



## Finding Family and Opportunity Through Literacy

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Over the 5 years that Marti and Daniela have worked together at Literacy DuPage, they have not only grown together as a team in learning English, but have also developed a true friendship.

The pair started out as strangers when they first met at a Naperville library in 2018. Daniela had just moved to the United States three months before meeting her Literacy DuPage tutor, Marti Bogart. Born and raised in Venezuela where her family continues to reside, Daniela had a difficult experience trying to learn English growing up. Daniela attempted to learn English in Venezuela, but the classes were limited and difficult to understand. When her family moved to the United States for her husband's career in engineering, she knew that she needed to start learning English but the process was daunting.

Daniela's experience is similar to many adult learners at Literacy DuPage. Simple tasks that were once easily manageable are now inaccessible due to the barrier of language. Daniela and her husband did not have family in the United States, which added challenges by not having a support system in the area. For Daniela, Literacy DuPage not only offered the opportunity for one-on-one English tutoring, but also something more difficult to find -- community and family.

Upon retiring from her career at North Central College, where she taught economics as a faculty member and later served as the Associate Provost, Marti wanted to spend her retirement doing something in a volunteer capacity. "I found Literacy DuPage, and I was a teacher and administrator in my career, so I should be able to do this," said Marti. After completing training, Marti received notice that she had been matched with Daniela.

It didn't take long at all for these ladies to go from strangers to teammates. Marti made sure to focus on topics familiar and interesting to Daniela, putting Daniela's nerves at ease. "I was afraid and a little nervous because I not speak English. And how she will understand me? But we passed the time and I'm feeling really, really comfortable with her. I'm a baker, and this was the first class. She showed pictures of sugar, flour, oven, for work. Pictures for everything," Daniela shared.

Marti and Daniela met every week, two hours each time. Marti provided Daniela with homework, and they covered topics specific to what Daniela needed to navigate her new community. Daniela affirmed, "I need to talking in the grocery, the school, the teacher. Because my husband travels a lot for his work. And whatever they need in the school, I go. I remember my first conference for my child, Miss Marti went too".

The pair's persistence paid off, as Daniela has achieved almost all of the goals that she set when she first started learning English with Literacy DuPage. "I go to the doctor alone, I talk with the neighborhood," shared Daniela. In addition to her improved confidence and independence, she is also working toward professional goals. In Venezuela, Daniela earned a degree in business administration, as well as a teaching certification. She is currently working in the lunchroom at

her son's school as she navigates obtaining her academic records from her home country, a process that has become arduous due to the current political climate in Venezuela.

Literacy DuPage's program is focused on building adult learners' English proficiency, in order to develop survival skills and self-sufficiency. Marti mentioned that as Daniela's English advanced, the range of topics they discussed expanded. "We got to the point where we met for 2 hours a week on Zoom during the pandemic. The first hour would be just telling each other what happened during the week before. What happened at school, your family, my family. And the next hour we would spend on instruction. Over time, things shifted to more conversation."

When asked about what advice they would give another student-tutor pair, Daniela and Marti revealed their insights on what makes a successful team. "I would tell a new student, don't worry to feel afraid and talk in English as soon as you can. If you have a tutor, talk on everything. Ask questions. Work together," shared Daniela. Marti believes that, "You have to be really patient and reliable and make adjustments as the student's needs change. Early on, I had to practice speaking slowly. It's necessary to reduce the instructional pace and then ask, "Did you understand that?"

As Daniela has developed a level of English that has provided her with self-reliance in daily life, her future goals include advancing her English journey and working toward taking the United States citizenship test. Due to restrictions with her green card, Daniela still has several years until she is eligible to take that test. Literacy DuPage is confident that Daniela will set new and more challenging language goals, not only due to her determination and the amazing progress that she has made, but also because of the family connection she has with Marti.

Daniela reflected on her experience with Literacy DuPage overall, "I want to tell you, Literacy DuPage, thank you so much for helping me. For opening your doors for me. For many students. Because with this opportunity we can feel comfortable learning. It's a beautiful opportunity. This program helped so much, it's free, they have excellent tutors. And my teacher, I love her. We continue meeting. We go to lunch or for breakfast one time each month. We send a text each week and say hey how are you doing, what's happening? I talk with her about my family, my friends. Ya, I think she is the best tutor I could have found. She helped me a lot. She is like a mom to me here."