

# CHATHAM LITERACY

A Message from the Executive Director

## I was inspired...

by our staff, volunteers and adult learners this past year as COVID-19 upended our programs, face-to-face teaching, budget and business.

I was blown away by the way staff pivoted. Volunteers and learners dove into our new distance (online) learning model. Our Board and Committees developed innovative fundraisers, grant applications and ways to provide program support. As we were presented with challenges, we turned those into opportunities. We not only survived, we flourished in dynamic ways, continuing to impact lives.

Being able to understand, process, make informed decisions, communicate - all of that is literacy. Literacy is the foundation upon which a healthy life can be built.

Join our conversations throughout this report showing how and why we believe in the power of literacy to change lives.

We think you'll also be... inspired!

*Vicki Newell, Executive Director*



**Chatham Literacy Staff** Front left to right: Kayla McCline, Joselyn Villaseñor, Leslie Ocampo; Back left to right: Vicki Newell and DJ Lynch. Picture taken by Bill Horner III.

## A COVID-19 Necessity – Streamlining Services

COVID-19 put a wrench in Chatham Literacy's gears last year. The office had to close. Tutors and adult learners could no longer meet face to face. Staff worked from home.

Chatham Literacy had no plan to venture into distance learning, that is, until April 2020. COVID-19 forced staff to immediately transition learners to remote instruction using Zoom and a self-paced digital learning app. Staff trained themselves, (we ALL had to learn, right?) and then trained both learners and tutors on how to navigate Zoom and the app. Adult learners were provided laptops and textbooks, and offered ongoing technical support with the addition of weekly tutor strategy and information sessions.

Looking on the bright side, Chatham Literacy, as an agency, experienced monumental growth this past year and our learners

gained knowledge in addition to digital and computer skills. Learners no longer had to come into Siler City; instead they could log on to Zoom to receive tutoring services from anywhere. Students who had struggled with lack of childcare or transportation no longer had to miss class.

All in all, remote instruction proved to be the silver lining in an otherwise difficult year. We will continue offering remote instruction and the digital learning app as options, making it possible for us to reach more people in our community than ever before. For those adult learners who returned to in-person tutoring, they can now use combined teaching platforms and meet via Zoom when weather is too bad to travel. Say good-bye to snow days!

**Our Mission**  
Chatham Literacy helps adults, living or working in Chatham County, N.C., acquire the literacy and educational skills they need to function successfully in society.

**Our Vision**  
Chatham County will be a community where everyone is literate.

- Our Values**
- Community
  - Diversity
  - Excellence
  - Focus on Students
  - Sustainability
  - Our Colleagues

## The Thirst for Knowledge



Martha and Mary now tutor in-person.

Martha Romero has a dream: "I want to become an American citizen so that I can obtain a business license and open my own bakery."

When the youngest of her four children recently graduated with a master's degree, Martha quickly refocused her energies on her own education goals. Enrolled in Chatham Literacy's Citizenship program for two years, she added an ESOL class.

The relationship between Martha and her new ESOL tutor, Mary Hood Hart, is one of mutual admiration. "I was lonely and bored in retirement, but volunteering has really helped. Martha is my friend! Her passion, work ethic

and positive attitude inspire me!" In addition to a fulltime job, Martha sells baked goods and Mexican ceramics, and is enrolled in a traditional Mexican dance class.

Together, Martha and Mary have turned challenges into opportunities: navigating distance learning; practicing and improving English conversation skills with a work supervisor; and using newfound confidence and skills to express concerns to a store manager.

This dynamic tutor-adult learner pair are thrilled to now meet in person for class and continue their journey toward helping Martha realize her dream.

## Overcoming Obstacles

Chatham Literacy is bridging the gap between learners and remote online learning. With the added responsibilities brought by the pandemic, many learners were not able to transition to virtual classes. To address that need, Chatham Literacy introduced Learning Upgrade as a teaching tool.

Learning Upgrade is a digital learning app that teaches English through the use of songs, games and videos. The program is self-paced, easy to navigate and can be accessed on a phone. When Chatham Literacy offered this app as an option to ESOL adult learner Xochilt, she readily agreed and

continues to use the program today. Xochilt has clocked in more than 130 hours using this digital application.

The completion of a course in Learning Upgrade is equivalent to a grade level gain in reading and Xochilt's reading ability has improved by three grade levels! When asked about her future plans, Xochilt says she wants to continue using the app so she can help her daughter with her homework as she begins second grade and so she can begin the next chapter in her life of becoming a U.S. citizen.



Xochilt takes her phone...and learning... with her everywhere!

## Sign me up! Professional development, please.



Janet and Christie meet via Zoom.

Janet Ramirez moved from Mexico to Siler City with her family in 2000. She was the first in her family to attend college, earning a certificate in Electronic Engineering Technology.

Janet now works at Hispanic Liaison and even though she speaks mainly Spanish when at work, she wanted to grow professionally and personally by improving her grammar and reading skills in English. Janet's boss at Hispanic Liaison encouraged her to enroll in Chatham Literacy's Adult Basic Education (ABE) Program.

Chatham Literacy tutor Christie Minchew steadily helped Janet improve her vocabulary and ability to structure thoughts in English.

"Christie never made me feel like I'm being judged and encourages and celebrates with me when I achieve a goal," said Janet.

Most of Chatham Literacy's ABE learners struggle to read, write or do math well enough to reach similar goals. Learners seek personal accomplishments, such as obtaining a job promotion, earning a high school equivalency diploma, or building the skills to read a prescription and talk with a doctor.

Janet's boss says it's a joy to see her employee thrive with tutoring. Janet agrees, "I wanted to improve myself and grow as an individual with an organization that actually cared about my learning."

# A New Citizen's Journey

"I wanted to renew my Green Card and the attorney was going to charge me two thousand dollars to fill out the application!" remembers David González who emigrated from San Luis Potosi, Mexico 30 years ago. "Then I found out that Chatham Literacy could help me (without charge), but I had to commit to taking the Citizenship class first." That was how David began his journey with Chatham Literacy volunteer instructor Joanne Caye.

Joanne and David meet weekly via Zoom to study for his upcoming Citizenship exam at the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) office in Durham. David recounted how he recently asked an American at his

workplace one of his study questions: Who was the leader of the Women's Suffrage movement? "The guy didn't know...but I knew!" David said. "Joanne told me that if I get any of the answers on the exam wrong, it better not be that one!"

Soon David won't have to worry about renewing a Green Card ever again. When he's ready for the test, he will complete all the necessary citizenship paperwork with Chatham Literacy staff, practice mock interviews and review his application (again and again) in the home stretch to becoming a U.S. Citizen.

And by the way, the answer - Susan B. Anthony!



Citizenship materials are provided free to learners.

# The Heart of our Office: Our Program Coordinators



Leslie Ocampo

Two vibrant, courageous and empathetic Latinas are at the heart of Chatham Literacy's operations. Leslie Ocampo and Joselyn Villaseñor are our Program Coordinators. They work hand-in-hand with learners, tutors, and the community to ensure our programs run efficiently and smoothly. They truly care because they are products of our area.

Leslie's parents came from Guerrero, Mexico, with the dream to provide a better future for their family. They moved to Siler City, worked hard and were outstanding role models for their children. Due to their effort

and support, Leslie went to UNC-G where she majored in political science and global studies. She was the first in her extended family to go to college.

Joselyn's story is similar. Her parents emigrated from Guatemala to escape poverty and to provide opportunities for their children. After leaving their beautiful mountainous country, they moved to Siler City to work at the poultry plant and later to Asheboro. After graduating high school in Randolph County, Joselyn studied at Randolph Community College and then transferred to NC State where she found her true calling and majored in Sociology. She is also a first-generation college graduate, making her family proud.

Both Latinas work tirelessly to support our community and help our families improve their lives. They meet with learners to explain our different programs, guide them to select the one that suits their needs and then pair them with caring tutors. In addition, they train tutors so they can provide quality education to adult learners. Both follow the learners' progress and address any questions that tutors may have.



Joselyn Villaseñor

Joselyn and Leslie faced the challenge of providing instruction in the middle of a global pandemic, which has proven their resilience and ingenuity. They have modified programs and provided tools to learners and tutors so they can continue their progress. Phone calls, texts, TalkingPoints messages and Zoom meetings are some of our coordinators' new tools.

Leslie and Joselyn have shown our county and our state what two extraordinary Latinas can offer. We are fortunate to have them in our organization.

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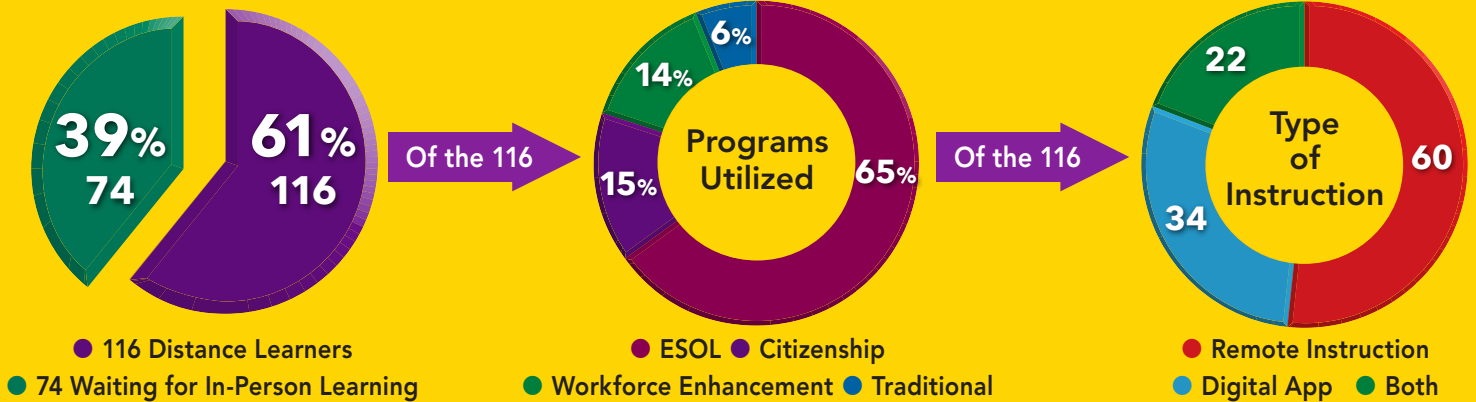
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Beth Anderson, Maureen Avakian, Jody Bruchon, Scott Cabe, Wanda Constantino, Tom Craig, Sheila Creth, Cyndi Harris, Larry Hicks, Teresa Keefner, Chris Kehrer, Ed Neely, Faye Partin, Paul Stiller, Liza Terll, and Anne Wrigley

# THE YEAR IN NUMBERS

## 190 Adult Learners



## 120 Volunteers

3,900 Volunteer Hours  
(including 2,400 Instructional Hours)  
\$111,306 = Value Added  
from Volunteers

## Learner Achievement

- +50 Received Laptops
- +6 Became U.S. Citizens
- +5 Obtained Jobs
- +80 Gained Digital Skills
- +43 Improved Conversational Skills
- +36 Increased Reading Comprehension

## Take Action: Donate!

Thanks to the generosity of people like you, Chatham Literacy is transforming lives through literacy. There are many ways you can continue to help.

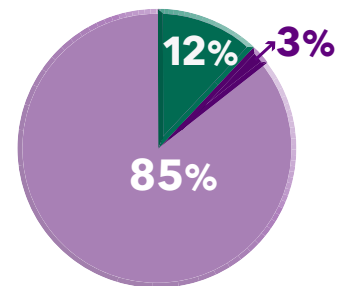
- ▶ Make a **financial gift**, online or by mail.
- ▶ **Become a sustainer** with regular monthly donations through your credit or debit card.
- ▶ Make a **charitable stock donation**. Do you have highly appreciated stock? This could allow you to avoid taxes on gains while also helping out Chatham Literacy.
- ▶ Make a **qualified charitable distribution** to Chatham Literacy. Are you currently taking required minimum distributions (RMD) from your IRAs/401ks? This could be a more tax-efficient way to donate!
- ▶ **Shop for literacy online** through AmazonSmile.com or iGive.com.
- ▶ **Donate your time as a tutor** either in-person or online.

## Appropriation of Funds

Fiscal Year 2020-21

**\$256,865**

- Program Services \$219,387
- General Administrative \$31,027
- Fundraising \$6,451



## A Focus on Cultural Competence

The climate across the country is unsettled. People of all colors, creeds, organizations and educational groups are embracing Cultural Competency. We are rethinking old attitudes and behaviors and engaging in new conversations.

The Chatham Literacy Board of Directors is examining our policies, employee handbook and everything we do to achieve our commitment to racial equity, inclusion and diversity. We are continually exploring ways to ensure

our Board, staff, volunteers and adult learners reflect the larger community.

Just as we look at a rainbow with its beautiful colors, almost blending together to make this amazing visual in the sky, our communities work side by side - blending and making the world a better place for all as we appreciate and value similarities and differences.

Our organization is launching trainings and mini-workshops provided by Board

members and Chatham Organizing for Racial Equity (CORE). We are learning to ask each other questions about our own community groups in order to dispel personal myths or assumptions.

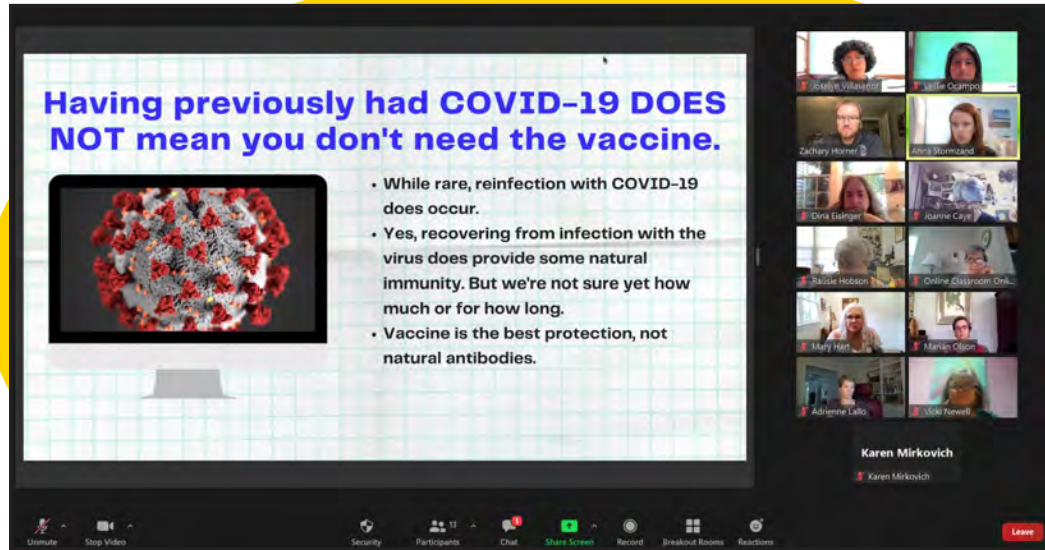
Ours is a work in progress - working to increase our knowledge and our understanding of our cultures and beliefs - so that we can be our best together.

# An Online Journey for New Tutors

Karen Mirkovich was a lifelong teacher of ESOL in the Washington, DC area. Once settled in our county, Karen approached Chatham Literacy in 2021 to become a tutor. Although in-person tutor training had been suspended due to COVID-19, Chatham Literacy offered Karen a redesigned self-paced, web-based tutor training program.

This new training format allowed Karen to work around her schedule. She was also provided a one-on-one virtual orientation covering tutor roles, responsibilities and other organizational information, as well as the opportunity to shadow an experienced tutor to observe remote instruction.

The redesigned tutor training offers weekly strategy and information sessions to promote professional development and networking opportunities. Karen says these sessions have built strong connectivity within the team. "The leadership team at Chatham Literacy is very professional, articulate, knowledgeable and supportive of the tutors they train."



Chatham County Health Dept. made a presentation during a tutor strategy and information session.

Chatham Literacy will continue offering web-based training as an effective and efficient way to introduce volunteers to the tutoring program. Web-based training also allows

tutors and adult learners to be matched more quickly. We strive to meet the individual needs of our tutors, and are pleased to offer an in-person option if preferred.

## THANKS TO OUR GRANTORS AND SPONSORS: JULY 2020 - JUNE 2021

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 United States Federal Government: Paycheck Protection Program  
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 Women of Fearington

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**Spring for Literacy, Spring 2021, Featuring Tom Rankin and Jill McCorkle**

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Sybil England Clark, in her honor.

*(Reading and writing were her life.)*

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Chatham Literacy is a United Way of Chatham County member agency and encourages participation in the current annual campaign.

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