



Celebrating 25 Years

1993 – 2018

A Dream Takes Shape: The Story Continues

In our Fall, 2017, issue of Word and Hope we shared the Dominican Literacy Center's story from its birth in 1993. Let's see what the DLC looks like today and what the future might hold.

In 1996, a new center, Dominican Literacy Center, Chicago began working with the immigrant population at Our Lady of Grace Parish. Sister Judith Curran, OP, who had been one of the first tutors at the Aurora Center, became the new director. In time, the Chicago center moved to Melrose Park, IL. There are also Dominican Literacy Center programs at St. Rita's Parish in Aurora and at St. Thomas More university parish in Columbia, MO. Each program used the DLC model, and personalized it for their students' needs.

The Dominican Literacy Center, sponsored by the Dominican Sisters of Springfield, IL, is a member of the Greater Aurora Area Literacy Coalition, which includes the Aurora Public Library, Waubensee Community College, World Relief, Family Focus, Hesed House and other members. The Center collaborates with the Coalition, informing clients about the services of all these agencies, as well as Mutual Ground, Visiting Nurses Association (VNA) and Family Counseling Services.

The DLC has had an Advisory Board since 1995, consisting of three Center staff members and ten members of the community. The present chair of the board is Dalila Alegria, whose mother was a student at the Center. Vanessa Aguirre, the daughter of the first student at the Center, Juanita Rodriguez, is also on the Board.

The Center has grown from the original five students and five teachers, to 200 students from 16 countries taught by 200 dedicated volunteer tutors, each year. The value of a volunteer is \$24.69/hr. (independentsector.org) Last year our volunteers served 7,165.5 hours for a total of \$176,916.20. Thank you DLC volunteers—well done! The sense of community, mutual respect and commitment to the mission of the DLC results in an 80% retention rate of tutors.

The Dominican Literacy Center also continues to offer citizenship classes to men and women of the community who are legal permanent residents, and who are studying to pass the U.S. naturalization test and become new U.S. citizens. The fall and spring semesters offer 48 hours of instruction in U.S. history, civics and basic English. The class is group instruction, with pull-out tutoring and practice with trained volunteers. The pass rate of women and men who study at these classes is 95%.

In April of this year, two of our students became U.S. citizens. We have included their personal stories of commitment and sacrifice in this issue of Word and Hope. They are an inspiration!

As the Center leadership looks to the future, they know that the needs of the immigrant community continue to grow, and the Center hopes to continue to meet those needs, incorporating workplace literacy and health literacy into the curriculum. And, as always, the Center is ready and willing to help other groups start their own literacy centers.

Since 1993, The Dominican Literacy Center has successfully upheld its mission to provide opportunities for women to receive individual tutoring in reading, writing and speaking English through individual tutoring by trained volunteers within the neighborhood setting, and the belief in empowerment through education, and in the dignity of each individual person. The yearly growth in the number of students and tutors and the unwavering commitment of staff and advisory board members, ensure that its future is bright, busy and blessed!



Save the Date

Dear Readers,

As you enjoy the summer with family and friends, please mention us to those who might be interested in tutoring. Ask them to SAVE THE DATE for the upcoming Tutor Training which will be held on August 14-16, and August 21-23 from 6:00-8:30pm at the Center. For more details, email alison@dominicanliteracycenter.org. Thanks much!

"The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams."

— Eleanor Roosevelt

In Their Words

Besides learning English, what have you learned or experienced from being at the Center each week?

"In conversation class, I learned about different countries from talking to people. I also learned to play different games. I liked learning about hobbies and foods."

– **Leonor Hernández**

"The center has flyers with a lot of pertinent information that I can use. I took two classes at the library because of the information on the flyers."

– **Ana**

"I enjoy sharing coffee and food on the mornings that my tutor and I meet. The social time in the Dominican Literacy Center's kitchen gives me an opportunity to meet new friends and enjoy conversations with other South Korean students who come on my day. I have become more involved with radio programs, reading newspapers, and magazines. Watching programs in English on T.V. has helped me be well-informed on events that I and my children and husband can discuss."

– **Yunmi Lee**

"Coming to the Dominican Literacy Center each week has given me more confidence in myself. I believe I can learn new things."

– **Martha Ortiz**

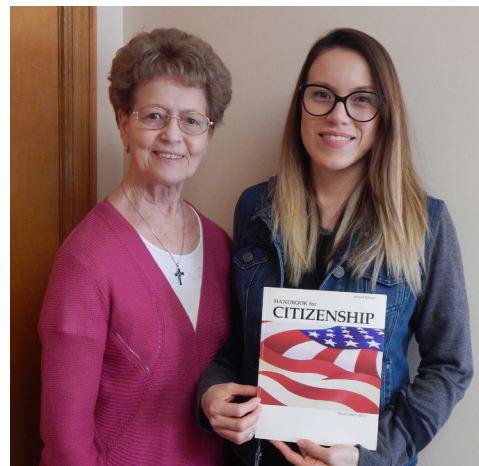
"I have experienced many new friends in a comfortable environment. Coming to the center has started my day on a happy, productive note. I have experienced first hand what makes a generous and giving spirit."

– **Marisela Rivera**

Dominican Literacy Center Students' Paths to Citizenship

Asmaa Abdulhameed and Dulce Camacho waited years to hear the words, "Raise your right hand for the oath of citizenship." After completing the citizenship class at the Dominican Literacy Center and studying U.S. history, civics and English for countless hours, both students took and passed the U.S. citizenship interview and exam and became United States citizens at the U.S. Citizenship Ceremony in April 2018. Also known as the oath ceremony, it is the final stage in the process of becoming a U.S. citizen.

To prepare for the interview and test, both Asmaa and Dulce took the citizenship class with Sister Jane Beckman and studied on their own as well. Dulce faithfully kept a study schedule of one hour a day. She divided all of the study information into seven sections and studied one section each day. Asmaa studied with her husband and used the Google app that provides practice tests and review.



Dulce Camacho



Asmaa Abdulhameed

For Dulce, the civics portion of the test was the most challenging because many of the words used in questions about politics and government were not commonly used in everyday conversation. Asmaa, on the other hand, found the English language interview to be the most challenging part of the test. Although she was well prepared for the interview, she became worried because the examiner questioned her for more than 50 minutes while she had seen other people being interviewed for only 10 minutes. Asmaa finally asked the examiner if she was passing and was relieved to hear him tell her that she was doing just fine.

The day of the Citizenship Ceremony was a day of great happiness for Dulce and Asmaa. Dulce remembers when the judge said, "You are now a U.S. citizen," she felt very proud of what she had accomplished. Asmaa had a feeling of strength that she was able to accomplish her goal of becoming a citizen. Both women's husbands were there to share their achievement, and they each celebrated by going to a restaurant afterwards.

Becoming a citizen of the United States was the final expression of their love for this country. Dulce loves that there are so many cultures in this country and so many different ways to think. She says, "It's like the whole world is here." Asmaa is appreciative of the law in the United States because it gives everyone freedom and rights. She tells everyone she knows what a great country this is. Both women encourage everyone they know to become a citizen.

Many Americans are not aware of how difficult the citizenship test and interview are. There are two components to the test. To pass the civics portion, which tests knowledge of American politics and history, applicants must correctly answer six out of 10 questions. The questions are randomly selected from a list of 100, and there's no multiple choice. The other portion of the test is the English language test. If an applicant fails either, they have to re-pay the fee (\$725) and re-take the exam. The pass rate for students who take the citizenship class at the Dominican Literacy Center is 95%. Compare this to statistics that say the pass rate for native-born Americans is only 66%!

Both Asmaa and Dulce willingly choose to take on the responsibilities of being a U.S. citizen. To both of them, responsibility and citizens' rights are both sides of the same coin, a coin they worked for tirelessly until they had achieved their goals.

"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."

— Nelson Mandela

We the People . . .

Diligence, Earnestness, Seriousness, Willingness--add in enthusiasm, cooperation, and a desire to succeed, and you have a description of the students in Sr. Kathleen's Wednesday night citizenship class. Class begins with Sister checking each student's "status" (current stage of the process) to note changes since last meeting -- i.e., not yet applied, applied but not yet fingerprinted, awaiting test date, etc. The atmosphere is welcoming, encouraging, and warm, but all business. Becoming a US citizen is serious business, an endeavor demanding extensive, exacting preparatory work and financial sacrifice (Application for Naturalization filing fee = \$725).

An undertone of camaraderie among the students shows in supportive smiles and respectful silence as peers are quizzed orally. Drilled directly from the naturalization test, students practice reading test questions aloud or provide answers to each other. Students also prepare hard to answer numerous personal questions: marital status, previous addresses, criminal involvement, place of employment, etc. Full comprehension and complete, accurate responses in English are imperatives to passing the test.

Students closest to their test dates receive priority for extra honing of skills. Trained volunteers escort students to nearby classrooms for individual quizzing. Short conversations put students at ease, initiate rapport, and help fit US historical/political information studied into context--understanding versus rote repeating is the ultimate goal as students develop into participating citizens. Anyone witnessing this class would be proud of these students' efforts and desire to become an integral part of the American community and inspired by the earnestness and kindness of the volunteers. Students and volunteers work together weekly to imprint their faces and experiences on the American Dream in 2018



Dominican Literacy Center: Empowering Our Community for 25 Years



DLC Board President and Staff

Let's Celebrate!

It's hard to believe that 25 years have passed since the Dominican Literacy Center began providing English language tutoring for the immigrant community. Over the past 25 years, the DLC has provided more than language and citizenship training, it has become a force in getting families oriented into the American community.

This milestone for the DLC will be celebrated during the 2018-2019 school year. A planning committee of DLC tutors, board members and staff

has been formed to plan and publicize activities throughout the anniversary year. After the first enthusiastic committee meeting in April, 2018, four pages of possible ideas were generated, giving the committee numerous avenues to follow. **At this point, we already know that there will be a DLC "family reunion" held on the grounds of the Center on Friday, October 12, 2018, from 4:00-7:00 p.m., (please save the date!)** and the year of celebration will end with the Center's participation in the 2019 Aurora Memorial Day Parade. DLC T-shirts will be designed and made available through the anniversary year. Stay tuned for more information and some surprises in our "Word and Hope" winter edition.

Your donation to support this very special year can be made using the envelope included with this newsletter. We thank you in advance for celebrating with us in the coming year, and we are grateful for your on-going encouragement and assistance.

*"I've learned that you shouldn't go through life with a catcher's mitt on both hands.
You need to be able to throw something back." — Maya Angelou*

Advisory Board

The Advisory Board provides guidance and support for the many initiatives of the Dominican Literacy Center:

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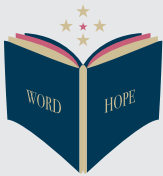


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DOMINICAN
LITERACY CENTER

The mission of the Dominican Literacy Center is to provide opportunities for women to receive individual tutoring in reading, writing and speaking English. We provide these opportunities through individual tutoring by trained volunteers within the neighborhood setting. The Dominican Literacy Center believes in empowerment through education, and in the dignity of each individual person.



- free 90-minute weekly individual tutoring sessions for women in reading, writing and speaking English as a second language.
- customized curriculum of English-only instruction appropriate to each student's level.
- sessions that run from September through May, with day and evening formats.
- the opportunity for a student to remain in the program for three years, usually working with the same tutor during the entire time.
- conversation classes open to current students and "graduates".
- citizenship classes for both men and women.

*For more information, call 630-898-4636, M-F 9 a.m. – 4 p.m.
or see our website at www.dominicanliteracycenter.org*