

The Cultural Diversity Network of Steele County

November/December 2004

Network supports English Language Learners

Learning a second language isn't easy. Getting your homework done in that language is even harder. But thanks to support from the Cultural Diversity Network of Steele County, some young English Language Learners are getting the extra help they need to succeed in school.

Most Tuesdays and Thursdays after school you'll find Network board member Bruce Larson helping students in the English Language Learners classroom at Owatonna High School. A dozen or more students, mostly native Somalis, stop in after school to get help with homework from volunteer tutors.

Larson began tutoring more than a year ago after being inspired by a trip to his great grandparents' homeland in Sweden. "It became obvious to me that I'm here [in America] because of economic refugees," he said. Helping today's refugees is Bruce's way of honoring his immigrant heritage and showing support for newcomers to Owatonna.

Working with kids is also a joy for Larson. "It's the highlight of the week for me," he said. "I come home all fired up."

Fourth and fifth grade English Language Learners at Wilson Elementary School in Owatonna also receive support from the Network. Executive Director Christine Baidoo volunteers in their classroom two afternoons a week. She also works with their teacher as part of a University of Minnesota-affiliated grant program called TEAM UP: Teaching English Language Learners Action Model to Unite Professionals.

The program uses a team of seven teachers and professionals to improve classroom instruction for limited English proficient students. Christine serves as her team's community liaison, but says participation in classroom instruction is also important because it helps lower the student/teacher ratio. "The smaller the group, the better the intensity of learning and teaching," she said. A native of Ghana, Christine also says it benefits students to see a person of color in a position of authority in the classroom.

Both school-age and adult English Language Learners in Steele County always need tutors. If you'd like to volunteer your time to tutor, contact Christine Baidoo at 444-4272.



Our Mission

To promote understanding and respect so residents of our communities may live together peacefully.

Our Vision

In this time of rapid social change, and with an increasingly diverse population, we seek to strengthen the network of intercultural human relationships and to try to keep Steele County peaceful, welcoming, trusting, and respectful.

Celebrate diversity at international potluck

Whip up your favorite ethnic dish and join us for our next Community Intersections forum titled Many Ways to Celebrate—An International Potluck and Fellowship. We'll spend our time enjoying great food and sharing the holiday traditions of our heritages on November 23 from 7 to 8:30 p.m. at the Steele County Community Center, 1380 South Elm.

Facilitated by Marcia Jacobs, Community Intersections is a place for people to meet one another across cultures, discuss common concerns and discover ways to build respect and understanding in our communities, schools and workplaces. Discussions are typically held on the fourth Tuesday of the month at the Owatonna Public Library.

The facts about diversity

Myth: *Immigrants do not want to learn English.*

Fact: The American Immigration Lawyers Association refutes this myth with the following information at www.aila.org.

- **Immigrant children learn English.** In San Diego, 90 percent of second-generation immigrant children speak English well or very well, according to a Johns Hopkins University study. In Miami, the figure is 99 percent.
- **Immigrants want to become proficient in English.** Reports from throughout the United States indicate that the demand for classes in English as a second language far outstrips supply. Data from fiscal year 2000 indicate that 65 percent of immigrants over the age of 5 who speak a language other than English at home speak English "very well" or "well." The children of immigrants, although bilingual, prefer English to their native tongue at astounding rates. In fact, the grandparents and parents of immigrant children have expressed some concern that their youngsters are assimilating too quickly.
- **Immigrants learn English.** Only 3 percent of long-term immigrants report not speaking English well, according the National Academy of Sciences.

University of Minnesota research on English Language Learners also found the following to be common myths:

- Children learn second languages quickly and easily.
- Children have acquired a second language once they can speak it.
- In order to learn a second language, it's necessary to give up the first.

How do you say that in...?

English

please

thank you

Spanish

por favor

gracias

Somali

fadlan

mahadsanid

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