



745 S 9th St Lincoln NE 68508 • 402.476.7323 • info@lincolnliteracy.org • www.lincolnliteracy.org

A 501(c)(3) Nonprofit

Uniting Our Community with English Language Literacy for All Summer 2018

Board of Directors

Officers:

President

David Williams

First Vice President

Janet Eskridge

Second Vice President

Kelly Neill

Secretary

Mike Eppel, M.D.

Treasurer

Dave Barnhouse

Directors at Large:

Herita Akamah

Qian Cheng

Janet Eskridge

Sanela Ganic

Jane Renner Hood

James Hoppe

Beverly Jester

John Jorgensen

Pat Leach

Evan Littrell

Cynthia Martinez

John McCarthy

Virginia Nelson

Lance Odom

Marlene Perkins

Daryoush Razavian

Takako Sato

Tana Wagener

Greg Walklin

Diane Wilson

In This Issue

Mayor's Award Winner 1

Sailing into a New Future 1

Giving Back to America 2

Help Us Grow our Future 2

Winners, Every One 3

Summer Family Literacy 4

A Yezidi Genocide Survivor, Refugee Earns Mayor's Award

It may not have reached the scale of the Nazi Holocaust inflicted on the Jews, but to the ancient Yezidi tribe of Iraq, it was just as horrific. In August 2014, ISIS launched a murderous campaign against helpless Yezidis in their homeland region in northern Iraq.

More than 3,000 Yezidis were slaughtered, many in gruesome ways. Those not cut down in the initial assault fled to the rugged slopes of Mount Sinjar, where thousands more, mostly children, died of thirst, heat, and starvation.

The genocide provoked international reaction, including air strikes against ISIS by allied forces and a rescue attempt. Aided by Iraqi Kurds, a safe-passage corridor was opened, whereby hundreds of thousands of Yezidis escaped -- but not before at least 10,000 had perished.

Khani Sharo and her husband Naif are among



Khani Sharo (left) accepts Mayor's Award from Councilman Eskridge.

the lucky ones who escaped. They were granted refugee entry to the U.S. in 2016. They've made good use of their time since — especially Khani.

See "Mayors Award," p. 3.

Through Stormy Waters, Lincoln Literacy Sails a Clear Path



Ask any old salt: The most risky, foolhardy, and inaccurate way to navigate is to go by dead reckoning. At times, however, though the way ahead be stormy and dark, there's no turning back. On you must sail, using your last known position, your momentum, your wits, and all your remaining resources to make headway,

however hard-won she may be.

But enough about Ron Howard's 2015 film "In the Heart of the Sea" (pictured at left).

What's ahead for Lincoln Literacy? Much abides, yet there's no gainsaying that much has changed. Having seen change coming, we are steering toward a bright and productive future.

For decades, the centerpiece of our services has been helping refugees and immigrants learn English and adapt to life in our community. That kept us plenty busy. In 2016, Nebraska led the nation in per capita refugee resettlement, with more than 1,500 new arrivals, many of them in Lincoln. In 2017, however, refugee resettlement in the U.S. fell by two-thirds, and this year it has fallen steeply again.

Lincoln in particular has seen a sharp drop.

See "Stormy Seas," p. 2.

If You Can Read This, You Can Surely Help!

Lincoln Literacy depends on volunteer tutors to get the job done. We offer training and support to the volunteers who teach our students. Both tutors and learners report satisfaction levels above 95%. For more info, click "Get Involved" on our website, www.lincolnliteracy.org.

Giving Back to Her New Country, With Heart & Skill

When Lincoln Literacy launched its 10-hour-per-week “R Block” classes last fall, the need for volunteer tutors was as intense as the classes themselves. One of those who answered the call was herself a relative newcomer to the country. Though she doubted her own English ability, Raida al-Hammadi threw herself into the challenge, volunteering all 10 hours per week.

Along the way, she showed such care and dedication that in a strong field she won this year’s Judy Ellingson Award for Excellence in Tutoring. Subsequently, former tutor Emma Williams interviewed Raida. Here are lightly edited excerpts:

What was your life like in Iraq?

“I graduated from the Baghdad Institute of Technology in Engineering Drawing in 1975 and started working in a government ministry. In 1980, the dictator Saddam Hussein became president in Iraq. That same year, to make things worse, war broke out with Iran. “Shortly after that war, Saddam brutally invaded Kuwait, causing the United Nations to place an embargo on Iraq as

a punishment. The embargo hurt Iraqis, who had to live in very poor conditions, but not Saddam, who was able to build many palaces while the vast majority of Iraqis could not buy medicine, food, or clothes.

“In 2003 the US invaded Iraq. Iraqis felt hope that the US would remove Hussein and things would be better, but instead the new people put into power in the Iraqi government were far worse than the notorious dictator. I lost hope that Iraq would be peaceful and safe again, so I decided to seek a better life in a democratic country.”

What do you like about living in America?

“I enjoy the green scenery, the beautiful trees, and my favorite place in Lincoln is the Sunken Gardens! I have wonderful friends. I enjoy working with the teachers and the staff at Lincoln Literacy. It has been a good experience to tutor here. I have learned a lot and enjoy encouraging the students to be successful English speakers and become volunteers at Lincoln Literacy, too.”

What have you done at Lincoln Literacy?

“I’ve tutored beginners and advanced English learners. I also helped as a scorekeeper at the scrabble tournament.”

What do you want to be doing in five years?

“I hope to continue working with Lincoln Literacy, but also I would like to travel in America and visit the other states.”



That’s because most of the refugees scheduled for resettlement here come from Iraq, where new security screening



♦ Charting a Clear Course through Stormy Seas

Continued from Page 1

procedures have proven virtually insurmountable. Lincoln Literacy and Southeast Community College, our partner in refugee English language services, have had just a handful of new refugees to serve this year.

But that’s not to say we are becalmed. On the contrary, in 2017 we hit a new record for total clients served, and our numbers this year continue to be robust. Through June 30th, we have served 726 adults, along with 124 of their children. That’s 73% of the total for all of 2018. At this pace, we might set a new record.

How can that be? Simple. There’s plenty of need for literacy services in Lincoln, and what’s more, those needs are evolving.

Young families in Lincoln are falling into poverty, because so many young adults lack sufficient skills to earn a decent living. That skills gap threatens the health and prosperity

of our community. Lincoln Literacy is rapidly developing new capacities to meet emerging needs. Our board took a first step in revising the mission statement to put strengthening our community first, through language teaching and a **variety** of literacy services.

We started last year by introducing financial literacy into our lineup. This spring, we pushed blended learning — the combination of personal tutoring and online learning — into the mix at many sites. This fall, we plan to launch a new “Readers and Writers” GED prep workshop, in partnership with The Hub.

We’ll also initiate workshops in information literacy, aimed at helping people make best use of online information and avoid scams and other pitfalls. Furthermore, in tandem with Bryan Health, we aim to start a nursing aide prep program later this fall. Full sail ahead!

Help Us Build Our Fund for the Future: Leave a Legacy for Literacy!

You can designate a life insurance policy, set a portion or a percentage of your estate, or look into a charitable annuity to help LL into the future. Contact us for details.

You can also support our present-day work by making a tax-deductible donation online at: lincolnliteracy.org

◆ Mayor’s Award

Continued from Page 1

Prior to joining family literacy classes at Belmont Elementary/Educare, she’d had no schooling in her life. “I didn’t know anything,” Khani said. “I didn’t even know how to write my own name.” But she made up ground fast in the weekday morning classes this spring. In just four months, she learned two years’ worth of English. Attending the joint LPS-Lincoln Literacy classes five days a week, she missed just once, and that was only because her three-year-old daughter Valentine was sick. Lincoln Literacy tutor Lori Neitschmann co-taught Sharo’s class along with Renee Cox. Neitschmann said Sharo was very quiet in the beginning but eventually blossomed. “She’s a very determined young woman who tries so hard and listens so intently,” Neitschmann said. That determination, and her remarkable progress, led to Khani Sharo being selected for the 2018 Mayor’s Award for Language and Literacy Achievement. She received it from Councilman Carl Eskridge. Remarkably, in accepting the award, Khani was able to read from a hand-written statement she’d composed to thank her teachers. “It was really very fulfilling to watch her grow,” Cox said. “Khani and her husband want to contribute to life in the fullest, while also being able to provide for their daughter.”



Khani Sharo, at right, holds her award beside Learner of the Year Adoula Haji.

Her coteacher agrees. “She’s really an amazing person to get to know,” Neitschmann said. “I’m just so proud of her.” In an interview for this story, Khani said both she and her husband will continue attending Lincoln Literacy classes so that they can keep on improving. “I can learn English, I can write, and I can read,” she remarked. “I feel so happy.”

Beyond the Awards, Broad-Scale Success

Over the past year, 216 of our adult English language learners underwent post-instructional testing. We aim to see at least 80% of them show measurable improvements on standardized Basic English Skills Test. In that period, however, 83% did. Of those, nearly 70% advanced by a level or more on the BEST. This is just one dimension of success. At least as important are the gains in confidence, motivation, and knowhow that blossom under the care our volunteer tutors. To gain insight into those, we survey both our tutors and our students. The most recent surveys, conducted in May, are consistent with others of recent years: Our students gave tutors a 97% rating, and with pleasing symmetry, 97% of our tutors said they found their volunteer experience rewarding. So, with a snappy salute to all the learners and tutors of the past year, here is the full line-up of award-winners recognized at our June 23 Annual Awards Ceremony and Luncheon:

- ◆ Raida al-Hammadi, Judy Ellingson Award
Honorable Mention: Joan Dietrich
- ◆ Lano Needham, Lois Poppe Award
Honorable Mention: Sandra Johnson
- ◆ Penny Greer & Mary Nefsky, Tutoring Team of the Year
- ◆ Dennis King, Tutor of the Year
- ◆ Ibtisam Shekh, Student Leadership Award
Honorable Mention: Nali Iwanaga

- ◆ Khani Sharo, Mayor’s Award for Language & Literacy
Honorable Mention: Zinah al-Araji
- ◆ Adoula Haji, Learner of the Year
- ◆ Gabriela Acuna, Little Learner of the Year
- ◆ Olsson Associates, Champion of Literacy
- ◆ Diane Wilson, Distinguished Board Service
- ◆ Rik Minnick, Distinguished Staff Service
Honorable Mention: Ngoc Tran



The great hall at Grace Lutheran was packed for our 2018 Awards Luncheon.



745 South 9th Street
Lincoln, NE 68508
402.476.7323
info@lincolnliteracy.org
www.lincolnliteracy.org

**Our mission: to strengthen
our community by teaching
the English language and a
variety of literacy skills to
people of all cultures.**

**Join us, won't you?
Go to lincolnliteracy.org,
and click "Get Involved."**

Lincoln Literacy is proud
to be affiliated with:



**And to all our grantors,
donors, and volunteers:**



Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Lincoln, NE
Permit 353

Return Service Requested

At Schools & Library, Family Literacy Enlivens Summer

Thanks to our tutors, our partners at LPS and the Lincoln City Libraries, and United Way, we were able to offer summer family literacy classes for New Americans at several different times and locations this summer. Pictured below left, refugee parents from Burma meet with tutors on Saturdays at McPhee Elementary, where their children attend. At right, United Way volunteers read a story to children at our program at Bennett Martin Library, and then the children gleefully act out a story of their own. Rounding out the family literacy summer lineup, we also offered classes Monday and Wednesday mornings at Culler Middle School, Tuesday and Thursday evenings at Park Middle School, and Saturday mornings at Grace Lutheran Church.



Find us on Facebook: www.facebook.com/LincolnLiteracy ... and Instagram! www.instagram.com/lincolnliteracy