

## **Update on Programs & Activities September 2020**

The COVID-19 pandemic has hit local immigrant communities particularly hard; many are essential workers living in multiple generation households, placing them at high risk of infection and transmission. Those with limited English skills do not have knowledge of local resource systems, and culture and language are barriers that prevent them from asking for help. These learners are often isolated and vulnerable to exploitation and loss. Now more than ever, English At Large Programs provide an essential service, working to ensure the health and safety of local immigrants, by supporting their continued learning, and helping them feel safe and connected in these uncertain times.

Like many direct service organizations, English At Large shut down all in-person programs in March due to COVID-19. By mid-April, we had transitioned to virtual instruction, and our Tutoring and Conversation Group programs were meeting online. The staff returned to the office on June 15, and we have been hard at work adapting our program policies and procedures to account for the needs of our learners and volunteers when delivering programs online. We offered a full session of Conversation Groups this summer, which were very well attended and successful. In September, our fall groups will open, and we will resume matching learners from our waitlist, for one-to-one tutoring in an online setting. In October, our staff will begin teaching a Beginner English class online, supported by EAL volunteers with similar teaching credentials. By this fall, these programs will be fully enrolled, and we will be delivering services at or very near the same level as prior to COVID-19. This remarkable accomplishment is due to the hard work of our staff, the dedication of our volunteers, and the resiliency of our learners.

At the same time we have identified a pool of learners who cannot participate in online programs, due to lack of technology or other challenges and commitments. In May, we developed The CARES Project: Creating Access to Resources for English Study, designed to provide relevant learning materials to low-level Beginner English learners. Through the CARES Project, 28 Beginner Learners received curriculum materials, including a workbook and activity grid for independent study, with follow-up support by an English At Large volunteer. These learners were previously enrolled in Beginner English or met in-person with a tutor; others have waited almost a year for a tutor, only to learn that they must continue to wait, until we can ensure their health and safety in a post COVID-19 world. When safe to do so, these learners will be enrolled in in-person programs on a priority basis.

The transition to online instruction has presented some unexpected expenses; in addition to curriculum materials provided by The CARES Project, we also needed to purchase premium Zoom subscriptions for use by our group programs, as well as for volunteer training and recruitment. Materials for the Career Access Lab and Beginner English Programs will be printed in the office, placed in binders and made available for pick up or delivery to learners prior to the start of each program. A generous grant from the Lenny Zakim Fund's COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund covered the cost of Zoom subscriptions; individual donations contributed more than \$1,800 to cover all expenses of The CARES Project. This community support helped us meet the needs of our learners facing new challenges, while also reaffirming our programs as essential to the health, safety and success of local immigrants in this ever-changing world.

## Impact of COVID-19 on FY 2020 Program Enrollment

### Tutoring Program

Total enrolled FY2020: 88

Learners who continue to meet with their tutors online: 21

Learners who will return to the program in Fall 2020: 8

Learners who cannot participate in program, hope to return in spring 2021: 8

Learners who are waiting for in-person tutoring: 2

Learners who dropped out of the program: 2

Learners who completed the program: 47

Notes: COVID-19 disrupted planned activities that would have matched as many as 35 learners off our waitlist with a tutor during the spring of 2020. This includes the training of 12 new volunteer tutors, 6 of whom have committed to complete their training and begin virtual tutoring this fall. Learners at the top of our waitlist have been contacted and assessed for online instruction. Those who are ready for online instruction will be matched with a volunteer tutor in the coming month. Overall, we estimate that COVID-19 resulted in the loss of more than 1,000 instructional hours in our tutoring program alone.

### Conversation Groups

Total enrolled FY2020: 293

Active Learners Spring 2020 Semester: 185

Learners who continued online during Spring 2020 Semester: 80

Summer Groups offered: 11

Learners enrolled in summer online groups: 154

Fall Groups planned: 15 (groups begin week of September 21<sup>st</sup>)

Learners registered for fall online groups: 188

Notes: Because Conversation Groups served intermediate to advanced English learners, this program was more easily adaptable to online instruction. Virtual groups also eliminate some barriers to program access, such as transportation. At the same time, changes to family and home life has impacted the ability of many learners to continue with the program. To help improve access, we have moved as many groups as possible to evening hours, a time when most learners are available.

### Beginner English

The spring semester had just started, when COVID-19 shut down the campuses at Tufts and Brandeis, ending the program for the school year. In October, we will launch a Beginner English class online, taught by EAL staff, who are certified as teachers of adult ESOL. We currently have 22 local learners enrolled, with a capacity to serve 12 students in a remote setting. This is almost half the number of learners we would be able to serve through in-person classes.

### Career Access Lab (CAL)

CAL enrolls learners in 15-week Career Groups, and typically runs 2 sessions of the program each year. COVID-19 made it necessary for us to transition groups to online, as well as the mock-interview and networking events. The pandemic made it necessary for the AmeriCorps Member to end his service early, which cancelled the 2<sup>nd</sup> cohort for this year. As a result, the 10 learners registered did not begin the Career Group program. We will be reaching out to these learners in the coming months to invite them to enroll in the next session, scheduled to begin in January 2021.

### Programs cancelled this year due to COVID-19:

Volunteer Appreciation Event

Tutoring Learner Graduation Ceremony

Summer Book Groups

Summer Internships