

## **LVEC's Satellite Initiative: Accelerating Our Transformation**

During the last few months, new LVEC Satellites were established at the Groton Public Library, Mystic & Noank Library, Montville Town Hall, and Lawrence & Memorial Hospital. These new satellites extend our network that already includes our original and prototype in Otis Library, in Norwich, as well as the Haitian Baptist Church, in Norwich, and the Multicultural Elementary School, in New London.

This expanding network of satellites is a significant demonstration by LVEC tutors and staff of our commitment to continually increase access to our services to our greatest number of learners—speakers of other languages who desire to speak and read in English. We continue to seek additional partners—libraries, churches, municipal offices, health care facilities, or other community-based locations—who can assist making our services even more accessible to the burgeoning population of speakers of other languages throughout Eastern Connecticut.

Changing work and child care schedules, limited transportation options, and difficulty in making appointments by phone with English-speaking tutors, are consistent barriers for speakers of other languages seeking LVEC services. Thus, establishing satellites throughout the area enables learners to more easily find and take advantage of our services.

However, extending our network of satellites is not easy. It requires tutors willing to assume a new administrative burden, as well as carrying out their tutoring responsibilities. And, it requires an allocation of space by partners who share our in commitment to making English language learning a top priority.

LVEC is both thrilled and thankful our tutors and so many partners have committed their time and resources to our growing network of satellites.

Without a short history lesson it may be difficult to understand why establishing this network of satellites is so transformative for LVEC. The history of LVEC is grounded in a model of service designed to teach adult Americans how to read for the first time. These learners had a social advantage, a learning need, and an emotional need, which collectively led to a system of service that speakers of other languages often found to be quite difficult to access or employ to their maximum benefit.

First, adult English-speakers who could not read have, for the most part, already figured out how to find their way, have a more stable work and family life, can

easily use the phone to make and keep appointments, and can establish a relationship with another English-speaker. The risk they were taking, however, was exposing the fact that could not read. Thus, LVEC went to great lengths to assure the confidentiality of these learners. In order to accomplish this, once a learner was matched with a volunteer tutor, it was left to the tutor and learner to negotiate where and when the dyad would meet for the tutoring to occur. And, the one-to-one dyad is a formidable and effective model for teaching an adult to read.

For speakers of other languages, however, these three issues are reversed. Negotiating life in America is why they want our services. The language barrier is always in the way. Plus, many have unsettled family lives often caused by working in jobs with shifting schedules or in need of child care services without the social networks that support individuals who have lived in the area for an extended period of time. Seeking to satisfactorily work out the logistics of a one-on-one tutoring session with an English-speaking tutor is often difficult, if not impossible. In addition, most speakers of other languages find it extremely beneficial to practice learning English in our computer-assisted learning laboratories or in conversation groups in acquiring enough basic English and the confidence necessary for a productive learning dyad with an English-speaking tutor. On the other hand, there is only minimal desire for confidentiality.

In other words, with no shift in our general level of funding, LVEC is quickly migrating from a decentralized delivery system heavily dependent on individual volunteer tutors to manage, to a series of satellites in which computer labs are established and managed, conversation groups are held, and volunteers are found and mentored who can help assure the satellites operate effectively. And, with each new satellite, a new partner with their own needs and for whom the needs of our clients are only marginal, compared to the overall existing demands of present clients on the partner. Therefore, a complex set of system changes were implemented during an ever rising demand for our services and the on-going expectation from the community we will meet this demand.

On behalf of the LVEC Board of Directors, I am delighted to express our deepest gratitude to our partners who have committed the time and resources necessary to allow this satellite network to grow. This gratitude is matched with admiration for the commitment and hard work by Susan Townsley, our Executive Director, and staff members Loretta Anderson, Barbara Severini, and Eleanor O'Malley who have fostered and propelled this network into being during the past few months.