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Editor's Corner

Happy New Year! We hope 2018 brings you great teaching experiences and lots of new ideas for your classroom.

In this issue, we kick things off with an article about incorporating math into lessons. Although adult ESOL teachers may not necessarily think of themselves as math teachers, basic math operations and numbers knowledge are a bigger part of class activities more than you might think. Read “Connecting Math to ESOL” to find out why math is an important part of ESOL classes.

In our second article, you’ll learn about a set of instructional videos focused on interactive speaking and student-centered learning, all geared toward the adult ESOL classroom. The videos, produced by the Minnesota Literacy Council, explore how to teach interactive conversation activities in your classroom.

Diabetes and prediabetes affect a staggering number of people in the U.S., and that number is growing as obesity rates increase in our country and around the world. “Teaching About the Dangers of Diabetes” presents a lesson you can use with ESOL, health literacy, and basic literacy classes to introduce what diabetes is and ways to increase awareness of it.

In this issue’s professional development article, we explain how you can help students who may have dyslexia. Dyslexia is thought to affect up to one in five learners; although adult education teachers aren’t necessarily equipped to diagnose dyslexia and then individualize lessons for those students, there are a few steps you can take to make learning a little easier.

Every issue of Notebook includes interesting activities and ideas in our Exploring Resources section. In this issue, learn about the new Road to Work series from New Readers Press, and find information to help students with time management. We also share a site that has resources from ProLiteracy’s recent conference.

Finally, in this issue’s Student Profile, we tell the story of Hussein Yerow, a dedicated refugee student in Syracuse, New York. Yerow overcame many obstacles to learn English and is now active in helping other refugees in his area. Yerow won the Ruth J. Colvin and Frank C. Laubach Award for Adult Learner Excellence at the ProLiteracy conference in Minneapolis this past September.

The Editor
Connecting Math to ESOL

Purpose
To introduce more opportunities for ESOL teachers to incorporate math into lessons.

Rationale
What comes to mind when you think of adult ESOL instruction? Several ideas may occur, including life skills topics like transportation, health, grammar skills, and pronunciation. One thing that probably doesn’t come to mind right away is math. After all, math is a separate class—and it may even be a class that language-oriented ESOL teachers try to avoid, right?

As it turns out, math is increasingly a part of adult ESOL lessons. For some teachers, it’s always been a focus. “Although math in ESOL classes has not been identified as a priority area nationally until recently, I believe that many teachers have been informally doing it for many years, in great part because their students have asked for it,” says Donna Curry, center director at the SABES PD Center for Mathematics and Adult Numeracy TERC in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

There’s also an increasing recognition of how math is used in the daily lives of adult ESOL students. Teaching math can boost student retention because it helps students better navigate life in the U.S.

This article offers some easy ways you can incorporate math into ESOL lessons. These ideas emphasize integrating math into broader student-centered lessons on shopping, budgeting/finances, and banking. The activities give students conversation and numerical practice. For each idea, students more knowledgeable about math can work with students who find numerical tasks more challenging.

If you’re nervous about your own ability to introduce basic math within lessons, make sure to read this article’s sidebars. You’ll find resources that address teaching math in adult ESOL as well as a short discussion about math anxiety among teachers.

The Basic Activities
• Compare monetary systems from students’ home countries to money in the U.S. Use visuals to compare how much each currency is worth. Curry shares the idea of, for example, comparing one Thai baht as equal to 30 cents in the U.S. and two Thai baht to 60 cents.

More Information
Donna Curry of TERC believes that ESOL instructors do not necessarily have more math anxiety than other adult education teachers. In fact, she’s met many ESOL teachers who are open and willing to learn about how to teach math to their students.

TERC offers a three-part online series entitled Mathematizing ESOL to help teachers recognize opportunities to teach some math versus just glossing over the numbers. A section of Mathematizing ESOL I: Integrating Whole Numbers begins on Jan. 8 and is open to Massachusetts teachers (register at http://sabes.org/event/8011). In addition, national sections of the Mathematizing ESOL series are offered throughout the year. For more information, email the Adult Numeracy Center at TERC at donnac@gwi.net or adultnumeracy@terc.edu.
Once students understand how to compare currency, expand it to address shopping bargains. “This same idea about proportional reasoning can be used to show prices such as two soda cans for $1.50, four cans for $3, et cetera,” Curry said.

Find ways to incorporate graphic representations of math information into lessons. Graphic literacy is growing in importance. Students can even make their own bar graphs to represent how many people in the class like two kinds of food the best (pizza versus chicken, for example). Similarly, once students are introduced to the concept of a pie chart, they could make a pie chart to show the favorite pizza toppings for everyone in the class. The latter idea comes from Barb Murphy and Sheri Lear of the Minnesota Literacy Council, who presented “Building Numeracy into Your ESL Curriculum” at the ProLiteracy Conference on Adult Literacy in September.

Lead a class lesson on personal budgeting. Have students note the amount they spend on rent/mortgage, food, utilities, and other major expenses. They can add up the amounts to compare them to their monthly income. You can find lessons on budgeting online or in ESOL textbooks.

For students new to the U.S., use realistic-looking money to give them practice in seeing what different coins and bills look like. Once that concept is clear, the class can take turns playing the roles of a cashier and customer during a transaction. Someone may buy a gallon of milk for $3.20 but gives the cashier a $5 bill. The cashier has to decide on the correct amount of change. This concept can be practiced on paper in addition to role-playing.

Ask students to make a short list of items they need to buy at the store. For each item, they can estimate how much they believe the item will cost and what their budget is. They can add up the items to make sure the total does not exceed their budget.

Prepare students for math lessons by focusing on numbers pronunciation. For beginning-level classes, spend time teaching the pronunciation of different numbers and giving quick and fun dictation practice. (Numbers that sound alike, such as 15/50 and 18/80 can be especially challenging.) This will build students’ listening skills for numbers practice in the future.
Video Training for Better Speaking Activities

Purpose
To provide ESOL teachers and tutors with professional development on interactive speaking activities.

Rationale
Adult ESOL classes are usually full of motivated students, but sometimes there are barriers to get students talking. First, some students can be particularly shy or don’t feel confident about their speaking ability. Other times, teachers may not be aware of teaching techniques that get students out of their seats to interact with others or how to best introduce these new activities into the classroom. If an instructor knows of a new technique but has never seen it practiced before, they may feel uncertain about testing it out with students.

To help ease these concerns and provide teacher training to tutors scattered through the state, the Minnesota Literacy Council developed a series of short videos that show common teaching activities. The videos are available at the site http://mnliteracy.org/classroomvideos.

There are two videos for each activity: a full version that shows the entire activity and a shorter version that provides an overview. Each activity also includes a PDF with the activity’s instructions. The videos were filmed in adult ESOL pre-beginning and beginning ESOL classes.

At the website (and on page 8 of this issue), there is an observation form in PDF and Microsoft Word formats that can be used during teacher training or for individual study. The form allows instructors to reflect on what they learned from watching the video and what questions they may have about the activity.

The sidebar on this page provides a list of activities highlighted in the videos. Next, we walk you through how to present to instructors one of the activities in the videos. Teachers could use the instructions on the following pages independently or in a group setting for teacher/tutor training. Once you are familiar with this training format, you could use it for the other activities featured on the site.
More Information

The Minnesota Literacy Council videos got started as a way to provide professional development opportunities for new volunteers around the state, says Andrea Echelberger, the program’s training coordinator. Sometimes, new teachers or tutors may be uncertain how to lead a specific activity if they’ve never observed it in action before, Echelberger says. The videos are a way to bridge that training gap.

So far, the videos have been used in Minnesota for in-services. As the videos become better known outside of the state, Echelberger is getting feedback from other instructors who are using them for teacher training.

This fall, there was a discussion on the LINCS English Language Acquisition online group about the videos. This free discussion group is supported by the U.S. Department of Education. By joining LINCS, you can view the discussion in the LINCS archive. Learn more about joining LINCS at https://community.lincs.ed.gov/.

Echelberger also welcomes feedback on the videos. Email her at aecheleber@mnliteracy.org.

Walk, Talk, Trade: Instructor Training

1. As a warm up, have teachers brainstorm some ways that they could practice new vocabulary with students. Ask if they have ever heard of an activity called Walk, Talk, Trade. As you will see on the video, Walk, Talk, Trade gives students the chance to practice new vocabulary by swapping pictures of the vocabulary words.

2. Hand out a copy of the instructions for Walk, Talk, Trade from page 7 of this issue.

3. Next, hand out a copy of the Classroom Video Observation form on page 8 of this issue. Have instructors first answer the Pre-Viewing questions before they watch the video.

4. Make sure you have the technology to show instructors the video about Walk, Talk, Trade found at the links below. The short video is six minutes, and the long video is about 10 minutes. Decide which video version you will show to teachers. The links to the videos are as follows:
   • http://tinyurl.com/ydz29cxh (long)
   • http://tinyurl.com/yd2c4vgp (short)

5. Take a couple of minutes to talk about the video with instructors. You can use questions that are on the Classroom Video Observation form in addition to your own questions.

6. Give instructors time to fill out the observation form.
Walk, Talk, Trade

This is an activity to reinforce the students’ familiarity with the weekly vocabulary through interactions with classmates. For lower level classes, pictures of the weekly vocabulary can be used. For higher level classes, written words can be used.

**Objective:** To review vocabulary

**Materials:** Cards with pictures or words of the weekly vocabulary

**Description:**
1. Review the vocabulary words that will be used during the activity.
2. As a class, practice the language that the students will use to interact during the activity (e.g. What is this? How do you spell it?).
3. Give each student a picture card or a word card. Some students may have the same picture or word.
4. Model asking a student what is on their card, responding to their question, then swapping cards and moving on to a new partner.
5. Students mingle in the classroom asking and answering questions about what is on their cards. At the end of each interaction, students swap cards and find a new partner.

Classroom Video Observation

Observations are a powerful professional development tool for both novice and experienced teachers. Observers 1) get new activity ideas for their teaching toolkits, 2) see classroom management techniques in action, and 3) can reflect on their own teaching practices based on what they witness.

Name: ___________________________ Date: ______________

Classroom Activity: ___________________________

中国制造

Pre-Viewing Questions:

1. After reading the activity instructions, which parts of the activity are unclear to you?

2. Which parts of the activity will be the most challenging for students?

Video Observations:

1. How does the teacher prepare the students to participate in the activity? (overview of the activity, review of vocabulary, clarifying questions, pre-teaching language, etc.)

2. How does the teacher model the activity for the students? What visuals were used to support the activity instructions?

3. How does the teacher check the students’ comprehension throughout the activity?

Post-Viewing Reflection:

1. How does your teaching situation differ from the one in the video? What adaptations will you need to make to the activity for your class level, size, or set-up? (additional modeling, technology, grouping, etc.)

2. What would you like to “steal” from the teacher to incorporate into your own teaching? (e.g. personal qualities, classroom management techniques, the way the teacher creates a good classroom atmosphere, etc.)
Teaching About the Dangers of Diabetes

Purpose
To introduce students to the topic of diabetes and the health dangers it can present.

Rationale
Diabetes and prediabetes are a growing problem in the U.S. and around the world. According to the American Diabetes Association, 30.3 million people in the U.S., or 9.4% of the population, had diabetes in 2015. Of those, 7.2 million were undiagnosed. An additional 84.1 million adults—33.9% of all adults in the U.S.—had prediabetes. That means they may one day develop type 2 diabetes if they don't make some changes to their lifestyles. The growing number of people with diabetes coincides with the obesity epidemic in the U.S. Type 2 diabetes is also on the rise among children and teens. Diabetes (both types 1 and 2) are associated with many health problems if the person's blood sugar is not properly controlled.

Unless students have a family member or close friend with diabetes, they may not realize the dangers it can pose. They also may not realize that type 2 diabetes is something that can develop over time and is often associated with being overweight, a poor diet, lack of exercise, and family history. Many adult ESOL students complain about the negative changes in their diet when they come to the U.S. As a result, diabetes is potentially a real concern among the adult student population.

The following is an activity from the New Readers Press high-beginning Health Stories book. This activity would fit in well with a life skills class focused on health, although it could also fit in well with a discussion about parenting. (The main person in the story is a child.)

The Basic Activity
1. Ask students if they know what diabetes is. Ask if they have heard of type 1 and type 2 diabetes. Spend a few minutes exploring what they know or don't know about diabetes.

2. Provide students with a copy of the story “Type 2 Diabetes” on pages 11 and 12. Go over the story in your usual class format. For instance, you could read the story aloud to the class once or twice and then give them time to review the story on their own or with a partner.

More Information
Here are links to additional resources about diabetes.

Background for instructors (these are at a higher reading level):

Facts About Type 2
This resource from the American Diabetes Association provides basic information about diabetes. It also points out that diabetes is more common in Latinos and Asian Americans—two groups that are part of many adult ESOL classes.

National Diabetes Statistics Report, 2017
This 20-page report, also from the American Diabetes Association, provides detail about the prevalence of diabetes in the U.S., including areas that have the most people with diabetes (the Southeast), deaths from diabetes, and health costs.

Carbohydrate Counting 101
http://www.joslin.org/info/Carbohydrate_Counting_101.html
Joslin Diabetes Center in Boston provides a relatively short reading about the importance of carbohydrate counting when you have diabetes.
More Information

11 Ways to Get Moving More When You Have Diabetes
https://tinyurl.com/y9b7aexk

The health site for U.S. News and World Report has several articles about diabetes geared toward people who have the disease. This one focuses on ways to boost physical activity and could serve as a conversation starter with students. (The teacher could suggest some of the ideas in a discussion; the article may be too challenging for students to read.)

Background for students

What Happened to My Body?
http://www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/Health/#Body

This ESOL picture story focuses on a man who began to eat too much upon arriving in the U.S. The lesson talks about the dangers of diabetes. The story and lesson appear on the Center for Applied Linguistics site.

Type 2 Diabetes Risk Test

Students could take this short, interactive risk test on their own or with guidance from an instructor to assess their diabetes risk. The test is also available in a paper version.

Conversation: Talking to the Doctor

Mother: How can my son control his type 2 diabetes?
Doctor: First he needs to lose weight. It can help lower his blood glucose level.

Mother: What can he eat?
Doctor: He needs fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.

Mother: What can’t he eat?
Doctor: He needs to avoid sugary sodas and processed foods. You can talk to a dietician about his meal plan.

Source: Health Stories, New Readers Press

3. **Ask learners about new or difficult vocabulary words.** The bolded words in the story are defined below. You can provide the definitions before they read the story or after, once you see which terms are new for them. Give the class some time to practice their new vocabulary.

```
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>over:weight:</th>
<th>weigh more than the normal amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>calorie:</td>
<td>fuel for our bodies from food or drink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>thirsty:</td>
<td>wanting to have a drink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>urinates:</td>
<td>sends out liquid when using the bathroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>energy:</td>
<td>ability to be active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lab tests:</td>
<td>tests done in a laboratory using someone’s blood or other body fluids</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>type 2 diabetes:</td>
<td>a type of diabetes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>glucose:</td>
<td>sugar in the blood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>exercise:</td>
<td>physical activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>medication:</td>
<td>medicines to help you feel better</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>diet:</td>
<td>what foods you eat; a meal plan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
```

4. **Once the class is comfortable with the story, review the comprehension questions on page 12.** You can discuss them as a class, in small groups, or have students write the answers down.

5. **Ask students: Do you think you could get diabetes?** As they share their answers, encourage them to think further about the topic with the questions below. You can have these questions on a handout. Students can keep their answers to themselves if they prefer.

   Put a check (✔) if it is true for you.

   a. _____ I eat a lot of foods with sugar.
   b. _____ I don’t exercise enough.
   c. _____ I should maybe lose weight.
   d. _____ I have a close family member with diabetes.
   e. _____ I am 40 years old or older.
   f. _____ I drink a lot of soda.

   Although this checklist is not scientific, it does touch on common risk factors for diabetes. Ask the class: “If you checked three or more things on the list, what should you do?” Encourage them to see a doctor and get their blood sugar tested if needed.

6. **For additional practice with the topic, students can read the conversation in the sidebar on this page, called “Talking to the Doctor.”** After you practice the conversation for the class so they can hear correct pronunciation, have pairs take turns reading the conversation aloud. Discuss any new words that emerge.
Mateo is 12 years old and overweight. He eats too many high-calorie foods. He drinks a lot of sugary sodas. Lately Mateo feels thirsty all the time. He urinates often. He doesn’t have a lot of energy. Mateo’s mother is concerned. She takes him to the doctor. The doctor orders several lab tests for Mateo.

In a few days, Mateo and his mother go back to the office. The doctor says, “Mateo, you have type 2 diabetes. It’s a disease that affects how your body uses glucose. Glucose is a sugar that your body needs. When you have type 2 diabetes, your blood glucose level is too high. You can get very sick.”

Mateo and his mother look worried. Then the doctor says, “Don’t worry. Type 2 diabetes is serious, but you can live a long and healthy life.”
The doctor gives Mateo and his mother a lot of information. Mateo needs to learn about checking his blood glucose levels. He gets information about **exercise**, **medication**, and **diet**. Now Mateo needs to avoid high-calorie foods and sodas.

Mateo and his mother leave the office. “There is a vending machine,” says Mateo. “May I please have a soda?”

“Sorry, Mateo,” says his mother. “Let’s listen to the doctor. There is a water fountain outside.”

**Answer the questions.**

1. How old is Mateo?
2. What does he eat and drink?
3. Why is Mateo’s mother concerned?
4. What does the doctor order for Mateo?
5. What does Mateo have?
6. What is too high when a person has type 2 diabetes?
7. What does Mateo need to learn about checking?
8. What does he get information about?
9. What does he need to avoid?
10. What does Mateo want after they leave the office?
Dyslexia in the Adult Classroom

Purpose
To explain what dyslexia is, how to identify it, and how to make the learning experience easier for students with dyslexia.

Facts and Statistics
You may have had students in your adult education class before who attended class regularly and were motivated to learn. However, they had trouble moving to a new class level. Perhaps you wondered if they were struggling with an undiagnosed learning disability.

This common classroom scenario has pushed a greater interest in learning more about dyslexia in adults. Dyslexia is the most common learning disability, as many as 20% of people may have dyslexia.

The International Dyslexia Association defines dyslexia on the site https://dyslexiaida.org/definition-of-dyslexia/:

“Dyslexia is a specific learning disability that is neurobiological in origin. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge.”

According to Steve Hannum and Gladys Schaefer, who led a presentation on dyslexia at the ProLiteracy Conference on Adult Literacy this past September, there are common misconceptions about dyslexia. “One misconception is that dyslexia is just the reversal of letters and numbers. Another is that people with dyslexia are lazy and should ‘just try harder.’ The dyslexic brain has to work vigorously to read, so they are already trying very hard. It just might not show up in the speed of their reading and writing,” Hannum and Schaefer say. Hannum is the director of literacy initiatives at the Literacy Council in Birmingham, Alabama. He also serves on the board of the Alabama Branch of the International Dyslexia Association. Schaefer is the lead reading interventionist at Spring Valley School in Birmingham. She is also vice president of the Board of the Alabama Branch of the International Dyslexia Association.

Despite the learning problems dyslexia can cause, many people who have it have higher-than-average intelligence and are known for their creativity and entrepreneurial spirit. Some famous people with dyslexia include Virgin Airlines

More Information
These sites can provide additional information about dyslexia.

International Dyslexia Association
https://dyslexiaida.org/

Dyslexia Screener for Adults
https://dyslexiaida.org/screening-for-dyslexia/dyslexia-screener-for-adults/

Fact Sheets
https://dyslexiaida.org/fact-sheets/

The International Dyslexia Association website provides several links to dyslexia fact sheets, including some available in both English and Spanish. The second link is the organization’s fact sheet about adolescents and adults with dyslexia.

11 Facts About Dyslexia

Reading and Language: The Facts About Dyslexia
http://www.pbs.org/parents/readinglanguage/articles/dyslexia/the_facts.html
Dyslexia Signs

There are certain signs of dyslexia that you can watch for in the classroom. These come courtesy of Hannum, Schaefer, and the resources with this story’s sidebars:

- avoidance of reading aloud
- difficulty reading unfamiliar or nonsense words
- difficulty reading menus
- embarrassment when taking notes
- trouble remembering names but not faces
- mispronunciation of common words or may use words that sound similar but have different meanings
- a history of spelling difficulties
- reading requires a lot of effort at a slow pace

How to Help a Dyslexic Student in the Adult Classroom

1. **Learn what you can about dyslexia.** Use this article and the various resources in the sidebar to learn about dyslexia.

2. **Ask for volunteers to read aloud instead of calling on individual students.** This can help avoid embarrassment over reading skills.

3. **Encourage the use of technology to help students learn materials beyond text-based options.** For example, they may be able to use audiobooks for some readings.

4. **Use large type and add white space when possible in handouts and reading documents.** This will make text easier to read.

5. **Tap into alternate ways that students can learn or share their knowledge of a lesson.** For instance, if reading is a challenge, perhaps the student can instead share something they have learned with an oral presentation. Or, use an oral test instead of a paper test to assess what the student has learned versus the traditional paper test.

6. **Provide lessons that go beyond many reading and writing tasks.** Multi-sensory lessons will better engage all students, and so will lessons that tap into students’ learning styles (e.g., audio, visual, and kinesthetic).

7. **Look into specialized reading software systems.** The Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity has an article that recommends specific software to help adults with dyslexia and reading challenges. Find the article at http://dyslexia.yale.edu/resources/dyslexic-kids-adults/reading/. Although it may not be realistic to buy such a system for one student, it could be a resource if your program has encountered several students with reading issues.

8. **Consider professional help for your student.** If you think the student may have dyslexia and could be open to additional help, the International Dyslexia Association has a list of member providers grouped by state and zip code. Find that list at https://dyslexiaida.org/ida-accredited-provider-directory/.
Exploring Resources

Post-Conference Resources from the ProLiteracy Conference on Adult Literacy
https://www.proliteracy.org/Professional-Development/ProLiteracy-Conference/Workshops
Visit the link above to download workshop materials from the 2017 ProLiteracy Conference on Adult Literacy. Workshop materials include topics on blended learning, ProLiteracy’s new basic literacy and ESL tutor training, news literacy, fundraising, public relations, and data management, to name a few.

Road to Work Series Available from New Readers Press
http://www.newreaderspress.com/road-to-work
Help ESOL students improve their workplace skills with Road to Work from New Readers Press. Road to Work is a new three-book series aligned to the new English Language Proficiency Standards. Road to Work builds the English language and literacy skills into the workplace content knowledge emphasized under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Title II. Written for the high-beginning to intermediate English language learner, the 12 lessons in each book contain a 200-word work-themed story followed by a variety of skill-building activities.

7 Time-Management Tips for Students
https://www.proliteracy.org/Resources/Blog/Article/266/7-Time-Management-Tips-for-Students
If your students struggle with getting everything done, then share these seven easy-to-follow time management tips. These tips appear on ProLiteracy’s blog, which publishes articles each week about what’s going on in the field of adult education and resources to help adult education instructors. On the right side of the screen, you can sign up to receive each blog entry in your email and never miss out.

Practice English Vocabulary, Help Support Feeding the Poor
http://freerice.com/#/english-vocabulary/1394
The website Free Rice has two goals: to make education free for everyone and help feed those who do not have enough to eat. Students learning English can visit the website and answer questions about English vocabulary. For example, users could be prompted to select the correct definition for words like lady, few, and liquid. For each question answered correctly, the site donates 10 grains of rice through the United Nations’ World Food Programme, which operates the website.

Current and Archived Issues of Notebook Now Found on Education Network
https://www.proliteracy.org/Professional-Development/Education-Network
Accessing Notebook is free, all you need to do is create a free Education Network account. Once you’ve logged in, use the search function in the top right corner of your screen to search for Notebook.
**Determined Learner Gives Back to English Program and Helps Fellow Refugees**

by Vanessa Caceres

*Determined* is one word adult education teachers might use to describe many of their students—and this description fits Hussein Yerow well.

Yerow, a Somalian raised in a Kenyan refugee camp, resettled in Syracuse, New York, at age 19. There he registered for adult education classes at the North Side Learning Center to work toward his goal of earning a high school equivalency degree and attending college.

Yerow progressed quickly through the English classes at North Side and eventually began to take English classes with another group in Syracuse. However, he continued his ties with North Side by volunteering at the front desk, where he welcomed students, assisted teachers, and handled attendance.

“He accepted any and every opportunity to learn and grow, whether it was attending a community meeting, taking on a new volunteer task, or simply pushing himself to read,” says Mark Cass, executive director of North Side.

In the spring of 2016, Yerow achieved a TABE grade equivalent score of 2.1. A year later, he had progressed to 5.0. “This is a testament to his determination and the many hours he devotes to learning beyond attending classroom instruction,” Cass says. Eventually, Yerow would like to open his own retail clothing business.

Yerow’s involvement in adult literacy has continued to flourish. Not only has he become a U.S. citizen, he also has participated in a variety of North Side activities, such as recruiting new refugee families for the programs and serving as an interpreter during the intake process and at various meetings.

Yerow represented North Side in a yearlong leadership program that resulted in a grant project award used to improve the organization’s library. Yerow has even attended advocacy events in Albany, New York, and Washington, D.C., meeting with elected and appointed officials. He also helped with a local voter registration drive.

“In my years of adult literacy work, I’ve encountered many exemplary students and student leaders. In my humble opinion, Hussein stands out among the best due to his commitment to lifelong learning, the number of hours he spends learning beyond his direct instruction, and his deep desire to serve the community,” Cass says.

“To me, literacy means opportunity,” Yerow says. “As long as you work hard, you will succeed.”

At the 2017 ProLiteracy Conference on Adult Literacy this past September, Yerow received the Ruth J. Colvin and Frank C. Laubach Award for Adult Learner Excellence.