



Uniting Our Community Through Communication

*Lincoln Literacy Council's Mission:
 To assist people of all cultures
 and strengthen our community
 by teaching English language
 and literacy skills.*

Tutor Helps Reunite Couple Divided by Civil War

By Katie O'Neal, AmeriCorps Member

When Nyamock Teny asked Lincoln Literacy tutor Barb Johnson Frank to help her understand a letter from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration two years ago, neither realized it would be a turning point in the long struggle to reunite a family.

Barb Johnson Frank began tutoring at Lincoln Literacy Council in 2007 after her retirement from teaching at Lincoln Public Schools. Recalling that she was "eager to work alongside the diverse group of world citizens that I had come to know at Elliott School," Barb volunteered to assist with a Sudanese Women's English Class through Lincoln Literacy Council. "It was in this first class that I met Nyamock and heard of her long separation from her husband, Bol Ngok."

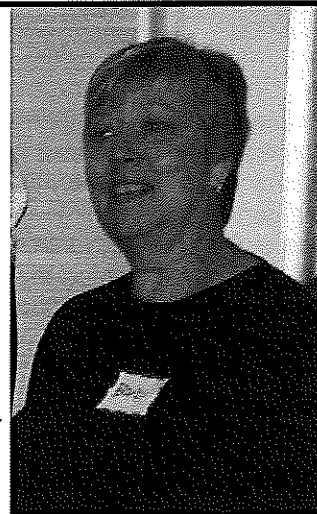
A refugee from Sudan, Nyamock came to the United States in 2000 with the assistance of relatives in Tennessee. Meantime, Bol, separated from his wife by the violence in Southern Sudan, journeyed to Egypt and later Israel while trying to reconnect. Nyamock was able to visit Bol only twice during their nine-year separation and gave birth to two sons in the United States. Inspired by the family's story, Barb Johnson Frank dedicated herself to bringing Bol to the United States.

The process was fraught with difficulties. American immigration guidelines required paperwork that Bol did not have access to, such as a birth certificate and documentation proving "good conduct" from the various countries where Bol

had lived. While many tutors would have given up in the face of these obstacles, Barb collected letters of support from state legislators and sought legal counsel. As a testament to her commitment to reuniting the family, Barb offered to co-sponsor Bol along with his wife Nyamock.

The dedication of tutor and student finally paid off on December 3, 2009, when Bol arrived at Eppley Airfield. He had seen his eldest son, Giet, once as a toddler but had never met his youngest child, Deng.

According to Barb, "the moment was unforgettable." Bol soon enrolled in English classes through Lincoln Literacy and is currently working at Hy-Vee. Nyamock continues to work and improve her English skills. Barb Johnson Frank demonstrated perseverance and dedication to her student but believes that Nyamock deserves recognition. "Family members and friends will not forget her determination and strength during Bol's absence."



Barb Johnson Frank

Help Support Our Programs!

Become an LLC Member!

When you contribute \$25 or more, you qualify for membership benefits such as these:

- ◆ Receive our Newsletters
- ◆ Be Nominated for Annual Awards
- ◆ Attend In-Service Workshops at No Cost
- ◆ Vote at our Annual Meeting

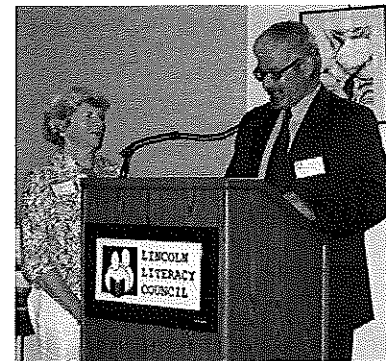
**Please, donate now — online
 or in the enclosed envelope.
www.lincolnliteracy.org**

Winners All Around At Awards Lunch

At the close of a school year filled with personal achievements, new friendships, and fulfilled goals, Lincoln Literacy Council celebrated its outstanding tutors and students on June 21st at the annual Awards Ceremony and Luncheon.

An overflow crowd gathered in Pilgrim Hall at First Plymouth Church (which hosts LLC's English for All classes on Monday mornings). Board President Lance Odom welcomed the audience and told them that although some people would get awards that day, it was an occasion to honor all of the hardworking volunteer tutors and students of LLC.

Mayoral Aide Jon Carlson was there to present the Mayor's Award for Literacy Achievement. It went to Hiba Hemeida, a refugee from Sudan who, in just five years, has gone from knowing no English to being at the top of the scale on the Basic English Skills Test. Carlson congratulated Hemeida and took note of her plans to earn a GED and go on to nursing studies.



Joanie Perry with Clay Naff

Mae Anne Balschweid, who teaches both Burmese and Middle Eastern refugees, was honored with the Tutor of the Year Award for her exceptional dedication to her students. Christina Vuong, a LLC student from Vietnam who served for two years as the students' representative on the board, received a Student Leadership Award.



Mayoral Aide Jon Carlson presents award to Hiba Hemeida



Judy Ellingson Award
Marvin Almy

Lois Poppe Award
Travis Benesch

Tutor of the Year Award
Mae Anne Balschweid

Honorable Mention
Beverly Clark

Tutoring Team of the Year
Barbara Johnson Frank &
Dianne Brown

Lifetime Dedication Award
Joanie Perry

Student Leadership Award
Christina Vuong

Learner of the Year Award
Jean-Paul Muloki

Mayor's Award for
Literacy Achievement
Hiba Hemeida

Honorable Mention
Fadia Abdellatif

Champion of Literacy
Lincoln Benefit Life

Distinguished Service
Esther Ortiz

Certificates of Appreciation
for AmeriCorps Service
Katie O'Neal
Valentina Obafunwa
Karen Schmidt

Board of Directors

- Lance Odom, *President*
- David Bargaen, *First Vice President*
- Kelly Neill, *Second Vice President*
- Tasha Everman, *Secretary*
- Dave Barnhouse, *Treasurer*
- Beverly Austin
- Nikki Bates
- Judy Ellingson
- Carolyn Gregorius
- Brett Harris
- Linda Hoke
- Mary Jane Humphrey
- Kristin Jakub
- Stephen Leeper
- Craig Lowe
- Denise Mainquist
- Cynthia Martinez
- Marlene Perkins
- Sheppard Perkins
- Joanie Perry
- Vicki Powell
- Tonya Vyhldal



Inside This Issue

- Awards 1
- United Way 2
- FLAIR 2
- Tutors' Tales 3
- Tutor Reunites Couple 4

United Way Awards Funding for Child Literacy

After a two-year hiatus, Lincoln Literacy Council has been brought back into the fold of United Way agencies. The United Way of Lincoln and Lancaster County has awarded \$30,000 to LLC in support of its child centered family literacy program for refugees and immigrants. (See story below.)

"This is a wonderful affirmation of the value of our family literacy efforts," Clay Naff, executive director of Lincoln Literacy Council, said.

The funding starts July 1st and, with the support of the public for United Way, will continue for two years. It will enable LLC to grow its Family Literacy Activities for Immigrants and Refugees (FLAIR) program. The target population for this program are the impoverished and culturally isolated children of non-English speaking, immigrant families. However, their parents' participation is just as important.

The 2009 Kids Count report shows that immigrant and refugee children are the fastest-growing youth population in Nebraska, and also the most in need. A staggering 61 percent of them are in poverty. This compares to a poverty rate of 13.4 percent for Nebraska children as a whole. The burden of poverty is compounded by language, literacy, and

cultural barriers. The result is that many children of immigrants enter school with low English vocabulary and little exposure to books, then swiftly fall behind and stay behind their peers.

FLAIR meets the challenge by engaging immigrant and refugee children in afterschool, evening, and weekend literacy classes. The children, mostly between 2 and 7 years old, have a story read aloud to them, followed by comprehension, discussion, and follow-up writing, drawing, or craft activities related to the theme of the story. Meanwhile, their parents receive English language lessons.

Instructors teach children school-readiness behaviors, such as sitting calmly in a circle, taking turns in discussion, learning to raise hands before speaking, sharing, and working in teams on activities. Parents participate in their child's school-readiness activities, including parent-child reading and computer time. LLC provides all children with age-appropriate books, donated by the community, that they can take home and keep. There are parent-child learning enrichment opportunities (LLC partners with the Lincoln Children's Museum and the Lincoln Children's Zoo to provide

mothers and children an opportunity to visit those institutions with their English-language tutors).

United Way and LLC go a long way back. In 2008, however, the relationship hit a stumbling block when United Way's funding criteria changed. At that time, LLC lacked a two-year history of serving children, and so was technically disqualified -- even though the FLAIR program was highly rated during reviews.

United Way officials were very helpful to LLC in finding bridge funding during the period that followed, and FLAIR has built a good track record in the meantime. Expressing his gratitude, Naff said that in a time of steep funding challenges United Way's commitment to LLC is a great opportunity to keep the program moving forward.



FLAIR Lights Up Smiles in Refugee Kids

By Jill Fox, Children's Literacy Coordinator

Many children are naturally shy, but for refugee children the shifting cultural sands under their feet can make speaking up really scary. For two little girls from Burma, Lincoln Literacy Council's Family Literacy Activities for Immigrants and Refugees (FLAIR) program has made a big difference.

'Ahn' [not her real name] arrived in Lincoln as a refugee from Burma in 2009 with her two little daughters in tow. She started taking English classes with Lincoln Literacy Council and during the 2009 - 2010 schoolyear her daughters, aged 3 and 2, took part in the FLAIR program. For the first few months, the preschool girls looked on and would only participate if the teacher pressed them. Now, both girls eagerly come to the table when the "book lady" arrives. A certified ESL teacher (me) and a rotating crew of teacher-education students work with these and other children at this site once a week, introducing a new book and enhancement activity each time.

Both girls have become well-practiced in holding books, turning pages, using crayons and safety scissors, and even connecting ideas and pictures from the books to their own lives. They have gone from shy and quietly curious to eager and outspoken when they hear or see something in a book that they can understand. These school behavior practices and literacy skills will give these refugee children a critical boost when entering Kindergarten in a few years.

The 2009-2010 FLAIR program helped hundreds of children enjoy storytime and reading activities, and get age-appropriate books to take home and keep. It offered about 60 of them the kind of intensive classroom literacy experience described above. Among these, we saw pre-literacy skills improve in about 90% of the preschool-aged children. We also had more than 60 volunteers help with FLAIR, from Nebraska Wesleyan's service learning program, UNL's multicultural education classes and teacher education program, Junior League of Lincoln, and some who were completely unaffiliated, but simply passionate about children's literacy. It's been a great experience for us all. I'll miss it when I pass the torch to my successor later this summer.



Jill and FLAIR kids show off caterpillars.

Tutors' Tales: Sharing Memorable Moments

[Apologies to those we could not fit in. To protect privacy, only first names are used.]

One of my favorite moments with Esta occurred when reviewing her homework. I do a "cloze" exercise where I give her a music CD and an accompanying handout with song lyrics: some words are replaced by blanks for her to fill in. Some of the songs were by African artists who sing in English. "One World" by Remmy Ongala of Tanzania is mostly in English but some lyrics were in an African language. As we reviewed the homework, Esta began telling me what the Swahili lyrics meant. In addition to finding the right words in English to complete the song lyrics homework, Esta also translated some Swahili so that I could understand the entire song. Our meeting then became a genuine cultural exchange rather than just my imparting information to her. That afternoon was just one of many in which I have learned as much or more from Esta as she has from me.

-- Gerise



Bibiana is a sweet young woman from Sudan whom I have tutored for nearly three years. During that time she has moved once, changed jobs and suffered through a serious health scare. While most of our sessions are fun and uplifting, one session was anything but. Bibiana shared with me that a beloved co-worker of hers had died suddenly. It was obvious that she wasn't aware of what she should or could do. I looked in the newspaper to check the time of the memorial service only to find that there wasn't going to be a service. Knowing that Bibiana wanted to do something, I suggested that we use our lesson time to write a letter to the family to tell them how much their loved one had meant to Bibiana. What started as a difficult time turned into something that helped Bibiana with her loss and I am sure was comforting to the family.

-- Carol

Friendships are an important aspect of women's lives all over the world. I have had the experience of a lifetime getting to know someone from Colombia who has become a very dear friend. I began tutoring Luz in conversational English almost two years ago at which time she was very timid. We have met at a coffee shop for an hour almost every week since! The culmination of our communication time together resulted in a luncheon-shopping trip together a few weeks ago. She entered my world, my home, the stores where I shop, and a favorite restaurant. SHE LOVED IT. We talked and laughed. She let me know that she is so much more comfortable about talking in public, on the phone, or with other people around her. I am excited and proud of my newfound friend, Luz. She has benefited greatly from the Lincoln Literacy Tutoring program....but because I volunteered, I have been the recipient of a wonderful multicultural experience and gained a treasured friend.

-- Helen

After teaching with Lincoln Literacy for two years, I'm still amazed and embarrassed at how much I assume my students know. The very nature of survival English allows a tutor great flexibility in developing lesson plans to fit the needs of the students. Yet it took close to a year before I realized that my Burmese students didn't use their ovens and dishwashers; not for lack of having appliances, but because no one had ever shown them how to safely operate them. Never having had stoves, ovens or other electrical appliances while living in Thai refugee camps, these students had a great fear of damaging something or starting a fire. Kathie and I took the whole class to a student's home, where we taught everyone about some basic kitchen and bathroom lessons. We made some apple crisp, which was then cooked in the oven; did the dishes in the dishwasher, and showed them which cleaning products to use to clean the bathroom and the kitchen while we waited for our dessert to finish baking. After class we relaxed and ate our apple crisp while our host demonstrated her beautiful weaving skills. It was a wonderful time of crossing cultural divides and helping these newcomers feel more confident in their new home. The lesson I'm learning is: Never assume!

-- Mae Anne

