NEW NEIGHBORS NEWSLETTER

English Language Learning & Family Literacy Program
A newsletter written by & for our students!

SPRING 2022

DIRECTOR’S CORNER

Lizzie Liu, Program Director

New Neighbors ELL has spent another year in the virtual world. Some of us felt more used to taking classes online, some of us continued to long for the in-person connections. Virtual learning has certainly opened up new opportunities in so many different ways. Our previous students who moved away from Alexandria can take classes again with their previous teachers. Students who have childcare responsibilities can take class while their infant child is sleeping in the room next door. Despite the challenging circumstances we continued to face, our students and teachers are still committed to the learning process. All of that has shown us our students are incredibly resilient when facing challenges.

Besides the pandemic, 2021 was also eventful in many other ways. The crisis in happened Afghanistan, the ongoing war in Ukraine, and rising costs of day-to-day items continue. We are certainly tested. As a program, New Neighbors ELL has reached out to many refugee resettlement agencies to offer support and to explore new opportunities to collaborate. Given our rich history of serving refugees coming from Afghanistan, we believe our program can play a bigger role in supporting new arrivals. Students have expressed gratitude towards our additional offerings such as diapers for the children, legal resources we have found, or just listening ears to their endless worries. We want to be there for our students, in any way we can.

Thoughts from Level 1
About What it is Like Living in the U.S. Today
Sara Beck & Sue Tate, Level 1 Instructors

Our students like the healthcare, good law and government of the United States. The safety and good schools especially for children are very important. More opportunities for education and work for all ages are also very important reasons why they find life here good.

But, they miss and worry about those still at home in Afghanistan, and find their inability to drive, a problem.

Regarding Covid treatment, they find that it is dealt with much better in the U.S. than at home with the U.S.’s easier access to vaccines and better trained doctors.
The Biggest Changes in My Life
Farzana Ahmadi, Level 3

Life is always changing. I think it’s “change” that makes us. One of the biggest changes in my life was emigration from my homeland, Afghanistan, to the USA. When I was in my country, I used to go to parties with my friends and family but I don’t have many friends in the US. Sometimes I miss them. I study English here. It’s difficult for me to speak English because I never spoke English in Afghanistan. I have been a dressmaker for a few years, but now I am learning English because I want to have a better life. In the future I want to be a fashion designer.

A Great Vacation
Nazo Darwish, Level 3

Let me tell you about my great summer vacation. This summer, I went to the mountains with my family. We stayed there for three days. It was amazing! During the day, we went hiking and saw many wild animals. We also went fishing and caught some fish. In the evening, we cooked outdoors. I helped my father roast hot dogs. They were delicious! At night we slept in a tent. I saw many beautiful stars in the sky.

Level 3: Setting Fresh Goals
Tara Knox, Level 3 Instructor

New Neighbors students altered their lives with a seismic change when they sought a new life here and change keeps coming, whether it’s living through the COVID pandemic and variants, coping with colder weather, moving to a new apartment, or helping their children adapt to a new school. For many students setting fresh goals helps them adapt to change and makes the new normal look brighter.

Level 3 students wrote about change in their lives, using some of the grammar and writing skills they are learning this year. In honor of National Poetry Month, several students also composed poems.
My Goals
Sabine Ngarmadjibe, Level 3

My name is Sabine and my home country is Chad; I used to live in Chad before I moved to the USA. My life changed with COVID-19. Before COVID-19, my life was good because I used to go to church with my family. We always went to the restaurants. I used to attend school in person, but now I do Zoom from home. I went to the movies every Saturday with my family and always went shopping, to the park, and took my children to the playground. It’s very important to my life to be with my family and friends. But now I watch movies at home and I go outside to do my job. I have a lot of goals: For school, now I am still learning English in Level 3, but in future I would like to go to college. For work, I am working outside the home at The Washington Post. For my family, we would like to buy a house.

Now, I Am So Happy
Farida Baligh, Level 3

My name is Farida. I came here nine months ago. I live with my family. I have three sons and one daughter. I was graduated from the Medical Faculty, Afghanistan. I became a doctor of Gynecology and Obstetrics. I worked in the public hospital in Afghanistan. Here I’m at home with no work outside. When I came here there were a lot of changes that came to me in my life. At first, I didn’t know the language. When shopping, I couldn’t go alone. I needed my husband to be with me. Also, my kids had lots of problems with the language here. When they went to school, they became better. Here, some things were so different for me, such as people’s language and culture, it was too hard to handle these problems. After taking English classes some of my problems are solved, like going shopping alone and also I can communicate with others and solve my problems. Now I’m so happy.

My Poem
Zufan Gebremedhine, Level 3

Sociable, mother and a grandmother
No peace back in my country, so no more family time and going to church. Feels very sad and lonely but yet, grateful that my family is safe.

My Poem
Forozan Mirwais, Level 3

My name is Forozan
Dedicated — Patient — Quiet
Last year a lot of people died because of COVID-19
This year the number has dropped.
Happy — better future
Going out with no fear.

My Poem
Hashim Kakar, Level 3

Hashim
I’m a student
I came to America
I’m excited
Level 2's Take on The Pros and Cons of The Pandemic

Masoda Alam, Level 2
Pandemic is good and bad. Good is that we spend time with our children and husband. We had time to sit down together. We spend time with each other and understand each other. We Muslims believe that Allah is with us and make all better.

Mariam Amiry, Level 2
The pandemic is not good for the children to stay home. All things were shut down, not good. Now is better, because school is open. All job is open again. Better for Muslim people to go to Mecca in Saudi Arabia.

Latifa Shirzai, Level 2
I find English class online is very good during the pandemic. It is very good for me.

Fazila Naderi, Level 2
When I get Covid, the first day is very hard for me. My body hurt. I could not breathe well. I go to hospital. The second time when I get the covid, it was not so bad. I just treated the body pain. I think covid was not good.

Parisa Azizi, Level 2
Pandemic was good and some not good. Good for family. More time for studying and playing and exercising. And talk with family in Afghanistan. During the Covid my brother in law had Covid. It was hard for him. He is in Afghanistan. Better now, but he is sick. I think surgery for hurt back.
Level 2’s Take on The Pros and Cons of The Pandemic

Shafiqa Safi, Level 2
English class is very good for me. And my husband works in the home. This is very good for me, because we live in Woodbridge and he works in Alexandria. Long time driving. After two weeks, he goes to office one day. Good for family.

Benafsha Azizi, Level 2
Quarantine was so bad, because flight to Afghanistan was closed. My dad got Covid and died. I couldn't see him. Not good this pandemic. I want to see my family, my mother and my brother and my sister.

Shefuga Wahidi, Level 2
The pros and cons of the pandemic. Pros: we stay in the house learning English and my children learning the Koran.
Cons: People died in the pandemic. My father was dead because of Covid. We go to Afghanistan in June, spend 15 hours in airport in Dubai. A little bit of pros and many cons.

Sona Hashimi, Level 2
Pandemic was bad because my daughter is born during the pandemic. My husband not go to work. My husband not come to me in hospital. My father is in surgery because of his back. Covid for me is bad.
Pros: It’s good because my husband is 3 weeks at home with the Covid.

Malali Sharifi, Level 2
Malali said her husband worked at home and was able to spend more time with the family which they all liked. She also liked English class on line. She didn’t like having Covid or quarantine. Her son came home from preschool with Covid. His little sister got Covid and then so did Malali. Her husband thinks he had Covid also but was never tested.
Feeling Better
Samia Kambal, Level 4

I am Samia I am from Sudan I came here before the pandemic I was feeling bad and depressed during the pandemic because I worried about my family and my parent they live in other country it’s so difficult period we couldn’t go anywhere we had better stay at home I was scared when I saw the news we missing many people in the pandemic I was feeling bad and my kids boring. I was supposed to found anything to stop this feel after that I did research online and we found online classes for me and for my kids we felt better and we start to eat healthy food to save our body and we could do some activities . sometimes we are walking near The Potomac river that was so good because we didn’t need to wear a mask and we need breath clean.

We Didn't Lose Ourselves
Hajar Daifoladi, Level 4

My name is Hajar. I am from Afghanistan. I have been living in Virginia with my family since December 2019. I have two children. When I came to the United States, after one month that virus came all over the world. The first time when I learned about the pandemic. I was really scared and shocked. Another wise, me and my husband missed our family and country. We lose the meaning of life, we pass very difficult days and feel very tired and depressed. But, we didn't lose ourselves and tried to be strong. we decided to be hopeful and do the best thing for us, we stopped thinking about negative ways. We were doing sports, watching movies, cooking different dishes and praying to have a better life. Finally we found the silver lining.I became pregnant and we bought a house. Today, we are a happy family and we work hard for our children. Life is like that, happiness, sadness, win, loss, healthy, sick, rich, poor...
Helping My Parents
Rockhsar Jalali, Level 4

I am Rokhsar Jalali. I am from Afghanistan and during the pandemic I was in Afghanistan with my parents. It was very difficult not only for me but also for my family and friends when we heard about Covid-19, which makes me very sad and that time I was sick and tired of the pandemic and quarantine. Any way, it made me progress towards my goals. I have been start learning English and I had spent a lot of time with my parents. I read many books during the pandemic and the book that I like a lot is about aliens and I had watched some movies and also I helped my parents when they were helping poor people in Afghanistan. And now I have missed those days. I have learned many things like I met English. I had known about aliens. I have spent a lot of time with my parents.

We Have Learned to Live with All Possible Measures
Ericka Costanza, Level 4

My name is Ericka Castanaza, and I am from Guatemala. I currently live in Alexandria, VA, in the United States, where I spent the time of the pandemic with part of my family. When the pandemic began, I felt a lot of confusion and fear of what would happen. Bad information on social networks, on the news, it was scary to see everything that was happening in the world, I was very scared for my family and friends. I had to stop working for 9 months to be able to take care of my little daughter and my granddaughter. Start school at home was difficult for them, the teachers and for me, continue with my English classes on zoom. I started to make masks to sell, there were people who donated fabric, elastic, because it was difficult to get it, and all the money collected was sent to donate to my country to the elderly and needy people. I wanted to share with them a little hope that someone was thinking about them, with the girls we went out to play a little in the yard, ride a bike, we made cookies, I continued studying English in zoom, and we shared more as a family, by now everyone in my family is fully vaccinated. I hope that everything will be the same as before, for now we have learned to live with all possible measures, so as not to get Covid-19.
Painting My Home
Eden Teklebrhan, Level 4

My name is Mrs. Eden. I came from Ethiopia. I was at home during the pandemic. I was feeling panic because I stayed home and I couldn't go outside the first 6 months of 2020 also so many people passed away and I was scared about myself who takes care of my kids. I worried about my family, I found hope during the pandemic and I had time to ask myself what I am doing and what I have done. Also the day felt too long and I couldn't sleep, so I painted my home because my mind was staying without work and I was only thinking negative, so I had to change my home's colors.

Keep Learning Anything You Like to Do
Heba Gaafer, Level 4

My name is Heba and I am from Egypt. During the pandemic I was in U.S. with my family and I was worried that my family and friends would be affected. This is because I lost some of my family during the pandemic. However, I have been studying English online that helped me to improve my English skills and I have spent a lot of time with my kids and we do some activities like read a book together. That has helped me to accept many words. Last thing I would like to say is "keep learning anything you like to do."

We Are Still Fighting
Maissa Bartal, Level 4

My name is Maissa Bartal. I'm from Morocco and I live in the United States of America. We had difficult days in the past three years during the pandemic. We felt scared and stressed in the beginning because we didn't know anything about Covid-19. We should have stayed at home, we couldn't meet with our family or travel outside the country. We tried to find the silver lining to pass from depression and sadness, and we spent a lot of time with our kids. We were happy it would end quickly and we could go back to our normal lives. But we are still fighting this epidemic. We hope this nightmare ends and we can raise our masks.
Growing Covid Times
Aracely Zambrano, Level 5

There are many people in the world who suffer stronger pains than I am experiencing. There are many nice people in the world too, a little piece of home far away. They become family with whom you can cry. I really love to see that among so many thorns the flowers stand out in the ruins.

All of this is what New Neighbors ELL represents for me. They have helped me live in this new normal. We are friends behind glass screens; they are good people we can trust.

We keep waiting to get back together “like before,” even though that is not real. The year 2020, better called “the lost year,” stole something from us all. Family, neighbors, friends and part of our life.

Our new life was and is different because we have had to learn to spend energy inside our houses. We need to be a playground for our children, we need to be a teacher. Our houses need to be an office, a school and a playground.

Living with fear, living with worries, working at home or not working, accumulating bills. Even with all this in our minds, we know that we must be ready three times a week to share a wonderful learning time.

We force ourselves to dress, comb, groom, and look decent for our date with learning. We review our homework and escape from our routine for a few minutes. The New Neighbors ELL teachers were and are our ray of light in the dark hours.

Thank you, New Neighbors ELL, and infinite thanks to all the wonderful and dedicated teachers who give their time to teach and help us.
Animals, Victims of the War  
Dantua Pawinska, Level 7 Conversation Club

Some of my previous short writings were about very happy animals, dogs and cats I had met in the U.S. Today my heart is broken because the scale of animal suffering caused by Russian aggression against Ukraine is overwhelming.

There is no food or medicine, not only for people but also for the dogs, cats, horses, and animals in zoos. Shelters and zoo workers do their best to minimize the animals’ suffering. Also, Polish volunteers do their best to support Ukrainian animals and their caregivers by delivering tons of food and medicine to the animal shelters. They are also making a great effort to evacuate animals from zoos and rescue as many other animals as possible.

The animals are evacuated in every possible way, and the lucky ones are reunited with their owners who have fled to Poland. At the very least, they have a chance to find a new home in Poland.

I am Polish so I am sharing with you what I know about Polish volunteers. I am sure help and support for Ukrainian animals is coming from many countries. Peace and love for all sentient beings.

*I would like to dedicate this story in memory of Anastasia Alanska, a 26-year-old Ukrainian volunteer who was killed while delivering food to a dog shelter in a suburb of Kyiv.

Spring is Coming  
Nhora Osorio de Leon, Level 7 Conversation Club

For the last two years, we were in quarantine and couldn’t fully enjoy all the seasons… Now spring is timidly approaching… Sometimes it’s hot, and the next day it’s cool, but spring is almost here with all the flowers, colors and scents to awaken our senses.

In the season of spring, we should renew our spirits, minds, and bodies. Being positive in this convulsed world... is Giving our fellows the best of ourselves!