Learning English and Following the American Dream
by Wafa Al-Ramah, Yemen, Level 6

The American Dream means freedom, equality and the opportunity to succeed. When I was 16 years old, I was obsessed with the American series “Friends.” I liked seeing how Americans lived their lives, their sense of humor and simplicity. Two years ago, I had a chance to come and live in the United States. Now I live here and see that everything I watched on the series is true. I have met a lot of new people that are kind and helpful, which makes my life better and it easier to follow my American dream. I’m sure this country will help me reach my dream. Now, I am studying English to improve my language to go to college in order to find a good job and better my life. I am sure I will find the support and guidance that I need to continue my dream because this country is the land of opportunity.

Traveling Throughout the United States
by Nathalia Salazar, Colombia, Level 6

Traveling in the Unites States is an amazing experience. I had visited this country before—New York with friends. My image of this country was huge, noisy and busy. A couple of years later, my husband and I decided to visit his family in Wisconsin and then to travel on his father’s motorcycle to California. This experience changed completely my opinion about the United States. We visited beautiful national parks, for example, Badlands and Yellowstone. And, we visited big cities like Chicago and Los Angeles. We also visited small places in what seemed like the middle of nowhere, like Mitchel, South Dakota, where we visited the world’s only corn palace. This palace was built in honor of the healthy agricultural climate of the area. Finally, this trip taught me how diverse and beautiful the United States is and why people love this country so much.

Director’s Corner

The Process of Learning

By Lizzie Liu

Being the director of New Neighbors for the past 8 months has been quite an experience for me. In a nutshell, it has exceeded my expectation. Never have I thought I would have the privilege to work with a group of teachers who are not only highly skilled but also extremely dedicated to the progress of their students. It was also inspiring to stand by the side of the students who are from all over the world but committed to the same goal as English language learners. Being an immigrant myself, I was fortunate enough to be supported by a lot of kindhearted people on my journey in this country despite the challenges. Because of that, I am beyond grateful that this role has given me an opportunity to give back. I’m committed to carry on the mission of building a community welcoming immigrants and refugees with open arms.

In this issue, students share with us the process of learning. We will learn about the struggles they have to face when learning English, we will also hear their happy stories in the classroom. We are so proud to see the progress students have made throughout this academic year. Nothing fills our hearts more than seeing smiling faces of our students when they step into the classroom.
We speak English to communicate our ideas, our concerns, our opinions. The words and structures we choose add to the meaning we wish to communicate. Level 7 students learned about those deeper messages that our words send.

- “Change your thoughts and you change the world.” - Norman Vincent Peale

There is something I believe is true, and I practice it every day. You can’t stop rain, but you can observe how wonderful a rainy day is. You can’t change somebody else’s behavior, but you can stop judging it. You can enjoy finding something amazing around you every day. It might be a very small thing, like the really nice color of a jacket worn by your horrible neighbor. Step by step, you might find you like everything around you and start to change your relationships — not because circumstances have changed, but because you have changed your thoughts. Having practiced this way of thinking has made me happy. Danuta Pawinski-Nowak

I really like this quotation, because if we change our thoughts, we also change our behavior to make the world better. This quotation makes me think about our responsibilities for the Earth and how we introduce ecology into our lives. The first thing I noticed when I came to the U.S. was that a lot of people here care about the environment. There is a lot of consumption and waste. Many Americans don’t think about turning off the lights when they don’t need them or using fewer plastic bags. I believe that if everybody thinks about those actions every day, maybe we can save the Earth -- or just give her more time. Moreover, our class proves that we can all live together even if we are different. You don’t have to agree with everything others think. You just have to accept that others think and behave differently. Everyone makes choices in his or her own life. We have to be tolerant to live together. That’s the real freedom. Hind Boudiaf

- “The owl is the wisest of all birds, because the more it sees the less it talks.” – African proverb

I realized that it’s more important to think and listen rather than to speak. Language is a useful tool, but it’s also a weapon. Sometimes we have different opinions from our families, our partner, our colleagues, or our classmates, especially value differences. These may cause arguments or fights. You may lose your temper and speak something you shouldn’t have said. Words hurt. It can change a person sometimes. Even if you regret saying something, it is not easy to take it back completely. A colleague could lose his or her job by saying something wrong or stupid, especially in a meeting or in public. So I like to ask myself three questions before I speak: Is it the right time to say this? Is it the right occasion to say this? Am I the right person to say this? “How to speak” is an art. It’s easy to open your mouth, but to manage your lips is wisdom. Sally Liu

- “The amount of happiness you have depends on the amount of freedom you have in your heart.” - Thich Nhat Hanh

I think it’s difficult to get the freedom you want in your life, because sometimes you have to take care of someone or something. For example, you may have to take care of your child or your husband, or even yourself. Also, you may have to work for a long time, usually to earn money, which is necessary to make your life easier. When you work, you become less free, and maybe that makes you sad. On the other hand, some people have a lot of money and an easy life, but their hearts feel sad. They are not interested in their lives, so they can’t be happy. Life is a short story. We must show interest in it and believe we can achieve by making our hearts free from any sadness and free from hate towards others. We must show kindness, and we should always remember that more happiness equals a lot of freedom in our hearts. Tamadur Salih

- “I want to sing like the birds sing, not worrying about who hears and or what they think.” – Rumi

I like this quotation because it describes me well when it comes to speaking English. As a language learner, it is important to try to practice speaking. You may make a mistake, but that is how people learn. However, I always feel nervous about making mistakes, and I care about what people think of me making mistakes. It makes me quiet. Joining this English class and seeing classmates put their efforts towards trying to learn as much as they can has made me think it is okay to make mistakes. No one laughs at what you say. I don’t need to be afraid. I’m still struggling, but I would like to move one step forward to change myself. Aoi Yokoda
From Seed to Flower, by Carol Ann Detlef, former instructor

In 2001, Jean Johnson, a former Christ Church member, planted the seed for the New Neighbors English Language Learners Program. Jean dreamed of a program that would not only teach English skills but would also encourage and support immigrants to Northern Virginia to succeed in the United States. Christ Church’s Fowler Parish House was an ideal space for classes during the week. The first five classes were organized into levels beginning to advanced, and childcare was offered. Volunteer teachers were recruited. Using popular textbooks, teachers developed a curriculum focused on the needs of new immigrants: speaking, reading, writing, pronunciation, culture and history. In 2010, New Neighbors became a part of The Campagna Center. The program has blossomed into a highly successful program whose classes are filled by the start of each year. This year, there are 10 classes of 168 students with 49 children in childcare. One full-time director, twenty-five teachers and seven childcare staff currently staff the program. Students in the New Neighbors Program come from over 70 countries around the world. During the year, various community workers and advocates are invited to speak to students on topics such as health care, financial management, computer training and how to work with public school teachers and administrators. Special classes have been offered including a job skills/resume writing seminar and a seminar to help prepare students for the U. S. naturalization test. Family literacy sessions help parents work with their children. A festive celebration marks the end of the school year. Many students wear their native dress. Certificates of accomplishment are presented. Everyone enjoys food brought by the students typical of their home countries. The children sing beautifully. The seed planted in 2001 continues to grow and flower each year, nurtured by the efforts, goodwill, and friendship of hundreds of students and teachers at New Neighbors.

Expressing Opinions in English: Level 4 Students Write Letters to the Editor.

Dear Editor
As a family of Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) we are very pleased for the services provided by Samuel Tucker Elementary School. Five months ago, when we newly registered our children at school in third grade and kindergarten, my children could barely speak English. Now my children speak fluent English and my third grade child received a certificate of independent reader. All the above facts are the proof of the hard work by Samuel W. Tucker teachers and management. They really work hard and with great loyalty, which has impressed us a lot. Recently we heard that the salary for elementary school teachers is not enough and they are hardly making a living. If this is true, we, as an ACPS family, kindly suggest that your organization consider giving a number of monetary awards to teachers as financial incentive to teachers and to encourage them to keep up the good work. In conclusion, we thank ACPS administration for all the services they provide.
Sincerely, Mursal Yousef

Dear Editor
The use of immunization is decreasing in some places of the world, because the parents have doubts about shots. When parents decide not to use immunizations based on personal beliefs, this causes a big problem for the future of many children and may cause many infectious diseases with bad consequences for public health and a country’s economy. The truth is many countries have 95-98% protection against serious infectious diseases when immunizations are used consistently by all. This should be our goal.
Thank you. Erika Munoz Periera
Learning English is a process, not a one class experience. Many of our students stay with us for several years, moving from one level to the next. The process is difficult. One day, you seem practically fluent! The next, you are struggling to complete a sentence. Grammar rules you thought you knew aren’t being used by the native speakers around you. Did you remember them correctly? Or, is this one of those exceptions your teacher told you about! Students in Level 5 share their thoughts about learning this strange new language.

• I hope my English skills are becoming better, but they are not moving as fast as I would like. I think I speak pretty well, although I need a better vocabulary, and sometimes people can’t understand my pronunciation even if I try to speak right. Unfortunately, I have a lot of difficulty understanding what I hear, especially when we are speaking on the telephone. I ask people to speak slower. I like to read out loud to hear my mistakes in pronunciation. Irena Pipikene

• I think my English skills are really improving. I’m speaking more fluently and now I can understand people more and more easily when they speak. I can also read more quickly, but writing is still the hardest because sometimes I forget how some words are written. The best thing is to be able to communicate with people. I hope not to be as slow as a turtle and to learn faster and faster each time I speak. Julia Martin Nogales

• I think my English skills are really improving. It’s been a little hard to learn how to spell some words and pronounce them. I’m more fluent in listening. Listening is easier for me because at work I’m always speaking English. I like to watch different series on NETFLIX. I put headphones on and read the subtitles in English. Oscar Ramirez

• My English skills are improving. Before I came to New Neighbors, I couldn’t write a paragraph. Now I can. I do well with speaking and understanding, but I am still working hard to get better in spelling. It is not easy to write accurately without mistakes, but I am working on it. I hope one day I will become a good writer. Nejuma Sherif

English as a Tool, by Level 6 students

The English language is an important communication tool to be a part of a western community. Communication in the English language can help a person in his or her day to day activities, which makes life easier. For example, you will be able to make a doctor’s appointment, use different modes of transportation and help kids with school lessons. Speaking fluently and confident in the English language will make a person able to get a good job. Manizha Ebadi, Afghanistan. • My English learning experience was very hard in the beginning. I didn’t understand or speak any English. My native language is Spanish and it is very hard to switch. Now I can speak some [English]. I want a better life here and I want to help my children even though it is hard for me. With the help of my family and teachers I will keep going. Leticia Guzman, Mexico. • Learning English is a personal goal. My challenge is to improve my speaking and my pronunciation, but is not easy. Although I studied English a little bit before in college, for a foreigner to communicate in a country where most people speak English is intimidating. However, it has been good to find that in this city there are several options for learning and practicing English. Free classes are in the libraries and in churches there are classes at a low cost. Technology also is very important -- there are apps, videos and web pages that help us to enhance the language. Luz Elrano Avila, Colombia

A Trip to Trader Joes!
Levels A1 and A2

What beginning students need most is supported real world experiences. Levels A1 and A2 went to Trader Joes to identify food, practice reading prices, check out and pay for food items. They also learn how to validate their parking ticket for free parking!
Voice of America, by John Lennon, instructor, Level 7

The Voice of America is an international broadcaster, funded and operated by the U.S. Government. It transmits hundreds of hours of newscasts and programs every week on television and radio in 45 languages, to about 250-million people worldwide. “VOA”, as it is known, is also available on the internet through its multi-language website – www.voanews.com – 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

One of VOA’s most popular services is “VOA Learning English.” Like New Neighbors, “VOA Learning English” offers lessons from very basic to advanced lessons on speaking English, American history and culture, news of the day, English grammar and American literature. While you’re learning English, you can also learn about the United States – there’s a lot to see!

VOA provides students a chance to practice English, with interactive lessons that are informative and fun! Learning English takes lots of practice! VOA provides an excellent way to practice in your own home. See for yourself by accessing Voice of America on www/voanews.com and go to the link for Learning English. If you need help, ask a question on-line or bring it to class.

Students Young and Old Love Dr. Seuss!

Dr. Seuss books are a great tool for beginning students and fun for their children too! Rhyming words add vocabulary, help with pronunciation and makes us all laugh! Reading to a child is a very good way to practice your English skills!

The children loved getting to pick out different Dr. Seuss books to read during the month of March!

Using the Library to Learn English

Trips to the Library are an excellent way to find tools for learning English! Classes at New Neighbors regularly go to the local library for tours and to get library cards. Students learn to access the many valuable resources provided.

With a library card, students can check out books like Dr. Seuss’ Hop and Pop to read to their children.
English is hard. Here are some problems we experience learning English: the Arabic and Russian alphabets are different [than the English one]. If we studied English in our home country at school, we learned grammar, not speaking. Some of us learned British English, which has a different vocabulary. Even if we knew English, we never had an opportunity to use it in our home country. People here speak fast and some have accents we can’t understand. We mostly live with people who speak our language; they don’t speak English. There is not much opportunity to practice. Writing in English is very hard! Sometimes we make mistakes. Some of us took the wrong buses and got lost. We rode around for a long time, but the bus drivers helped us get home. One time a mother spoke with her son’s teacher and said, “My son is broken.” The son and the teacher said [with a smile] this is not correct. He was being pushed by other kids, but he was not broken!

Join Us for Classes in the Fall!

- This year all registration will be online only, from July 29th – August 23rd, at https://campagnacenter.schoolforms.org/newneighborsELL
- HELP with online application will be available at The Campagna Center building located at 418 S. Washington Street, Alexandria, VA 22314, on the following dates:

  **August 1st, 7th, 13th, and 23rd**
  (From 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. each day)

- Class space is limited. Registration is open only until spaces are filled.
- TESTING for New Students will be at Christ Church on August 28 and August 29, from 9:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.
- Don’t wait! Child care spots fill up quickly.

418 S. Washington St., Alexandria, VA (703) 549-0111 www.campagnacenter.org

118 N. Washington St., Alexandria, VA (703) 549-1450 www.historicchristchurch.org

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