

LCNV's 60th Anniversary (1962-2022): Celebrating 60 Years!



The Literacy Council of Northern Virginia (LCNV) has always been committed to its learners and fueled by the mission and vision to create a community empowered by the ability to read, write, speak, and understand English. Thanks to the dedication of countless supporters and volunteers since its inception in 1962, LCNV has steadily expanded and transformed, maintaining quality instruction and support for nearly 60,000 adult English language learners in the last 60 years.

Our story began when one of LCNV's founding pioneers, Mid Allen Ries, returned to the United States from Ecuador and made the unsettling discovery that an estimated 5,000 adults in Alexandria, Virginia were illiterate. This inspired her to start teaching English locally using a teaching method called "Each One Teach One" designed by a leading specialist in the field, Dr. Frank Laubach. She began by tutoring two adults in the neighborhood but soon realized that there were too many potential students and not enough of her to go around. She began enlisting several neighbors to join her cause and together they planted the seed of a grassroots organization that would become a model for other literacy organizations and non-profits. More than 30 volunteers stepped forward, combining their knowledge, creativity, experience, and passion to form an official council dedicated to teaching the English language.

In response to the growing needs of learners, the council held its first workshop devoted exclusively to teaching tutors how to work with students for whom English is a second language (ESOL) and began implementing a major change in its organizational structure, which included hiring paid staff and securing a permanent headquarters. In 1987, after 25 years of borrowing spaces to use as classrooms, LCNV made a permanent move to the James Lee Community Center in Falls Church, Virginia, and opened the first two ESOL (English as a Second Language) Learning Centers to provide students with extended classroom time and access to reliable computers. Recognizing the critical role that literacy plays in a family's future, LCNV conceived the Family Learning Program in 1999 for parents and caregivers, which today

also includes literacy-related activities and homework help for children. Over the next decade, LCNV Board members, staff, and volunteers held various fundraisers and launched new classes based on the evolving needs of learners while fostering mutually beneficial partnerships with local businesses, government agencies, and non-profits.

LCNV worked diligently to secure funding for a major instructional redesign to transition from one-on-one style tutoring to a traditional classroom setting, expanding student services to include advising and adding a guide to local community services called SNAPSHOT that lists medical, educational, and subsistence resources available across Northern Virginia in simple English. The Destination Workforce® program, designed in 2014, was piloted the following year in partnership with local businesses to upskill employees and improve their English comprehension and communication skills and in 2017, the Intensive English and Work Readiness class was introduced as a way for Afghan refugees to receive 100+ hours of instruction quickly to fast-track them to employment. New programs and classes have made it possible for us to meet the unique needs of a diverse group of learners, placing them at the appropriate level of learning, gearing instruction to their personal goals, and providing supplemental tutoring as needed. We recently received funding to provide our learners enrolled in our Intensive English and Work Readiness program with loaner laptops to promote digital literacy. The amazing work and developments overseen by LCNV's previous directors have continued without interruption by Roopal Saran, who serves as LCNV's current Executive Director.

These initiatives have kept the organization at the forefront of the literacy movement in the U.S. and have enabled LCNV to continue to meet the needs of the lowest-literacy-level students, even during a global pandemic. Broadening our impact and reach across various platforms both virtually and physically has greatly contributed to the organization's ongoing success. While there have been changes along the way, our dedication and commitment to our mission remain strong and true. What started as a small idea between a few like-minded people has grown into a flourishing organization driven by the dedication of staff and the perseverance of the student body and over 500 volunteers that go above and beyond each year to serve them. 2022 marks the Literacy Council of Northern Virginia's 60th Anniversary - 60 years of lighting a path to a brighter future for everyone, regardless of race, gender, language, or religion.

Literacy Council of Northern Virginia

