



From Science Labs to Literacy

MCC Retired Professor Becomes Literacy Champion



Lynne Osborn, retired MCC Science Professor, and volunteer tutor for *English at Large*.

“Wonderful things happen at Middlesex. I watched people turn their lives around and find strengths they did not know they had. Now, I see our learners at EAL turning their lives around by learning English, becoming citizens, and participating fully in their new country.”

*- Lynne Osborn
retired MCC Science Professor*

Become an English Literacy Tutor

The need is great! To be a tutor you do not need previous teaching experience or knowledge of a foreign language. You do need desire and commitment. The training is free. Get more information at: www.englishatlarge.org or contact them by e-mail at volunteer@englishatlarge.org or call 781-395-2374.

ENGLISHATLARGE

After 30 years of teaching science at Middlesex (at times tutoring struggling English-language learners), retired MCC Professor Lynne Osborn found it easy to transition to volunteer tutor for *English at Large* (EAL) in 2003. Last year, she was named a Massachusetts Literacy Champion for her outstanding work in developing and implementing creative solutions to adult literacy challenges as an EAL volunteer.

“I stand in awe of the bravery it takes for the people English at Large serves to come into a culture so different from their own to start a new life. Their stories are humbling,” said Osborn, talking about the adult learners in the EAL program. “Many of them work long hours and have small children and little free time, yet they know that mastering English is crucial to their success here.”

Founded in 1970 in Lexington, EAL is the leading volunteer-based adult literacy organization in the area. Its volunteers have provided free English literacy services to more than 10,000 Boston-area adult learners. These services include individual and small group tutoring and conversation practice, tailored to the specific needs of each learner. With the help of more than 280 volunteers, EAL learners are changing their lives - writing resumes, getting new jobs, learning to speak to health professionals, reading to their children, and achieving citizenship.

Learners are thoroughly assessed before they begin in order to determine the level of help they will need. Teaching and learning occur whenever and wherever tutors and learners can meet, usually in libraries. Tutors participate in a 15-hour training session and receive a handbook of information before starting. Most volunteers tutor one-on-one, for a few hours each week. More than 200 learners are on the waiting list, and most wait nearly 12 months for a tutor.

Osborn first read about EAL in an article in a senior newsletter which was written by a volunteer. She is very glad she decided to give it a try and very enthusiastic about the great work being done by so many volunteers.

Massachusetts Literacy Champions is an initiative of Herald Media’s Massachusetts Literacy Foundation, in partnership with Verizon’s Check Into Literacy program. The purpose of the awards is to identify and publicly recognize people who have made significant contributions in literacy education. The award-winners receive a \$2,500 grant for their organization and a \$1,000 personal grant. Both grants awarded to Osborn were donated to the Acton Memorial Library, which purchased wireless computers, Rosetta Stone software, and multiple copies of the writing series, *Weaving it Together*.

Osborn’s first learner was a mother of two

from Taiwan with a degree in business. After working together on her language skills for four years, the woman now has a good job with the Veterans Administration. She and her husband became citizens two years ago. Osborn has been working with her current learner, a medical doctor from China, for nearly five years. This pupil now works as a research technician.

“The entire staff at EAL does wonders on a shoestring budget,” said Osborn. “We initially serve as a ‘walking yellow pages’ to help our learners access whatever services they need and become familiar with cultural issues that are often so different from their own.”

During her 30 years at Middlesex, Osborn taught on both campuses and was “involved in everything.” She chaired the Faculty/Staff Association four times and served as Science Department Chair for many years. Last year, she chaired the Retiree Campaign for the MCC Foundation Annual Fund. “Like most Middlesex faculty, I served on numerous committees at the college and strongly support the college’s mission. Wonderful things happen at Middlesex. I watched people turn their lives around and find strengths they did not know they had. Now, I see learners at EAL turning their lives around by learning English, becoming citizens, and participating fully in their new country.”

Osborn also has been active in Friends of the Acton Council on Aging since 1981, and has served as treasurer of the group since 1990. She noted that Acton now has a growing immigrant community of East Asians, Indians and Brazilians. Many East Asians and Indians are older and often help care for grandchildren, so the Senior Center is reaching out to them with literacy programs and other activities. “Getting involved in literacy programs and activities at the Acton Senior Center is a nice bridge between the center and my work with English at Large.”

In addition to volunteering, Osborn has enjoyed other activities in retirement. “Retirement has given my husband, Gil, and me the chance to do a modest amount of traveling to Scotland and the Canadian Maritime Provinces. We also have taken trips centered on our shared love of opera, including one glorious trip to the Metropolitan Opera’s 40th anniversary celebration.”

Osborn encourages anyone interested in volunteering to contact English at Large. “Volunteers are always welcome and tutoring really exemplifies the best part of teaching – working one-on-one with a dedicated, motivated student.”

- Deborah Kearney