

This nomination is for the following award: **Maria Chavez-Hernandez "Libraries Change Peoples' Lives" Award**

First Name **Nickie**

Last Name **Kortus**

Library Affiliation (if applicable) **Alachua County Library District**

Title (if applicable) **Marketing and PR Manager**

Street Address **401 E University Avenue**

City, State, ZIP **GAINESVILLE**

Telephone Number **13523343909**

E-mail Address nkortus@aclib.us

Are you nominating an individual or a group/organization for this award? **Group/Organization**

Library (Other Organization or Research Team) Being Nominated **Alachua County Library District**

First and Last Name of Head of Organization **Shaney T. Livingston**

Title of Head of Organization **Library Director**

Street Address **401 E University Avenue**

City, State, ZIP **GAINESVILLE, FL 32601**

Telephone Number **3523343910**

E-mail Address of Head of Organization slivingston@aclib.us

Has the service or program been in place for at least two calendar years? **Yes**

The service or program serves... **Adults**

Will you be submitting any supporting documentation? **Yes**

If you would like us to review web pages in consideration of this application (including videos or other supporting materials that are stored online), please enter the Uniform Resource Locators (URLs) below.

http://www.flalib.org/assets/Publications/fall_2015.pdf

Essay **Conversational English Program Antonine Pollas made a special trip to Alachua County Library District's Tower Road Branch to share triumphant news. With her new degree, she moved up in her field, as a registered nurse and a manager, and gained more responsibility along with better hours and more pay. "Ms. Pat, I got my promotion. I start my new job at Shands Hospital on March 13, and I just wanted to thank you. The Conversational English Program helped me. My coaches were excellent, and I just came to tell you this great news!" The joy she shared was palpable, because there had been a time when Antonine, who is originally from Haiti, had felt stuck in a dead-end job. She had told Patricia Carr, program coordinator, that she was also frustrated with her English skills, her thick French accent and the trouble she had had with pronunciation. "My supervisors say they can't understand me, so I get passed over for promotions. It's very upsetting." Antonine had been working with volunteer Pamela Morse, who said, "I have enjoyed working with her, but I have taught her all I**

know.” So, Pat reached out to Zelda Jones, a volunteer with credentials in Teaching English as a Second or Other Language (TESOL) and Zelda said, “I have a few ideas.” The two women hit it off right away. Zelda said, “Antonine diligently and tenaciously pursued her dream of receiving a BSN through challenging circumstances. Online learning was not her preference, but she persevered even while working full time. In fact, during much of her studies, she worked at night. I was honored to encourage her as she pushed forward. However, she encouraged me. Congratulations Antonine!” Antonine graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Nursing from the University of West Florida, in December, and the promotion she so earnestly desired quickly followed. Antonine said, “As a non-native English speaker, the Conversational English Program has been a tremendous asset to me. I am able to improve fluency and conversation skills, which have gone on to help me in many aspects of my life, including furthering my education. Pamela Morse and Zelda Jones were engaging teachers whose methods of teaching had been very compelling and effective. I will continue to use the lessons I have learned from the program in my everyday life. My BSN helps me find a better position. I feel honored and thank you again.” This story and others like it illustrate the many ways this program expands opportunities of information access to underserved and immigrant populations, specifically adult English Language Learners (ELLs) who may be visiting scholars from the University of Florida or Santa Fe College, travelers, new or temporary residents, or immigrants seeking U.S. citizenship. Since 2011, the Program has grown and become a valuable asset to the community because it is based on common values such as life-long learning, professionalism and respect for diversity and multiculturalism. This free program for adults is open to the public but there is usually a waiting list. The program complements basic and advanced ESOL classes provided by the Library District’s literacy coordinator, who also offers an annual Learning Conference for volunteer coaches and literacy tutors. From October 2014 to September 2015, 175 people, coaches and students alike, benefited from this program. The next year, that number jumped to 272 people. Since October 1, 2016, to today, 199 people have already been involved. Currently, 163 people, 48 volunteers plus 115 students are active. Thirty-two people are on the waiting list. Everyone is encouraged to get a library card in order to access resources online, in print, CD, DVD or digital formats. Participants include volunteer English coaches, who undergo a general background check, and students who may be learning English as their second or other language. From the beginning, founders Al Martin and Jin Lyons matched students with volunteer English coaches and each pair met at the library to practice the art of conversation. When Pat became the coordinator in 2015, she initiated social mixers. They have proved to be very popular with 50 people or more in attendance. Due to high demand, today’s coaches may meet with two or more students and some schedule lessons with multiple students back-to-back. One student, Christianne Aguiar, said, “Thank you for arranging a partner for conversation. Vivian is great and I’m enjoying the lessons a lot! I’m grateful!” Preliminary findings from an on-going survey indicate that students look for certain values in volunteers such as friendliness, helpfulness, integrity, professionalism, and a commitment to life-long learning. Common values and respect for diversity bring people together, and the social mixers are casual, fun events for volunteers, students, and their families. In fact, many students take pride in preparing and serving special recipes from their homeland. Pat asked people to bring typed recipes too. She said, “Food gives us something to talk about.” She hopes to put together an international cookbook someday. Volunteer coaches, who are offered an orientation and on-going training, and students report great satisfaction based on shared goals, fun social mixers, and the joy of an on-going multi-cultural exchange. In fact, Eunjung Woo said, “I think the social mixer is a very good chance to practice English. I met my coach, Gaylin, at one. She

is very qualified and experienced to teach someone. She tries to teach me exact pronunciation. She is always kind and tries to understand my clumsy English. I'm very satisfied with my coach. Thank you for showing me the Transparent Languages database too!" We believe this program is eligible for the "Libraries Change Peoples' Lives" Award, because it exemplifies the dynamic spirit of Dr. Maria Chavez-Hernandez' work, by expanding opportunities for English Language Learners to access information and engage with their communities.

Summary Since 2011, ACLD's Conversational English Program has proved to be a valuable asset to the community because it is based on common values such as life-long learning, professionalism, and respect for diversity and multiculturalism. The program is growing 163 people, 48 volunteers plus 115 students are currently active and 32 people are on the waiting list. Volunteers and English Language Learners meet at the library to practice the art of conversation. Participants report great satisfaction based on shared goals, access to information, fun social mixers, and the joy of an on-going multicultural exchange. Libraries transform peoples' lives!

Alachua County Library District's Conversational English Program

The Newsletter of the Learning Round Table of the American Library Association

December 2015

Libraries Transform People's Lives

By Patricia Carr

LearningExchange

December 2015

"Sch

Libraries Transform People's Lives

Patricia Carr
Librarian, Youth and Outreach Programming
Coordinator, Conversational English Program
Alachua County Library District

Libraries transform people's lives. Consider for example, the difference volunteer coaches can make for foreign students who need help practicing their English-speaking skills. Students who participate in the Conversational English Program at the Tower Road Branch of the Alachua County Library District in Gainesville, Florida, say the difference is indeed significant.

One student, Dr. Yanpeng Diao, says as a non-native English speaker and former British-English learner, he was struggling to communicate with American colleagues in an academic setting at the University of Florida. He says "sometimes, we have to communicate by writing or drawing. Fortunately, I met Jean at the Tower Road library under the free English Language partner program. I must say that my teacher is an erudite teacher. She not only knows American English and British English, but also French and Spanish. I have learnt a lot from her, such as language, religion, culture, and

Continued as Transform on Page 8

Transform Continued from Page 1



Coach Eileen Wagner and Jinkyoung Lee
Conversational English ACLD Tower Road Library

even fish! After almost five years meeting with and talking to my teacher, I feel more confident when I speak English. I still hope I can continue to improve my oral English in this program, and I believe I can!"

Diao's coach, Jean Evans, reports other positive rewards. She says: "it has been a great pleasure to participate in the library's language program for the past five years. Yanpeng is a dedicated scientist who has worked diligently to improve his English language skills. Through our many discussions of his readings, I have come to greatly admire and appreciate Yanpeng. He is extremely conscientious about any task he undertakes. I volunteered in the program to help with English language skills. Over the years, however, Yanpeng and I have become very good friends as we discussed our families, traditions, cultural backgrounds, historical perspectives, and world events. Even though I had visited his home country, I feel that I have learned so much more through our conversations. My life has certainly been enriched by my association with this kind, scholarly gentleman."

These quotes reflect the win/win situation many coaches and students report. Since 2011, the Tower Road Branch Library has been helping transform people's lives by offering their Conversational English Program to non-native speakers. They have a new

motto, "We practice the art of conversation," and a new slogan, "Our coaches provide value beyond words."

Just this year, alone, 175 people, coaches and students, have benefitted from the program. Each coach-and-student pair meet at least once a week and sometimes twice a week to practice English language skills that are relevant to the student's personal and professional life. Each session usually lasts one-to-one-and-a-half hours. The program is growing too. Patricia Carr, the librarian coordinator, is planning an inaugural social mixer to bring everyone together. "The social mixers will give students and prospective students a chance to meet our coaches, and give them a chance to practice their spoken English language skills in a casual, informal, and friendly environment," she says. "It will also give students a chance to meet others who are learning English too. I've received a lot of positive feedback from people. We're excited."

Right now, there are 26 students on the waiting list, so Carr says some coaches are meeting with two or more students until new coaches can be found. The program is so popular, she sometimes receives three applications a day from prospective students. In contrast, she may get two applications a month from prospective coaches.

"We may need to go to a 2-to-1 ratio between students and coaches in order to accommodate the growing demand for our Conversational English program. I think that will be fine. Our students and coaches are so happy," she says. "I know it's a win/win situation for them."

Another coach, Dr. Donald Rosenberg, agrees. He says, "I let the students know that I learn as much from them as they learn from me. Not only do I become aware of their learning processes, they inform me about cultural, historic, and socio-economic/political situations in their homelands. This enriches my personal education and enlightenment."

Jackie Kelly sums it up for the coaches, saying "this program is such a rewarding experience."

Alachua County Library District's Conversational English Program

The Alachua County Library District's Conversational English Program Helps Adults Meet Personal and Professional Goals

By Patricia Carr

The Alachua County Library District (ACLD) won a National Medal from the Institute of Museum and Library Services in 2011, and that same year a new initiative, the Conversational English Program, was launched at the Tower Road Branch Library in Gainesville. From the beginning, adult volunteer coaches and foreign students have met at the library once or twice a week to practice the art of conversation and other English language skills.

Retired librarian Al Martin said he and staff member Jin Lyons, a newly-minted United States citizen from China, established the Conversational English Program with the approval of Branch Manager Ike Welch and Library Director Shaney T. Livingston.

Since then, hundreds of people have participated and last year alone 175 people, coaches and students, benefitted from the program. Currently, fifty-three active coaches serve sixty-eight students, and most meet once a week for sixty to ninety minutes, but some meet twice a week in order to make more progress. On average, twenty-two people are on the waiting list.

The program is popular and effective, students and coaches say, because it is a rewarding win/win experience. Volunteers and students focus on English language skills, but everyone benefits from a continuous cultural exchange. One-on-one lessons, small groups, social mixers, language resources and coach training all serve to benefit students who report positive and successful outcomes.

Librarian Patricia Carr, the current coordinator of the program, works in tandem with Literacy Coordinator Theresa Sterling, who offers three levels of English for Speakers of Other Language (ESOL) classes and one advanced conversation class at libraries throughout the county. "The Conversational English Program also serves as an advanced level," Carr said. "Students are expected to have some basic and advanced skills in order to participate and practice conversations in a meaningful way. Most applicants are immigrants or visiting scholars at the University of Florida, who need to improve their English in order to get or keep a job or pass an exam. Others want to make friends and increase their vocabulary."

Fall 2016: http://www.flalib.org/assets/Publications/fall_2015.pdf The Alachua County Library District's conversational English Program Helps Adults Meet Personal and Professional Goals *By Patricia Carr*

One student from China, Feifan, and his coach, Drew Clay, have made significant progress. Feifan said, "Not only did this program help me with my English it also helped me to learn more about American culture. It helped me to speak more confidently, and my teacher helped me obtain my driver's license and apply for college."

"I have enjoyed watching Fei grow and flourish here in Gainesville," Clay said. "He is so brave to have come as far as he did. I like to think I learned as much from him as he ever did from me."

Coach Lola Haskins agrees and said that tutoring at the library has been wonderful.

"Not only have I been able to befriend people of all persuasions and cultures, but also I've learned a lot about my own language from what's come up in the process," Haskins said. "Even better, because our culture is often a mystery to my students, I've been able to show them how to make friends here and how to get things done."

Haskins's student, Alexandra, said one of her favorite things is to talk, "knowing that I will make mistakes and immediately receive a kind explanation regarding pronunciation, grammar, or synonyms."

Whether students are studying for the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) or the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) or pursuing other goals, each coach makes a difference. For



Coach Drew Clay and Feifan Hao (Harry).

example, Hankook asked a coach to proofread his dissertation and he returned home, triumphantly, with a doctorate in chemical engineering. Another student, Maria, is also celebrating because she recently passed the Naturalization Test for United States Citizenship. Another student, Gislaine, is working hard to pass an occupational exam. Her coach, Betty Roode, who happens to be a retired nurse, said, "What a good match! Each Saturday, Gislaine and I review sample test questions. Sometimes, she needs help with pronunciation. She will stop me and ask, 'Say that word again so I can hear it.' Sometimes, she doesn't understand the question, or the answer, and I explain the nursing implications. In a few weeks, Gislaine will take the state Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) exam. If she passes, we will have a big celebration!"

What makes this library program so effective and so popular? Perhaps it's the personal, individualized

attention students receive, the social mixers that bring everyone together, the on-going cultural exchange, the Literacy Office's Learning Conference, or a culmination of all these factors.

Sterling established the annual Learning Conference in 2014, and guest speakers have included experts in the field of English as a Second Language (ESL) or Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). For example, last year's panel included Andrea DeCapua, Ed.D., Catherine Baucom, MA-TESOL, and Lena Shaqareq, MA-TESOL. This optional one-day training session is open to all volunteer coaches who participate in ACLD's Conversational English Program or ESOL classes.

One coach, Zelda Jones, said the free training was relevant, applicable, cost effective, and conven-

ient. "The quality of the information we received is equivalent to that which is available at TESOL Conferences," Jones said. "Also, the small group of attendees provided the opportunity to converse with the speaker. . . I look forward to attending the next conference."

The Library District's Conversational English Program is just one way staff members are "thinking outside the book" today to bring collaboration, diversity, and innovation together to provide excellent patron and community services that help empower and transform patrons' lives.

Alexandra said, "It is more than a class, it is like a good conversation with a great teacher that helps me to improve my speaking and at the same time my writing. The program means everything to me."



Coach Juanita Rizzo and Jie Liu Conversational English ACLD Tower Road Library.



Masoud Pourshabanian and Coach Cheryl A. Morton Conversational English ACLD Tower Road Library.

Patricia Carr is a librarian for youth and outreach services at the Tower Road Branch of the Alachua County Library District, and she serves as the coordinator for their Conversational English Program.

Our Coaches Provide Value Beyond Words



I am really pleased to have a friend who volunteers for the Conversational English Program. Thanks for your help!
~Soonyung

I believe having an English language coach helped me in my integration and interaction with the community by climbing over the language barrier in an enjoyable way. Thank you!

I appreciate your time and help!
~Sincerely, Hankook



Our students shine too!

*What an extraordinary experience.
This is such a rewarding program.
I learned as much as my students.*

I let students know that I learn as much from them as they learn from me. Not only do I become aware of their learning processes, they also inform me about cultural, historic, and socio-economic/political situations in their homelands. This enriches my personal education and enlightenment.

Students tell their friends and families in their native lands about the kindness and generosity of our program. These good reports put the image of our nation in a positive light for the world at large to admire. When my students thank me, I thank them for letting me help them. Without students, there would be no use for teachers. We all need to be needed.

This program is such a rewarding experience.
~Jackie



CONVERSATIONAL ENGLISH PROGRAM



Alachua County Library District

What We Do

In 2011, two of our staff members, Librarian Al Martin, and Library Assistant Jin Lyons, established the Conversational English Program at the Tower Road Branch Library. Volunteer coaches were paired with students who were English Language Learners. Patrons loved the idea! Volunteers signed up. Students were receptive. The program was an instant success. So much so, demand for the program grew. Since that time, we have helped hundreds of adult students learn English as a Second or Other Language (ESOL).

Our story

Many of our students are visiting scholars from the University of Florida or Santa Fe College, but others come in on their own from various countries all around the world. This program is free and open to the public, but, due to high demand, there is usually a waiting list. We provide volunteer English coaches with an orientation and on-going training at our annual Learning Conference, and fun social mixers are held throughout the year for participants and their families.



Our Success Stories

This rewarding volunteer opportunity is like no other. Time and time again, our Conversational English coaches and students tell us that they have formed long-lasting friendships that span different continents, time-zones and cultures. Many people keep in touch long after their formal sessions here at the library have come to an end. The cultural exchange aspect of this program appeals to many volunteers. Likewise, our students are very motivated to learn English and local culture, and they work hard in order to make real progress.

More about our story

Conversational English Program lessons must take place on library property, but we have 12 locations throughout the county for your convenience. Please ask our coordinator for more information. We will be happy to make arrangements for you.



**alachua county
library district**

...thinking outside the book

Who We Are

Coaches need to be at least 18-years old and have a good grasp of the English language, but they do not need to be native English speakers. We ask volunteers to meet with students at the library at least two hours per week. Coaches need reliable transportation, and they are subject to a general background check. Due to high demand, we are currently asking new coaches to meet with two students at a time once or twice a week. Each session usually lasts about one hour, and those who meet twice a week report more progress.

Ready to volunteer? Please contact us to learn more.

Contact us

Patricia Carr, Coordinator
Conversational English Program

Alachua County Library District

Tower Road Branch Library

3020 SW 75 St.

Gainesville, FL 32608

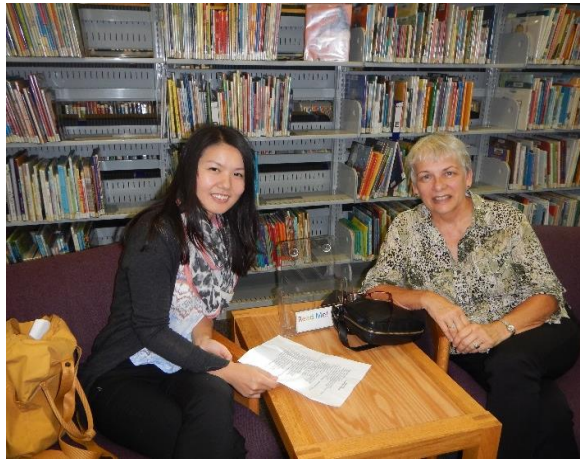
(352) 333-2840

FAX (352) 333-2846

pcarr@aclib.us

www.aclib.us

Alachua County Library District's Conversational English Program



Above: Xiaomeng Xie and Coach Jean Lemire
Below: Aykut Turkdogan and Coach Zelda Jones



Above: Coach Connie Bernal and Hankook Kim
Below: Coach Alexandra Dillard and Ismail Celik



Above: Student Antonine Pallas graduated with a Bachelor's of Science Nursing degree from the University of West Florida