for waste, fraud, and abuse.” He demanded that people using the ACP give their Social Security number to enroll, thus disqualifying undocumented individuals from receiving services.

In addition, Simington makes accusations without evidence that undocumented families will not pay their bills and will leave service providers on the hook. Such hostile words about undocumented people could make it hard for many families to seek the assistance they need.

Make the Program More Accessible

For this reason, we must take steps to ensure undocumented immigrants feel safe accessing the ACP and similar benefits. Local officials should increase community outreach to educate immigrant families about public programs. They should employ trusted community leaders to provide workshops that explain how families can apply for services. Also, local leaders should make materials available in multiple languages and hire translators to communicate information to non-English speakers. There should be social media campaigns and ads in public places that help explain the resources available. These efforts could give undocumented immigrants more access to life-changing resources.

Participation Without Fear

Ultimately, if the goal is to break the cycle of poverty, undocumented immigrants must have equal access. The ACP is a step in the right direction for our society. It is a vital step towards universal and equitable internet connectivity, but we can do more. We can make sure that undocumented immigrants feel safer about participating in programs that will improve their lives. Participation in the ACP and similar services can begin to break the cycle of poverty that low-income families face, and it improve the quality of life for everyone in our society. To promote connectivity for all, we should lead with empathy and compassion instead of fear.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. According to the author, who should have affordable internet access? Do you agree? Why or why not?
2. Visit <https://www.fcc.gov/acp> to find out more about the Affordable Connectivity Program. Consider applying. Tell others about the ACP.
3. Make a flyer or a presentation about how to apply to the ACP and share it with others in your program.

Federal Poverty Level

In 2023, the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) is as follows:

Family Size	Annual Income	200%
1	\$14,580	
2	\$19,720	
3	\$24,860	
4	\$30,000	
Each additional	\$5,140	

Source: <https://povertylevelcalculator.com/>. Calculate 200% of the FPL and add it to the chart above.

How is the Federal Poverty Level determined? It is based on a formula that government officials created back in the 1960s. Is it a good way to measure poverty? Research it to find out more. <https://prospect.org/day-one-agenda/rethinking-the-poverty-measure/>

Sources:

FCC Commissioner Targets Undocumented Immigrants
<https://progresschamber.org/fcc-commissioner-targets-undocumented-immigrants/>

STATEMENT OF COMMISSIONER NATHAN SIMINGTON APPROVING IN PART, CONCURRING IN PART
<http://progresschamber.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Statement-of-FCC-Commissioner-Simington-on-ACP.pdf>

How Federal and State Leaders Can Reach Immigrants and Build Their Trust in the Safety Net
<https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/how-federal-and-state-leaders-can-reach-immigrants-and-build-their-trust-safety-net>

Affordable Connectivity Program
<https://www.fcc.gov/acp>

LaKeisha Davis is an educational reformer, writer, and speaker on education equity and inclusion. She is an ELA teacher in Augusta, Georgia, and she is currently pursuing her PhD in education. She is a Georgia girl, a lover of great food, a literary enthusiast, and a passionate advocate for culturally responsive education.



Technology in My Life

Svetlana Burenina

BEFORE YOU READ: Read the title and the headings in the article. Notice the pictures. What do you think this article will be about?

First: A Scary Vacuum and a Russian Abacus

My first encounter with technology was in my childhood. It was a scary vacuum cleaner. It seemed like a huge loud monster, and I hid from it under the table.

I also remember the tool that my mother used in her accounting work. It was a strange metal device. She turned levers and twisted a knob, and the strange thing moved and tinkled. I was delighted. This shiny black device beckoned to me. I knew only two other items with handles, a meat grinder and a sewing machine. This device was not like them. My mother called it an Arithmometer. She used it for counting and calculating. My young brain did not understand. To me, it looked magical! I played with it as long as I could. It was heavy, so my mom rarely brought it home. But whenever she did, I liked to twist the handle and hear the clanging sound.

Then: Science Fiction and Early Computers

In my youth, I loved to read science fiction. I admired the worlds created by Isaac Asimov. They were inhabited by technology and robots. Space ships traveled between stars, and intelligent

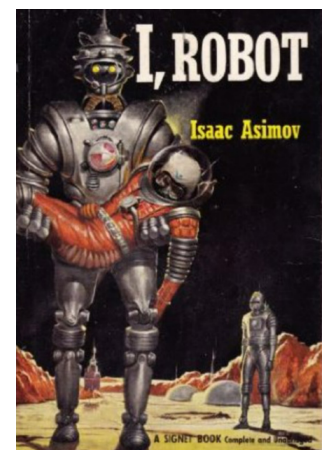


machines had human sensitivities! It seemed fantastic and yet real. I wanted to live in those worlds. It seemed like a close and possible future!

When I went to university, large computers already existed. We studied simple programming languages, such as Basic and Fortran. We wrote lines of commands on paper and gave them to assistants who transferred them to punch cards, which were then inserted into a huge computer, the size of a house.

When I graduated from the university, I went to work at a research institute in the automation department. It was an emerging line of work. We were young engineers, and we were the only ones who could use the computer for work. While other departments did everything the old-fashioned way, by hand, we pushed buttons and got beautiful machine-made results. Several years of my life passed during the development of modern technologies, and my skills also evolved. Those years were amazing! We grew up together!

Now it is difficult to imagine life without computers. They are everywhere. We use them for study, work, communication, and entertainment. They manage production, launch spaceships, watch the seabed, and assist in surgery, among many other things. We live in a world of dynamic technology. It grows and develops to meet our needs.





Above left, two women work at a main frame computer, circa 1969. Photo by arbyreed on Flickr. Creative Commons 2.0. Above right, a person uses a laptop to attend class by Zoom. Bottom left (p. 28) a Russian Arithometer.

Now: An Electronic Brain in Every Device

When the pandemic began, computers and the internet became a lifebuoy for humanity. In long-term isolation, they helped us to stay connected to others, keep working, and be safe.

Today my life is inextricably linked with technology. In the morning the phone wakes me up, breakfast is prepared for me by an automatic cooker, and a smart car takes me to work. The computer is waiting for me in the office and helps me to do my tasks. Almost every device has an electronic brain. I have continued to develop my skills to use these devices. Whether it is learning what buttons to press on an air fryer or how to operate a video meeting through Zoom, I have had a lot to learn.

Technology Helps Me Do More

Today I have a new profession. I am a mental health counselor. I conduct most of my meetings online, and it doesn't seem strange anymore. It has become a regular thing for us. My home is now in the U.S., and I study English online at Holyoke Community College (HCC), which has opened a new door in my life.

At HCC, I got the chance to practice my language skills, which increased my confidence.

I also received more opportunities through this community college for other training and scholarships that are very useful for career and personal development. This may not sound like much to others, but to me, this has opened my eyes. Technology has helped me acquire a new sense of freedom, expand my knowledge, and build my own future.

In the famous words of Teddy Roosevelt, which I so often use with my clients, "Do what you can, with what you have, where you are." Technology helps me do more with what I have, where I am.

AFTER YOU READ: How has the author used technology in her life? Write a short memoir of your life, describing the role of technology in it.

Svetlana Burenina is a student in the ESL class at Holyoke Community College in Holyoke, MA. She moved to the U.S. from Russia in 2020. She works as a mental health counselor with Russian-speaking people. Her goal is to improve her English and become a licensed social worker. In addition, she takes classes to develop her computer skills.



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A small selection of the themes we have covered:

