

New Directions/New Partnerships

A Letter From Vicki Newell, Executive Director

Dear Friends,

We had a great year at Chatham Literacy. We enhanced our organization and expanded program offerings for our learners. We forged new partnerships in the community with a variety of businesses and organizations, and extended our geographical reach into rural parts of our county that are traditionally underserved.

Let's take a quick look at a few of our accomplishments.

Developing New Directions

We continued to grow our programs in terms of the number of learners we serve and the number of volunteer tutors who comprise our team.

- We served 214 adult learners this past year, an increase of 42%.
- We recorded 5,491 total instructional hours, an increase of 36%.
- And we were grateful to have 76 tutors who worked with learners this year, an increase of 41%.

We approved Financial Literacy as a permanent offering. The program addresses money management, budgeting, spending while saving, establishing an emergency fund and understanding credit scores. We successfully completed a Spanish Literacy pilot that helps non-literate Spanish speakers improve their reading skills in Spanish, preparing them to do well in their personal lives or in our other programs where basic language skills are so critical.

Forging New Partnerships

We saw a significant rise in the number of businesses willing to partner with us by encouraging their employees to take our classes onsite, during work hours. The result for our business partners is more capable employees who can communicate better and be more engaged. We are also finding that our business partners care about the quality of life of their employees and want to help the community as a whole.

We, of course, continue to partner with other nonprofits and local government agencies that help us identify potential learners and often let us tutor in their facilities.

Gratitude

I want to thank our staff for their dedication and many contributions this year. I am so proud of their work and their caring attitude.

I also thank our tutors and other volunteers who give so much of themselves to help our learners.

And I want to thank all of our donors for your continued generosity. Everything we do is made possible with your financial support.

Whether you are a donor, a tutor, a volunteer or a staff member, we thank you! Every accomplishment you read in this report is a direct result of the role you play in our family!

Respectfully,



The Year in Numbers

(July 2023 – June 2024)

214

Learners
served

82%

Achieved a
short-term
literacy goal

43%

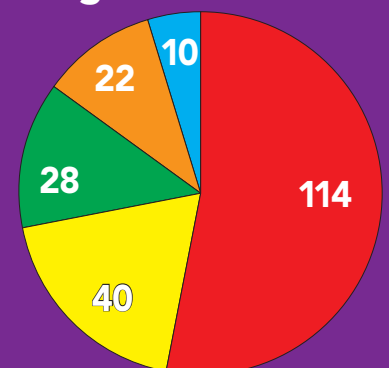
Achieved a
long-term
literacy goal

76

Tutors
volunteered

9,592 volunteer hours, valued at \$321,236!

Program Enrollment



- ESOL
- Citizenship
- Financial Literacy
- Adult Goal-Based Education
- Spanish Literacy



Cultivating Success: A Strategic Partnership Between Chatham Literacy and O'Mara Landscaping and Lawn Care

In Chatham County, a transformative partnership between O'Mara Landscaping and Lawn Care and Chatham Literacy is addressing a critical workforce need: English language proficiency. James O'Mara, owner of O'Mara Landscaping, and Chatham Literacy have jointly implemented an innovative approach to employee literacy development that goes beyond traditional job training. The partnership's success lies in its tailored approach to adult education and a long-term commitment to fostering a learning environment within the company.

Recognizing that employees who had engaged in physical labor all day would be unlikely to attend classes at night, James O'Mara integrated Chatham Literacy's teaching program into the workday to ensure that any employee who wanted to participate could do so. Classes are held on-site, in the mornings before employees need to be on a job site. Learners are paid for the time that they are in class, which is an added incentive.

O'Mara emphasizes the long-term nature of this initiative, stating, "I think you have to be patient. It's not something that's going to happen overnight. I tell the guys it's a three-year program, right? Because I don't think you're going to get results in six months."

O'Mara shares an example of how improved English skills opened up new opportunities for an employee

who became an operational manager: "English is a passport, it can help you, and it should get you a better job. It should get you promoted. You become a more valuable asset to any company."

He observes, "There's a collaboration, a cooperation, a sense of teams working together. I just love that dynamic that's being created." This collaborative environment fosters not only language learning but also team building and cultural understanding.

O'Mara sees the partnership as part of a larger narrative about immigration and integration in America. "Chatham Literacy's mission is about fulfilling one's fullest potential. What we need to talk about here is why immigration is important to this country. It has been foundational to this country.. We can train immigrants to be more effective communicators. We can train immigrants to become more effective workers."

Through this partnership, O'Mara hopes to see his employees "break through their immediate cultural surroundings and see the world from a bigger perspective," embodying the transformative power of language and education in the immigrant experience.



Miriam Lopez: From Learner to U.S. Citizen

When Miriam Lopez arrived in the U.S. in 2000, she came for the same reason most people do: to make a better life for herself and her family. Over the years, she has worked hard, put down roots, and is now the proud mother of three daughters and is a six-year employee at Mountaire Farms, a poultry plant in Siler City. Her oldest daughter has recently been accepted into Wake Forest University.

Miriam is especially proud to have become a U.S. Citizen in November 2023. "I always wanted to become a citizen," Miriam explained. "I now feel safer and more secure while my family and I pursue a good life here."

Miriam studied to become a citizen at home for one year with the help and support of her daughters. She soon realized that she needed more assistance and joined the Chatham Literacy Citizenship tutoring program.

"My tutor was excellent," Miriam said. "She really helped me understand everything. When I finally took the test, I found it very easy. I was so well prepared."

Her positive experience next prompted her to take ESOL (English) classes with Chatham Literacy.

Chatham Literacy is pleased to report that 156 of our learners have become U.S. citizens since the program began in 2008, thirteen in the last year alone.

Our dedicated tutors help people who want to become citizens study for the citizenship test. Learners are taught about the history, government structure, and civic responsibilities of U.S. citizens. Our learners delve into topics such as the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, the branches of government, and the rights and freedoms that define this nation.

The rigorous preparation and focused study that learners like Miriam undertake for the citizenship test reflect a commitment to understanding and embracing the duties and privileges of U.S. citizenship. Chatham Literacy applauds Miriam, and all thirteen of our newest citizens!

Take Action: Donate Today!

Thanks to your generosity, Chatham Literacy transforms lives through literacy. Here are ways you can continue to help.

- Make a financial gift, online or by mail.
- Become a sustainer with regular monthly donations through a credit card, debit card or ACH transaction.
- Make a charitable stock donation. This could allow you to avoid taxes on gains while also helping out Chatham Literacy.
- Make a donation to meet your Required Minimum Distribution (RMD) from your IRAs/401ks.
- Include Chatham Literacy in your planned giving.
- Donate your time as a tutor! We offer both in-person and distance learning.
- Become engaged as a Board Director or Committee Member.



Dream Big, Budget Smart

Chatham Literacy piloted an innovative Financial Literacy program in 2022. Following its initial year, financial literacy became a permanent offering. This multi-week course helps people better understand banking, credit cards, credit scores, personal savings and budgeting. The course is designed to help people who may be struggling with financial matters, and is also an excellent stepping-stone for new entrepreneurs.

When Walter Fuica and Brenda Lopez – a Chilean couple with three children – first arrived in the United States, they discovered that financial matters were very different in the U.S. compared to their home country. They realized that they could not be truly successful without understanding the U.S. fiscal landscape and how to manage their finances.

Walter and Brenda enrolled in Financial Literacy and soon completed their certification. Both learners were highly focused and had perfect attendance during the duration of the course.

"We are following our dream," the couple said. "One day we would like to be able to open our own business, but we know we have to start with the basics.

This course is exactly what we needed to help us get started down the right path."

"All of the sections were valuable," they added. "We got so much out of the budgeting section which included lessons on how to prioritize our spending. We now understand how credit works."

After receiving their certification, the couple enrolled in ESOL to improve their English language skills. While they understand much of what is spoken to them, they are hesitant when speaking English and are working hard with their tutor to gain confidence and improve their skills.

With their budding self-assurance, the couple's new goal is to start a commercial cleaning business to help them build a stable financial life. Over the long-term, they would like to open an events-planning business that would feature weddings and other kinds of celebrations.

"We have some experience in events planning from Chile, and this is our dream. Chatham Literacy is helping us realize it."



An ESOL Lifetime Achiever

Esther Carillo is one of Chatham Literacy's star learners in the ESOL program. Married to Luis Aguila, another Chatham Literacy learner who recently became a U.S. citizen, Esther is the proud mother of three children.

More than 20 years ago, she arrived in the U.S. from Mexico, facing the challenges and uncertainties that come with starting fresh in a foreign land. Now Esther is working at Chatham Habitat and continuing her mission of self-improvement at Chatham Literacy.

When she first arrived, Esther worked at a local diner, serving patrons with warmth and a little apprehension. She spoke of working at the diner, where she would occasionally need her coworkers to translate for her when she could not understand her customers' requests. One day, she confused a group of individuals coming from a funeral for a party. That day she vowed that she needed to learn English to communicate better so that she would not make such a mistake again. She bravely joined Chatham Literacy's ESOL program in 2017 and hasn't looked back.

During the pandemic, Esther found herself facing the unknown. Recognizing the importance of learning in her professional and personal life, Esther doubled down on her studies at Chatham Literacy.

Under the guidance of her patient tutor, Mark Zeringue, Esther dedicated herself to improving her English reading and writing skills. Leslie Ocampo, a Program Coordinator at Chatham Literacy, describes Esther's progress as "remarkable" – a sentiment echoed by her tutor, Mark, and many who have observed her journey.

Since improving her English skills, Esther has been able to transition from her position at the diner to a career with benefits as Family Selection Coordinator at Chatham Habitat. She credits Chatham Literacy with supporting her, saying, "I learned a lot here. Now I can call my doctor, talk with my children's teachers, make my own appointments. I found a new job. I'm improving a lot. Chatham Literacy really helped me."

Esther's journey is an inspiration to those facing challenges in their lives and wanting to learn how to adapt to their community. When reflecting on her experience in the ESOL program at Chatham Literacy, Esther emphatically encourages "anyone thinking about learning English should definitely do it!" She reflects on the transformative power of education in her life, saying, "I like to learn. I always say, there's always something to learn, every day. I just want to keep learning more and more."

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

2023 Fall for Literacy Luncheon featuring Annette Saunooke Clapsaddle

Platinum

Wren Foundation, Inc.

Gold

Mountaire Cares

Silver

Arauco
Baba Antique
Wooden Floors
Chatham Park
Mosaic

Bronze

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Annette Saunooke Clapsaddle

2024 Spring for Literacy Luncheon featuring Brendan Slocumb

Master's Degree:

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Brendan Slocumb

Mission Statement

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.

Contact Us!

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