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Thanksgiving Exposes Hardships But an Abundance of Gratitude, Too

This will be the most expensive Thanksgiving ever, according to the American Farm Bureau. The people Lincoln Literacy serves feel the pain of rising prices. So far, rising wages have not offset inflation, forcing many parents to work overtime or multiple jobs to keep going.

Our ongoing survey on jobs shows that a fifth of our adult students work 40 or more hours per week, but 82% say they don't yet earn enough to live on. This accords with the findings of Lincoln Public Schools, where 47% of children qualify for free or cut-price lunches, up from 46% five years earlier. The arrival of hundreds fleeing the Taliban only deepens the need. Despite an abundance of job-openings, without language, literacy, and other skills, the people we serve cannot escape poverty.

Yet, however hard their lives may



With help from Lincoln Literacy, Afghan refugees are learning a new language and way of life.

be, Lincoln Literacy students are overwhelmingly grateful. Recently arrived Afghan refugees, pictured above, express their thanks daily. So, too, our long-term students: In a survey at the end of last schoolyear, 99% expressed satisfaction with our services. "I like

Cont. on page 2

Standout Refugee from Burma Now a Citizen

In October, Kler Say Gay passed the multi-section United States citizenship exam given in Omaha.

It's another milestone added to what is becoming a pile of them. Just six short years ago she arrived in Lincoln -- a

refugee with little spoken English ability and no means of making a living.

Today, she is fluent in English and is on the brink of graduating from the Bryan College of Health Sciences Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) program, which became available to her through Lincoln Literacy.

It's been a long road to reach this moment, Kler said.

She was born in a refugee camp in Thailand. During her childhood, Kler and her family rotated in and out of several, often moving because of fires in the area. Her four sisters were each born in different places.

"We cannot go outside the camp,

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Kler Say Gay poses near a medical mannequin during one of her CNA classes at Bryan College.

One Year Later: An Update on Norman Brewer

Some of you may remember Norman Brewer from last year's holiday Word on the Street insert. Recently, several staff were delighted to see him in our office registering for class again.

Norman already faced challenges, which the pandemic only worsened. Abused as a child, he ran away from home when he was 10. The streets of Omaha taught him how to steal, drink, and do drugs, which led to foster homes, institutions, and even the state penitentiary.

Life's been better for Norman since he started learning with Lincoln Literacy. Working on his reading and writing has given him a chance to get his passionate words down in print. He hopes that sharing his life of adversity will prevent others from making the same mistakes.



Norman Brewer is determined to keep moving upward and hopes to share his life's story with the world.

Seeing him again, wearing a bright smile in the morning sun, gave us hope that he was succeeding. He said he was returning to Lincoln Literacy to try to finish his book.

"Lincoln Literacy gives me the opportunity to learn to read and write," he said.

Lincoln Literacy will match Norman with a one-on-one tutor to help him finish writing his book, maybe even turn his life story into a play. His intention is to help others gain strength from his misfortune. Smart and sincere, Norman has a burning desire to share his story, and Lincoln Literacy is going to do everything it can to help him achieve that goal.

To sign up for our training and become a tutor to Norman or someone very much like him, contact Joyce Hahn at jhahn@lincolnliteracy.org. Or consider a year-end gift by going to www.lincolnliteracy.org or mailing a check to 745 S. 9th Street Lincoln, NE 68508.

Thanksgiving Message from Lincoln Literacy, cont. from page 1

everything about the class," wrote one. Our students know that crossing the Bridgeway to a Better Life takes more than language ability. "Before this [class] I didn't know anything about math, but now I'm learning."

With support from Woods Charitable Fund and many others, we've added more skill-building opportunities than ever since last Thanksgiving. Teacher Prep

gained a junior partner in Paraeducator Prep. Three Para Prep "grads" have been hired by Lincoln Public Schools. What's more, two of our Teacher Prep students returned to a role in the classroom as paraeducators. They are thrilled to be back in the classroom while continuing to prepare for the next steps: teacher preparation exams.

We've added a driver's instruction class, ranging all the way up to assisting Russian-speaking truck drivers to learn the rules of the road.

We, in turn, are thankful to all those who volunteer to instruct Afghans arriving daily in our community -- and to those who volunteer to drive them to clinics for vaccination or help them move into an apartment. We appreciate the volunteer tutors in all our classes. We're thankful to the hard-working staff who have adapted, time and again, to the changes forced on us by the pandemic.

We're grateful to the many donors and sponsors who have kept us going through challenging times. The spirit of Thanksgiving burns bright in Lincoln.



Staff and board members break bread together at a local park.

From Turmoil to Tranquility in Lincoln

Humanitarian Crisis in Venezuela Causes Couple to Flee to United States

Jose Corredor and his wife, Nelida Moreno, were headed for a wonderful retirement. For decades, he served as a professor of forestry engineering at a leading university in Venezuela. Nelida, who holds a master's in linguistics, was head of research publications there.

Then, political catastrophe rocked their country. According to the Council on Foreign Relations, "Venezuela is the archetype of a failed petrostate. ...President Nicolas Maduro and his allies have violated basic tenets of democracy to maintain power."

Once rich, Venezuela now faces "a devastating humanitarian crisis, with severe shortages of basic goods such as food, drinking water, gasoline, and medical supplies." It hit home. When he and Nelida retired, their pension was set



Their dream of retirement is gone, but Jose and Nelida remain grateful.

at \$12 per month. Inflation was running at 6,500%.

"We couldn't survive," Jose recalls.

Fortunately, the couple have a daughter living in Lincoln. She was able to sponsor them for green cards. As soon as they got here, Jose and Nelida enrolled in our English classes. They attend faithfully.

"I thank God every day that I found Lincoln Literacy," Jose says.

Now 78, he is determined to find a job and earn a living for the couple. To do that, he knows he must master English and gain an understanding of how things are done here. Lincoln Literacy helps with all that and more.

"You are like guardian angels to us -- not just Nelida and me, but everyone who comes to class. You change the lives of all who reach you," he said.

Kler Say Gay Passes Citizenship Exam, cont. from page 1

because we don't have a green card," she said, adding that conditions were much better for local Thais.

"But inside the camp, bamboo houses and tents," she continued.

Kler arrived in Lincoln in September 2015. On her second day in Lincoln, she began improving the English she had started learning in Thailand. She was put in touch with Lincoln Literacy by

Catholic Social Services of Southern Nebraska, which also provided a place to live. Her first classes were at First Presbyterian Church.

In addition to her two children, aged 4 and 3, six members of her family live in the United States, she said: Her parents, sisters and an older relative she considers a member of the family and calls "Grandpa." Two sisters

already work at Lincoln Family Medical Center. The youngest is a senior at Lincoln High School, planning to attend Southeast Community College after graduation.

After progressing through Lincoln Literacy's CNA preparatory class, Kler moved on into the Bryan College CNA classes, where she is doing well, she said. The state certification exam is in December.

To help Kler across the finish line to her goals, LL tutor Kathy Karsting, herself a registered nurse, continues to meet with her.

"After I graduate from CNA, maybe I want to go volunteer some place," she said, adding she plans to rely on Lincoln Literacy's Job Mentor program for help.

"I think working at Bryan Health would be good," she said.



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Family Literacy Program Uses All of Lincoln as a Classroom

After a year of nothing but online lessons, FLAIR, the family literacy class led by teacher Erica Birky Rios, had a blast during the summer meeting in public parks. To keep the in-person engagement going while remaining safe from COVID-19, Birky Rios has organized weekly field trips for the United-Way funded program to notable Lincoln sites ever since.

Birky Rios took family groups to the historic Haymarket (July 14), the architecturally unique State Capitol (July 21), the University of Nebraska-Lincoln East Campus Larsen Tractor Museum and Dairy Store (July 28), Union Plaza and downtown Lincoln (Aug. 6), and, most recently, on Nov. 7, they visited the Nature Center in Pioneers Park.

The outings show new Nebraskans what Lincoln has to offer and help them feel



Erica Birky Rios (bottom left) said successful gathering in local parks led to a plan to get out into the community.

more comfortable in their new community.

In June, the group had met from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. every Wednesday at Cooper and Peter Pan parks.

Birky Rios said which park was used alternated so that travel time for participants would be fair. With hands-on help from Lincoln City Libraries and Art Bus LNK, “ABC’s in the Park” featured storytime, free books and hygiene items, snacks,

By the Numbers

- 37 children & 25 adults attended ABC’s in the Park & Field Trips
- 8 Covid-19 safe outdoor events, 16 hrs of programming events
- 61 summer class sessions
- 25 classes for all ages
- 18 afternoon classes for ages 2 to 5
- 18 afternoon classes for ages 5 to 12

as well as art and projects.

Twenty-six children and 20 adults attended ABC’s in the Park, with many families attending multiple events. The unvaccinated wore masks and social distancing was carefully observed.

Said Birky Rios: “I wanted to give kids who had been so isolated the chance to get together in a safe outdoor environment, to just play, have fun, and take joy in stories.”

With a Little Help, Refugee at Last Reclaims Her Profession

Aurora Tubella served long years as an accountant in her native Cuba. Then, in 2013, she and her family made it to Nebraska as refugees from the oppressive communist regime. Though liberating, the move did not mean an end to hardship. For eight years, Aurora cut meat in Nebraska's sprawling packing plants and did other menial work to support her family.

"I always had a knife in my hand," she said. "It was really hard times. I used to only use a knife in the kitchen sometimes. It was so hard. I cry after my shift."

The whole time, she yearned to get back to her profession. To do it, she had to become fluent in English, and much more. In Cuba, she performed accounting by hand on ledger sheets. To be an accountant in America, she had to learn accounting software -- and for that she needed a laptop, a mentor, and a lot of encouragement.

Aurora credits Lincoln Literacy for providing those, as well as helping her over the last hurdles.

"I will never forget you," she says, "It was a great experience finding people so nice and so caring. Always saying, 'Hey, don't give up. Keep going.'"

The journey was made all the more arduous by the COVID-19 pandemic. When Aurora first came to Lincoln Literacy, she had already made great progress in learning English, but other roadblocks stood in her way. She met with Associate Director for Adult Skills Renee Cox, who introduced her to Executive Director Clayton Naff.

"As Aurora told me her story," Naff recalls, "tears rolled down her cheeks. She was embarrassed, but she needn't have felt any shame.



Aurora Tubella poses next the sign that marks her return to her chosen profession.

Like millions of others, she just wanted a better life for her family. I promised her that we would help her attain that."

Naff introduced her to board member and tutor Diane Wilson, who is herself a CPA. Wilson listened carefully to Aurora's account of her experience as an accountant in Cuba and then mapped out for her the route to regaining her profession in America. Among other things, this involved learning Quickbooks and other professional software. Lincoln Literacy equipped her with a Chromebook, and Aurora was off.

The first interviews were difficult. "Usually people don't read all of a resume, and my accounting jobs were being left behind," she said, crediting Cox with keeping her pumped up and excited for interviews.

"I remember I had an interview one time, she told me, hey, feel like you're an important person. Like you're in a play. So I tried to play that game," she said, and then added, with a laugh: "And it didn't work either, that time."

But soon that advice paid off. She started working at Money Smarts on June 1 of this year. "It's an opportunity for me to have

my dreams come true," she said. "They're awesome people. Very kind. Always trying to help me to fit into their team."

After so much hardship, things are finally going well. Aurora recently became a U.S. citizen. Her 20-year-old son is studying business administration at community college, and her youngest son is doing well in fifth grade.

Taking stock, she beams: "I'm not so bad in English, I have my bachelors degree, now I am an American citizen, so, I say to myself, 'No problem.'"

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Others Like Aurora Thrive:
MAKE A YEAR-END GIFT
www.lincolnliteracy.org



Our Charity Navigator Rating

LINCOLN
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Thanks for Making Dreams Come True!

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Dave & Maruta Barnhouse

Margaret & Ken Donlan

Mike and Karen Hays

Linda Hillegass

Ellen Claire Newcomer

John & Nancy Wiederspan

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Chris & Joseph Stone

Gail & James Linderholm

Janet & Carl Eskridge

Kari & Tom Beckenhauer

Diane Wilson & Kay Richter

Clayton Naff &

Tari Hendrickson

Daryoush & Mahvand

Razavian

Pat Leach

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