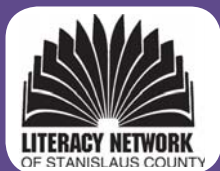


# Learning for a Lifetime

## 2018 Literacy

Presented by:



Learning*Quest*  
Stanislaus Literacy Centers



# Charting a New Path

By Denise Nordell

A difficult home life, two teenage pregnancies, and drug addiction pushed Mariah Younker to drop out of high school and ultimately land in jail. But for some, like Younker, incarceration represents a decision point. Younker determined that she would never return to jail and that she would carve out a new life for herself, free from addiction and the poor choices that had led her there. She enrolled in the Sheriff's SCCILS program, which offers a High School Equivalency (HSE) program through LearningQuest. "I needed a focus while in jail," says Younker, "and I knew my future depended on me making better decisions."



incarceration." Transitions Specialists help students create resumé's, prepare for interviews, identify roadblocks, and create a strategic plan to guide them once released.

Now, Younker is employed as a case manager at Redwood Family Center, the clean and sober living recovery center where she was formerly a client. Her goal is to obtain certification as a substance abuse counselor. She is achieving other personal goals as well, having recently purchased her first car. Her next goal is to improve her credit so she can purchase a home for herself and her two-year-old son. She is also beginning the process of reuniting with her older children.

Younker is justifiably proud of her accomplishments and grateful to those who helped her along the way, "With the support from my teachers and finally believing that all things are possible, with a lot of hard work, consistency and determination, I passed and am now continuing my journey." ■

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“  
*I knew my future depended on me making better decisions.*”

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so well for Younker: "Our HSE team offers instruction and testing for students who are currently incarcerated at the Stanislaus County Jail. While working toward their HSE diploma, they are assigned a Transitions Specialist who helps them to prepare for life after

The path was not easy. Though she was able to complete two sections of the test before her release, Younker struggled with Math. However, she persevered, continuing to study at the Day Reporting Center while on probation. There, she completed the Writing and Science subtests, but Math still loomed large. She didn't give up, according to LearningQuest Program Manager Isela Gutierrez. "Mariah was driven to stay the course. She accepted the support given by LearningQuest instructors and volunteer tutors, taking it one day at a time until she was able to successfully pass her Math test and earn her HSE."

LearningQuest's Transitions Specialist, Josh Cruz, described the program that worked



Mariah Younker (center) with family at LearningQuest 2018 Spring Graduation and Awards Night.

# Literacy Student Finally Says, “It’s My Turn.”

By Denise Nordell

Like many students who come to LearningQuest to improve their literacy skills, Socorro Valencia places a high value on education, but felt she always needed to put the needs of her children first. In 2016, with all four of her children well on their way to college degrees and meaningful jobs, Valencia felt it was her time. She came to LearningQuest with the desire to improve her English speaking, reading and writing skills.

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“  
*Keep going,  
you can do it!*”

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“Nothing is easy in this life,” says Valencia, a single mother who has worked in an impressive array of jobs, from taco truck owner to apartment manager, while raising her children without government assistance. She realized the time had come for her to improve her English when she found she needed a translator to discuss a rental agreement with a tenant. Though it is often difficult, Valencia refuses to give up. At 61, she says it is never too late. “Keep going,” she urges prospective students. “You can do it!”

Valencia’s tutor, Hennie Van Konynenburg, admires Socorro for her grit and determination. “I’ve been surprised at the resourcefulness of my student in her life in the U.S.,” she says. “An ‘aha’ moment for me has been realizing how challenging

it is for someone who has not had much schooling to understand concepts like parts of speech and other features of a language that people here are taught in elementary school,” she says.

Van Konynenburg retired from teaching in 2014. She taught German and English as a Second Language (ESL) at the college level as well as English as a Foreign Language in Germany.

“Socorro is an English language learner. She wants to be able to construct grammatically correct sentences in English, so we’ve spent a lot of time on verb tenses and sentence structure,” she says.

Their relationship is mutually beneficial, says Van Konynenburg: “I’m working on becoming more fluent in Spanish,” she says, while Valencia is working on becoming more proficient in English. “Even though we come from very different backgrounds, we’ve found a lot of common ground. We have an easy-going and trusting relationship, often sharing personal stories.” By getting to know Valencia, she says, “I’ve gained more insight into the difficulties facing many immigrants to the U.S. and the resilience they often bring to the fore.”

Volunteer tutors are always needed, according to Rose Jurado, Literacy Coordinator for LearningQuest. Though prior teaching experience is a plus, it is most definitely not required. The waiting list often exceeds 40 adults who are eager to begin the program. Free training sessions take place quarterly. For more information call Rose at (209) 558-4505. ■



LearningQuest student, Socorro Valencia (left), and tutor, Hennie Van Konynenburg (right).

# Thank you for supporting Learning for a Lifetime



LearningQuest - Stanislaus Literacy Centers, the Literacy Network of Stanislaus County and The Modesto Bee's News in Education would like to thank the businesses, organizations and individuals who supported this year's "Sign-on to Literacy" Campaign. These contributions raised more than \$9,000 for literacy in Stanislaus County and will help improve the literacy of our residents. Currently, 43% of adults read at basic level or below. To help adults be better equipped to fill out job applications and read to their children, we need to have literacy and basic education programs available. Thank you for helping to bring reading to the lives of Stanislaus County adults and children.

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## What is News in Education?

The Modesto Bee's News in Education (NIE) program is dedicated to promoting literacy in our community. Our goal is to educate, inform and inspire students by providing classroom teachers unique, timely and creative online resources to engage students and encourage lifelong learning.

NIE provides access to the daily eEdition (digital newspaper) and dynamic educational resources to enhance lesson plans.

The Modesto Bee's NIE program reinforces positive and relevant lifetime reading habits by encouraging students to utilize critical thinking skills and analyze current events in the world around them.

The eEdition and resources are provided at no cost to schools and learning facilities through generous donations made by community members, businesses and Modesto Bee subscribers.



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Stanislaus Literacy Centers

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For more information, contact Karen Williams,  
Director of LearningQuest - Stanislaus Literacy Centers at (209) 522-0656.

# Learning English for a Life of Opportunities

By Karen Williams

Dulce Aguilera, born and raised in Mexico, speaks in English with little hesitation. She is rightfully proud that she can communicate well and credits English classes she has taken for three years with LearningQuest at Eisenhut Elementary School. With two daughters, ages 8 and 9, Dulce believes that speaking English is critical to being involved at her children's school. "I am able to volunteer in the student store, to speak with their teachers, to help in the classroom sometimes and to help my children with their homework," she said. "I also help other parents who don't know how to do the math or don't understand the project that has been assigned. I like helping them."

“

*The most important thing is to learn English so you can improve your life by getting a job or going to college.”*

In fact, Dulce, who finished high school in Mexico, had started taking classes in college to be a social worker in Mexico. However, she came to visit her mother and while here, met her future husband, Cesar.

She ended up staying in Arizona where



Dulce Aguilera (center) reading with daughters, Andrea and Nayeli Aguilera.

her two daughters were born until four years ago, when her husband was transferred to Modesto. He works in a warehouse for Ford Motor Company. She had tried taking English classes in Arizona, but since her daughters were young, she found it difficult. However, the program offered at Eisenhut provided not only classes for her, but a program for her daughters. "My daughters love their class. They love doing the crafts and reading books."

LearningQuest opened this program only three years ago with the help of a grant from United Way supplemented with funding from Stanislaus Union School District. This partnership allowed for morning classes with childcare at Chrysler Elementary and evening classes with childcare at Eisenhut. Dulce is the perfect example of why both United Way and Stanislaus Union School District (SUSD)

invested in this program. Britta Skavdahl, SUSD superintendent, explained it this way, "We were a pilot school for Stanislaus Reads so we were already doing things to engage parents and to enhance reading in the home. Providing English classes as a family program aligned perfectly with our goals. We wanted parents to have the resources to

be a partner in their child's education."

Also, Dulce chose to participate in the citizenship class offered by LearningQuest. She attended every session and will soon be scheduled for an oral interview that she is confident she will pass. When asked why she wanted to become a citizen Dulce said, "Because I love this country. We have a lot of opportunities. I want to vote. I want to help the community. I want to be part of a program that helps people find resources like learning to read and write."

For others coming to this country, Dulce has this advice: "When people come to the United States, they sometimes don't realize how important it is to learn to communicate with other people. The most important thing is to learn English so you can improve your life by getting a job or going to college." ■

# Literacy Network Annual Awards

At its 19th annual luncheon held on March 2, 2018, the Literacy Network of Stanislaus County presented achievement awards to three adult students, a volunteer tutor, and a pioneer in the development of literacy and workplace training programs in Stanislaus County.

**BERNADET MOKHATAS** (left) was the award winner for English as a Second Language. She and her husband, both Assyrians, fled religious persecution in their native Iran. Their transition to living in the U.S. was difficult. Knowing no English, Bernadet became a

caregiver for an elderly woman who verbally abused her. Studying at Modesto Junior College, Mokhatas was encouraged in her language learning and began to consider the possibility of graduating from college. At MJC, she has earned As, has perfect attendance, and is now a tutor in the Writing Center. She will graduate in 2019 with a major in English and plans to transfer to CSU Stanislaus with the goal of becoming an English teacher.

**SILVIA CAZARIN** (left) was the award winner in the Literacy category. Born in Mexico,

Cazarin moved to the U.S. when life became too dangerous in Mexico. After the killing of her daughter's friend, she and her daughter left everything behind in Mexico taking only a suitcase apiece. In Modesto, Cazarin entered the English Language Program at Modesto Junior College and also started with a tutor at LearningQuest in

2016. She has improved her language skills by four grade levels and currently teaches at a tennis center.

**AROWA GHAZI** (right) received the award for high school diploma or equivalency. As is the custom in her native Yemen, Ghazi and her family were entitled to a bride price. She asked for an education to which her prospective husband agreed. After their marriage, he

continuously denied her permission to enroll in school. Using proceeds from selling items on Ebay, Ghazi took an online course to study for a high school diploma. But it was too difficult with her limited English skills. While she was in New York caring for her mother who had had heart surgery, Ghazi's husband took their three daughters to Yemen, leaving her with a baby. Ghazi spent just over a year at LearningQuest, improving her English skills, studying academic subjects, and attaining a diploma. In spring 2018, she completed her second semester at MJC. She enrolled in summer classes in math and nursing and continues to work as a clerk on campus.

The Betty Mulnix Service Award was presented to **DENISE NORDELL**.



For 10 years, Nordell tutored incarcerated students at the jail and in the community while she simultaneously held a full-time job. She gave all her students every

possible resource to help them meet their goals and encourage them in their educational journey. Nordell currently tutors at Fremont Elementary School. She enjoys focusing on her students' goals and watching her students attain them. Nordell has expertise in communications and serves LearningQuest by editing the monthly newsletter, developing promotional materials, and generating stories for social media. She is also a docent at the Modesto-Stanislaus Library.

The Jean and Clyde Dunlap Award for Outstanding Contributions to the Cause of



Literacy was presented to **MARY ANNE PARKER STROM** (right). More than 30 years ago, Parker Strom did ground-breaking work in literacy in Stanislaus County.

While employed at Tri-Valley Growers, she learned the needs of the local workforce and was given the opportunity to train workers. With a \$500 grant, she and Margaret Land of the Volunteer Center identified effective literacy programs and set up a program which Tri-Valley expanded to six plant and warehouse locations. Eventually, Parker Strom oversaw a training program that educated thousands of employees of Tri-Valley Growers and other manufacturing plants. She was also instrumental in starting literacy programs in four libraries, served on the Board of Directors of Stanislaus Literacy Center and on the Board of Directors for California Literacy. Parker Strom also participated in the group which eventually became the Literacy Network of Stanislaus County. ■

# Literacy Network of Stanislaus County – Literacy Providers 2018-2019

Provider Name	Contact	Telephone	Location of Offerings	Ages	Class Offerings						Instructional Methods			
					ESL	Reading	High School Equivalency	High School Diploma	Workforce Preparation	Citizenship	One-on-One	Small Group	Class	On-Line
America's Job Center of California Career Resource Centers	Staff	558-9675	Throughout County	18+					✓		✓	✓	✓	
The Bridge Community Center – Sierra Vista Child-Family Services	Jean Kea	571-8430	Modesto	All	✓	✓					✓	✓	✓	
Cambridge Academies Enterprise Centers	Laura Elkinton	408-8193	Throughout County	18+			✓		✓			✓	✓	
Central Valley Opportunity Center (CVOC)	Lucio Cruz Ernesto Rodriguez	577-3210	Modesto	18+			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Ceres Unified School District - Ceres Adult School	Dallas Plaa	556-1557	Ceres	18+	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
El Concilio Community Center	Teresa Guerrero	523-2860	Modesto	16+	✓					✓	✓		✓	
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church Learning Matters!	Pamela Youngdale Beth Kirkpatrick	667-7712	Turlock	18+		✓	✓				✓	✓		
International Rescue Committee Refugee Services	Jim Stokes	238-3011 667-2378	Modesto Turlock	18+	✓	✓			✓				✓	
LearningQuest - Stanislaus Literacy Centers Learning Center	Natalie Ochoa	548-9266	Modesto	18+	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
LearningQuest - Stanislaus Literacy Centers Stanislaus County Library	Rose Jurado	558-4505	All County Libraries	18+		✓					✓			
LearningQuest - Stanislaus Literacy Centers English as a 2nd Language/Family Literacy	Kelly Nery	548-9266	Throughout County	0-7, 18+	✓					✓		✓	✓	
Modesto City Schools – Adult Education	Eric Andersen Jeanette Zabrosky	574-8192	Modesto	18+	✓			✓					✓	
Modesto City Schools – School to Career	Jeff Albritton	492-4222	Modesto	16+					✓				✓	
Modesto Gospel Mission – Center for Adult Education	Dale Hartman	225-2921	Modesto	18+		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Modesto Junior College – Community Education	Elizabeth Orozco-Wittke	575-6063	Modesto	17+			✓		✓				✓	✓
Modesto Jr. College – Literature and Language Arts	Jillian Daly	575-6150	Modesto	18+	✓	✓							✓	✓
Modesto Jr. College – Technical Education and Workforce Development	Pedro Mendez	575-6332	Modesto	14+					✓			✓	✓	✓
Newman-Crows Landing School District Newman-Crows Landing Adult School	Rick Gonzalez	862-2309	Newman	18+	✓			✓	✓			✓	✓	✓
Oakdale Literacy	Rosalie Osman	604-6831	Oakdale	18+	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓		
Patterson Unified School District Patterson Adult School	Jose Sanchez Marcos Huerta	892-4720	Patterson	18+	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Riverbank Unified School District CASA del Rio Family Resource Center	Araceli Zamora	869-0468	Riverbank	All	✓	✓						✓	✓	
St. Joseph's Catholic Church – ESL Program	Mercedes Hart Lauren Willoughby	551-4973	Modesto	18+	✓	✓				✓		✓		
Stanislaus County Office of Education Come Back Kids	Julie Moore	238-8650	Throughout County	18+				✓				✓		✓
Turlock Unified School District Turlock Adult School	Linda Alaniz	667-0643	Turlock	18+	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
Waterford Unified School District - Adult Education	Peggy Herndon	874-9017	Waterford	18+	✓			✓	✓	✓			✓	✓

**For information about the Literacy Network of Stanislaus County, call the Stanislaus Partners in Education at 238-1766.**