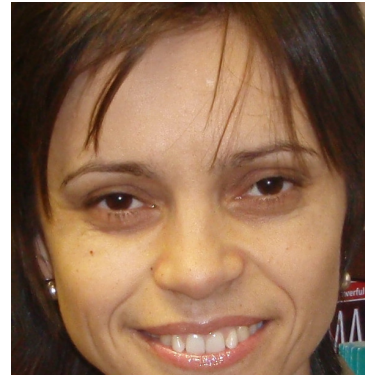


Motivated, successful, and giving back

By: Martine A. Thomas, Program Manager



Violeta Jeliaskova, a Bulgarian native and Woburn resident, knew only 200 words of English when she walked into a Burlington manufacturing company determined to get a job.

Luck was on her side. A Bulgarian supervisor interviewed her. After living in the United States for only a week, Violeta, who came to the United States with a master's degree and professional experience in computer science, landed a position as a program engineer.

She soon realized that knowing 200 English words wouldn't take her far. She studied nightly with an English dictionary on her lap. When a tutoring session with Webster was not enough, she quit her job to attend English classes.

After attending a few courses, Violeta became dissatisfied with the classroom environment. "I didn't just want to just learn grammar. I brought an English book for \$8 dollars that taught me all that stuff. I wanted someone to correct my English and teach me to express my feelings in English."

While studying in the library, she noticed a flyer for English At Large. She contacted the organization and began working one-to-one with a volunteer tutor. They clicked right away.

Violeta practiced her English conversation skills as she and her tutor compared their perspectives—and feelings—on a range of subjects. "My tutor corrected my English without insulting me," she shares, "and she connected me to American pop culture. We talked about everything. She built my confidence."

Violeta built on that confidence, eventually starting her own graphic design business, which she now uses her English skills to run.

"English At Large is a really good organization, and it's really needed in greater Boston. I really needed that one-to-one attention, and I got that from English At Large."

Violeta is now committed to giving back to local communities. She offers her time as a Bulgarian-English interpreter for Catholic Charities, Boston. In 2008 she accepted an offer to sit on the English At Large Board of Directors.

"I really needed that one-to-one attention..."

"I was a learner, so I understand what learners go through when they learn a new language and adapt to a new country. I can be their voice during these [board] meetings and that makes me feel good," she beams.

"Violeta is a community role model," says English At Large Executive Director, Marlana Patton, "Like so many of our learners, she has strong professional skills, and I am convinced that she will do an excellent job of ensuring that our student population has a voice."

Violeta adds, "English At Large doesn't just match students and tutors. It brings together two worlds, and during this connection, friendships are developed as well as respect for cultural differences. I am so proud to be a part of this organization."