



**EL SILENCIO
MATA**

THE CHANGE AGENT

**Adult Education for Social Justice:
News, Issues, and Ideas**

WE TAKE ACTION

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The Change Agent is a publication of The New England Literacy Resource Center at World Education (a division of JSI), 44 Farnsworth Street, Boston, MA 02210 (617) 482-9485. Coming out three times per year, each issue focuses on a different topic that is relevant to learners' lives. This online magazine is designed for ESOL, ABE, GED, and adult diploma classes. In New England, online access to *The Change Agent* is available free of charge through NELRC's affiliated state literacy resource centers. [Contact us](#) to learn how to access the site.

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Table of Contents

Leadership & Initiative

My Big Gift	3
Humiliated on the Job	4
Weight Discrimination	6
Not Good or Legal	8
Problems on the Job <i>high beginner</i>	10
Problems on the Job <i>high intermediate</i>	12
Breaking with Tradition	14

Communication

Custody Battle	16
Reaching Out to Solve a Problem	18
Out of My Comfort Zone	20
Giving and Compassion	22

Teamwork & Collaboration

What to Do if You Get Lost	24
My Supporters Help Me Reach My Goals	26
No One Stands Alone	28
No Man Is an Island	29
Lifelong Learner	30
My Friend Lydia	32
A Loss Can Be a Win	33

Our Series on Resilience and Success Skills

Adult education students are resilient and skillful at navigating life and reaching their goals. Many of these life skills are "transferable." They are skills that an employer looks for in an employee. This series is organized around the 10 transferable skills listed in the [Personal Workplace and Success Skills](#) (PWSS) Library published by World Education.

Issue #59, August 2023: "We Take Action" (Teamwork & Collaboration, Leadership & Initiative, Communication)

Issue #60, November 2023: "We Adapt and Manage" (Adaptability & Flexibility, Self-Management, Respecting Differences, Emotional Intelligence)

Issue #61, Feb. 2024: "We Use Our Minds" (Critical & Creative Thinking, Navigating & Using Information, Digital Literacy)

A Note to the Teacher

See our [Issue 59](#) "Extras" for some guidelines about how to use these materials, some pre- and post-activities, and interactive teaching tools.

Thank you,  essential education

This issue is co-published with [Essential Education](#). We are grateful for their generous funding and expert support (especially from Jen Denton) on the editorial board.



Our Editorial Board for Issues 59-61:

From top left to right: Cynthia Peters, *Change Agent* editor; Ebony Vandross, World Education; Shirley Doan, World Education; Svitlana Troesch, student at Literacy for Life, VA; Mary O'Brien, teacher at Literacy for Life, VA; Maria Carrasco, HCCS, Oakland, CA; Albania Hernandez, student at HCC, Holyoke, MA; Corazon Higgins, teacher at HCC, Holyoke, MA; Andy Nash, ESOL teacher and adult education advocate, Cambridge, MA; Jerry Yamashita, World Education; Dan-nielle Doyle, President of Student Division of Essential Education; Jen Denton, Director of Educational Development at Essential Education.

My Big Gift

Gabriela Reyes



BEFORE YOU READ:

1. Describe a time you advocated for your child. What did you do?
2. Discuss the word *advocate*. Try using it in several sentences.

Something Was Not Right

This story is about my young son and me. He is my third child and my only son. When my son was born, he needed to stay in the hospital for a couple of days because he would not eat. That was not a good sign. During his first two years, he learned to eat and crawl the same as his sisters. But I noticed he did not speak. That was the first *red flag*. I knew something was not right with him.

When he started to walk, he fell a lot and that was the second *red flag*. His *development* wasn't right, and it was time to look for help from a specialist. In Ciudad Juarez, where we lived, there were only two *pediatric neurologists*, and the waiting list was very long.

A Diagnosis

Finally, we got an appointment with a doctor, and the *diagnosis* was *developmental delay*. My son needed speech therapy and more tests. We didn't have insurance for my son, and we needed to pay for all the tests, appointments, and medicine. That was a very hard time for my family. We

also needed to find a school for him. Private school was very expensive, so he started going to a regular kindergarten.

I knew that I needed to find help.

I didn't see any progress in my son. I knew that I needed to find help from a different school and teachers.

I prayed to find a better life for him. I asked

God, the universe, or anyone for an answer. I needed help to figure out how to move forward. After some time, I found the answer. It was a school called CAM in Mexico City. It is a special school for students with learning *disabilities*. I met a wonderful teacher. Her name is Maritza. She taught me *strategies* and exercises to *stimulate* all the senses in my son's body and brain. It was hard work for me because I took him to therapy Monday through Friday, and I continued going to my job every day.

Joy in the Journey

This was the beginning of learning about Special Education. It is wonderful to learn about my son's condition. When I understand what he needs, then I can do more for him. It has been a beautiful journey for me and my family. I walk with other people that are going through the same thing, and we support each other. It is complicated, but there has been a lot of joy in this journey.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. According to the article, how did Gabriela advocate for her son?
2. Note the vocabulary words in *bold italics*. If you're not sure what they mean, use context clues to figure it out. Try using them in your own sentences.
3. Why did the author choose "My Big Gift" as the title of this story? Write about a big gift you have received in your life.



Gabriela Reyes is a student at Ysleta Community Learning Center in El Paso, Texas.

Humiliated on the Job

But I Stood Up for Myself

Jose F. Marquez

BEFORE YOU READ: What is the “chain of command” (or hierarchy) at your workplace? Do you have a direct supervisor (or boss) and then someone who is higher ranking than them? What do you do if you get conflicting directions?

A Lack of Communication

One day in my first week at work, I was involved in an incident with my supervisor. The director of the company gave me a specific job to do. He told me he wanted to see it done by the next morning. However, he did not tell my supervisor that he asked me to do this job. This lack of communication is what caused the incident.



What is the hierarchy at your workplace? Make a diagram that explains it. Use this diagram as a model.

What Can You Do If You Have a Complaint Against Your Employer?

When Jose experiences embarrassment and humiliation on the job, he says he will file a complaint with the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC). The TWC represents the interests of workers. For example, workers can contact the TWC if they did not receive wages or if they experienced harassment or discrimination on the job.

Does your state have a government office that represents workers? Conduct research to find out. Share the information in an email that could be sent to other students in your program.

When I started doing what the director told me to do, my supervisor came to me and asked me to stop. I said, “But I am doing what the company director told me to do.”

My supervisor said, “I don’t care. I’m your supervisor, and you should do as I say.”

I responded to him that I was going to get in trouble with the director. He answered, “No, you’re not. I’ll deal with him.”

I decided to follow my supervisor’s orders.

The next day, the director came to me. I could see he was angry; his face turned red as he approached. As he got closer, he shouted at me in front of everyone. He yelled, “Why didn’t you do what I told you to do? Why isn’t the job done?”

Embarrassed and Humiliated

I tried to explain what happened, but he continued screaming at me without giving me a chance to say a word. I felt embarrassed and humiliated. I told him to stop yelling at me, that he had no right to treat me like that. I told him I



Describe what you see in this cartoon image. Be detailed and specific. Image from Pixabay.

could take the complaint to the Texas Workforce Commission. In my defense, I told him, “If you are angry at me about something, then we must go to your office to talk about the incident.”

After that, he calmed down, and we went to his office. I felt embarrassed walking toward his office while all my co-workers stared at us.

We Found a Better Way

He called my supervisor into the office too. I explained that I got one order from the director and then a different order from my boss. I told them that I didn’t feel comfortable. I said they should decide who was going to give me orders so that we could avoid similar confusions. At the end of the confrontation, they both apologized for their actions.

Finally, my co-workers were happy to

see that the managers changed to a better way of giving orders, not just to me but to all the employees.

AFTER YOU READ:

- 1.** How did Jose show leadership at work?
- 2.** Study the punctuation. Note the use of a semi-colon in the 6th paragraph. What are the rules/guidelines for using semi-colons? Note the use of quotation marks. What rules can you identify?
- 3.** Share a time you had to handle a difficult situation at work. What did you do?

Jose F. Marquez is a student at the Ysleta Community Learning Center in El Paso, Texas. He came from Mexico to the U.S. looking for better opportunities. He loves running. His goal is to get his GED, go to college, and obtain a degree in computer programming to open his own business.

Weight Discrimination

Berenice Guadalupe Aguirre

BEFORE YOU READ: What is discrimination? Have you ever experienced it on the job or in the hiring process?

Job Search

I graduated from the program in International Business and Customs in Mexico in 2015 with honors. I have always considered myself to be a dedicated person, a go-getter. So, when I graduated, I thought that it was going to be easy to get a job and that my working life was going to be perfect, just like my student life. But reality was different and it took me by surprise.

Getting a job is not as easy as you might think. You have to go to a lot of interviews, and for some companies you have to pass multiple rounds of interviews. Then, when you make it to the last stage of interviewing, and you think that you got the job, but they never call you back. You console yourself thinking that the job was not for you, but it can feel discouraging.

Finally, A Temporary Job

It took me a year to get a job. During that time, I had to work at my parents' business. I was frustrated because I didn't enjoy the job. Luckily, at the end of that year I got an opportunity in a company. It was a temporary position, but I was very excited and I took it.

There I was on my first day in the office, thinking that it would be the best job ever because

One of the requirements was a physical exam.

I was finally working in my area of expertise. And indeed, it was a great job. I did well, and after three months, my boss offered me a permanent position. Of course, I immediately said yes! I went to Human Resources to fill out all the necessary documents.



What do you think about the message in this picture? Does U.S. popular culture affirm all body types? What evidence do you have to back up your claim? Image by MissLunaRose12 from [wikimedia.org](https://www.wikimedia.org/).

One of the requirements was a physical exam. I went to see the company doctor and filled out a questionnaire about my health history.

Dealing with Discrimination

I thought everything was OK. But then my boss called me into her office. I took one look at her face, and I knew something was not OK. I sat down ready to listen to what she had to say, and I will always remember her words: "Bere,

the doctor said that you are not able to get the job because you are overweight. We can give

That day after work, I went home and cried a lot.

you the job for three more months, but you have to lose weight if you want the job." I remember that I was in shock. I thought, "This is not real." But it was. In addition, my boss

said, "We don't want to lose you because your work is perfect."

That day after work, I went home and cried a lot. I have never felt so discriminated against in my life. I told my parents what happened, and my dad was really mad and frustrated. I remember that he told me, "Bere, please don't let anybody in your life discriminate against you due to your weight. Tomorrow go and show them that it is the quality of your work that is the only thing that matters." And so I did! I talked to the doctor, and I asked him how my weight interfered with my job. I told my boss that it would be wrong to fire me because of my physical condition. That is discrimination.

After many long discussions, I got the job. For six years, I demonstrated that I was good at my job. Now, my company transferred me to the United States, and so I can keep growing and developing my skills.

When I first graduated from college, I thought I would find the perfect job. But things did not work out perfectly. There were many challenges. When I finally found a job, I had to fight to keep

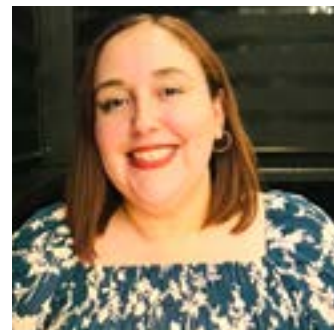
it. Now I know that if I hadn't gone through all those things, I would never be where I am now, working as a supervisor in my area of expertise here in the United States. Always remember, your body size does not matter. You can do whatever you put your mind to.

Things did not work out perfectly... I had to fight to keep my job.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. Describe the *twists and turns* in Berenice's career path. Be specific.
2. How does she know she is being discriminated against because of her weight? What does she do about it?
3. To practice reading a more academic text, click on this article, [Obesity Discrimination in the Recruitment Process: "You're Not Hired."](#) What do you notice about academic writing? What strategies can you try to read and understand a more complex text like this one? What is the main point of the article?

Berenice Guadalupe Aguirre is an ESL student at Ysleta Community Learning Center in El Paso, Texas. She likes to dance, sing, and meet new people; she loves spending time with her family. Travel is the best part of her life.



What Can You Do About Discrimination?

Have you ever experienced discrimination on the job? If so, what did you do about it? Do some research to find out what kinds of discrimination are illegal in the U.S. What options are available to employees who experience discrimination? (Is weight discrimination illegal? Conduct research to find out!) Make a presentation (on paper, poster board, or digital slideshow) to share what you find.

Not Good or Legal

My Experience Working in a Factory

Lorrayne Reiter Alves

BEFORE YOU READ: What are some things that an employer might do that would be illegal? Share your experience.

Coworkers Not Earning Minimum Wage

I was born in Boston, Massachusetts, but raised most of my life in a small town in the northeast of Brazil. After I finished college in Brazil, I decided to come back to the U.S. I wanted to work in my field, which is Labor and International Law.

My first year in the U.S., I worked in different kinds of restaurants, coffee shops, and retail stores. When the pandemic hit, I started working in a factory. At my interview for the job, the manager told me I was hired, and he asked me not to share with the other workers how much they would pay me (at that time, the minimum wage in Massachusetts was \$13 per hour).



Later, I found out from my coworkers that they were not being paid the minimum wage. This is illegal. Most of the workers were undocumented, but it does not matter what your immigration status is. The law requires employers to pay (most) workers the minimum wage.

Minimum Wage

The federal minimum wage is \$7.25 per hour. That means it is illegal to pay anyone less than that. However, there are exceptions. For example, some servers in restaurants may not earn the minimum wage. Why are restaurants exempt from paying their employees the minimum wage? Good question! Look it up and see what you can find out. What are other exceptions?

Some states have higher minimum wages than what is set by the federal government. Look up the minimum wage in your state.



Over the years, workers have fought for a higher minimum wage. Photo from <https://commons.wikimedia.org/>.

The factory exploited workers in many different ways. In addition to being paid under minimum wage, they also got no overtime pay, had bad working conditions, and worked on dangerous machines with no training or safety equipment. The workers sometimes worked for 24 hours straight! The company put no limit on how many hours they could work.

Seeing this situation I started to ask myself, “Why are these people not making the same amount of money that I make, even though they are doing the same job that I do?” It always bothered me. What was happening there was not good, nor was it legal!

Harassment on the Job

One day, I received a text message from an unknown number. It was a man who told me he was watching me during work. He said how pretty I was and how he wanted to get to know me better. After that I went to work everyday completely terrified, knowing that someone was “watching” me. I couldn’t leave my job because Covid hit, and there were not many jobs left at the factory. People were being let go. I couldn’t go to my manager because I was not sure if the person harassing me was one of the managers. I knew if I told someone, I could get fired.

The situation got worse. Maybe the man knew there was little I could do to stop him. He started making comments to me in person, not just by text. He said things about my body, and he made sexual comments. The managers were aware of his verbal abuse, not only of me but of other girls in the building, and they did nothing.

I stayed there for five months. I never thought of finding help from a worker center. I never thought of reporting the abuse because I was afraid. I was new to the country, and I could not afford to lose my job.

You Have Rights, Documented or Not

One day, I received a call from the Brazilian Worker Center. They asked me if I wanted to volunteer because they were super busy helping

Learn More about Worker Centers

Lorrayne works at the Brazilian Worker Center. It is one of many worker centers around the country. Read more about their work in the articles on pp. 10-11 and 12-13.



a lot of families with food and cash assistance. I said yes. Today I am the Immigrant Defense and Domestic Workers Rights coordinator and I help other workers, especially immigrant workers, get the tools and knowledge they need to fight for social and economic justice in their workplace.

One day, a worker came into our office. She was from the same factory that I used to work in. She said that the factory refused to give her overtime pay, and the work was hazardous. I helped this worker by explaining her rights and what we could do to get her wages back.

It doesn’t matter if you are a U.S. citizen or not. You have labor rights that should not be violated. If they are violated, that is against the law. At the Brazilian Worker Center, we want to make sure that workers know their rights.

AFTER YOU READ: What laws did Lorrayne’s employer break? If you’re not sure, look up the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) to learn more: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/flsa>. Is harassment on the job illegal? Read more about it here: <https://www.worker.gov/harassment/>.

Lorrayne Reiter Alves is 28 years old. She has a law degree from FENORD in Minas Gerais, Brazil, and she has seven years of experience in international and family law. She is on staff at the Brazilian Worker Center, where she also takes a class called English for Organizers.

Problems on the Job?

A Worker Center Can Help

Gizele Bombardier, Lorryne Reiter Alves, and André Simões

Problems on the Job

Maria took care of two older people. She worked over 60 hours per week. She did not get paid overtime.

Lupe worked in a grocery store. Her manager treated the workers badly. He yelled at them in public. He cut their hours. He pushed them to quit their job.

We work at the Brazilian Worker Center (BWC). We met Maria and Lupe when they came to us for help. We helped them learn their rights. We helped them fight back. Now Maria and Lupe help other workers.



The law requires employers to pay overtime. If they do not, that is wage theft. Wage theft is against the law. Image: www.workingnowandthen.com

We Help Workers Find their Power

The Brazilian Worker Center is a safe space for all workers. We help them use their power. We make sure they know their rights. We support them to be safe on the job.

Workers often tell us that their employer breaks the law. For example, they don't pay overtime, like in Maria's case. Or they harass workers, like in Lupe's case. We help the workers solve the problem. Sometimes, we bring their



Employers are not allowed to harass workers. Harassment is against the law. Image: creazilla.com

This article is available at two levels: high beginner (pp. 10-12) and high intermediate (pp. 12-13).

case to the Attorney General’s office. (See box on p. 13.)

Employers sometimes try to scare workers who are undocumented. They say, “If you complain, I will call immigration.” This is retaliation, which is a crime.

Workers Fight for Themselves

Workers who do not have “papers” have rights at work. We teach them about their rights. Then they can fight for themselves.

We help workers meet each other. They learn they are not alone. They feel stronger. They are able to fight back. That is how a Worker Center can help.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. According to the authors, what does BWC do?
2. Have you ever had an employer who broke labor laws? What happened?
3. What questions do you have about worker centers? Find one in your community, and invite them to speak at your program.
4. Try reading a higher level version of this essay on pp. 12-13.



Gizele Bombardier, Lorryne Reiter, and André Simões are staff members of the Brazilian Worker Center in Boston, MA, and they are enrolled in an English for Organizers class at their workplace. They are Brazilian immigrants. They come from different backgrounds but they share the same commitment to support the rights and dignity of all people.



Members of the Brazilian Worker Center rally for worker rights. Image: Lenita Reason’s Twitter feed.

Resources to Find Out More

Workers’ Rights

“Advocating for Yourself” – an ESOL lesson plan about workers’ rights published by the City of Philadelphia. Get the PDF [here](#).

“Workplace Health and Safety ESOL Curriculum” – published by the MA Worker Education Roundtable. Get the PDF [here](#).

Worker Centers

Cornell University Library has an archive of worker centers in the U.S. Click [here](#) and search for your state or city to find a worker center near you.

Unions: Another Resource for Workers

Read “Organizing for Our Fair Share” – an article about unions on pp. 48-51 of [Issue 36](#) of *The Change Agent*.

Problems on the Job?

A Worker Center Can Help

Gizele Bombardier, Lorryne Reiter Alves, and André Simões

BEFORE YOU READ: What do you think a worker center is? What does it do?

Mistreated at Work

Maria was a caregiver who took care of an older couple. She worked over 60 hours per week. The couple's daughter would not pay her overtime. Maria came to the Brazilian Worker Center (BWC). She attended a Know Your Rights workshop, and we helped her send a letter to her employer to request her overtime pay. She won her case! Then she joined our group of domestic workers. Now she comes with us when we go to events, and she tells others her story.

Another woman, Lupe, worked in a supermarket. She had a problem with the manager. He mistreated the workers. He yelled at them in public. He cut their hours arbitrarily, and he pressured them to quit their job. The workers complained to the boss, but nothing happened. She came to BWC for help. We explained that she has rights. She has the right to a safe workplace where no one harasses her. She wanted to spread this information to her co-workers, so she brought our flyers to share with other workers.

Helping Workers Find their Power

Maria and Lupe came to us because they had a problem on the job. We helped them learn about their rights and negotiate with their employer. We also gave them a way to stay involved. Now, they show solidarity with other workers by telling them their rights.

The Brazilian Worker Center is an organization founded by workers for workers. It is a safe space for workers regardless of their immigration status. We organize workers to use their power



The Brazilian Worker Center provides support to families and communities in the Boston area, as well as workers.

to protect their rights and make sure their workplace is safe. We often meet with workers whose employers have broken labor laws. For example, they steal wages, don't pay overtime, retaliate, and discriminate. We encourage people to try to resolve the problem with their employer. We always recommend they have another worker with them as a witness, so they will be protected. If that doesn't work, we send a letter to the employer to seek an agreement and, if necessary, bring the case to the Attorney General's office.

We have been amazed at the way employers mistreat workers. Consider Jose's story: Jose was trying to get his former employer to pay him for the work he did. The employer refused to pay. He sent him WhatsApp messages using derogatory language. He also threatened him by sending him photos of his family and suggesting that something bad could happen to them. At another job, he got an injury and asked for a doctor. The

This article is available at two levels: high beginner (pp. 10-12) and high intermediate (pp. 12-13).

supervisor gave him an immigration form (not a medical form) to fill out, so the worker called us and we started a case against the employer. Impersonating a U.S. citizen on this form is a felony, so we understood that the employer was trying to create trouble for the worker.

Employers often use workers' immigration status to make their workers too afraid to speak up. For example, if a worker complains, the employer will threaten to call immigration. This is retaliation, which is a crime. Another way employers try to control workers is when they get hurt on the job. They say, "When you go to the hospital, don't say you were injured at work!" They don't want to pay the workers compensation.

Workers Realize They Can Fight for Themselves

Workers come to the worker center with a feeling that they have no rights because they are undocumented. When they learn their rights and realize they have the same human and civil rights as U.S. citizens or people with "papers," they realize they can fight for themselves.

When we first start meeting with a worker, we ask them what happened. Sometimes, they don't say much because they think it is not important. But when they hear about other cases, they realize that the conditions that they've gotten used to are not right. When workers talk to one another, they don't feel alone in the situation. When the workers know they are not alone and someone is behind them, they become strong enough to fight.

From Defending Themselves to Defending Others

Our Building Justice Committee was formed by workers who had resolved their cases and wanted to help other workers. They understand a lot because they were in the same situation. This committee works in partnership with Justice at Work (J@W). Together, we monitor and take action on wage theft cases. For example, we go together to deliver demand letters to employers, or we give out flyers at a workplace. We once

gave out flyers in front of a hotel where workers were mistreated, and the next day management settled. This is how we build confidence between workers and organizers. When they see that a worker center can help, they want to keep working with us and they help spread the word.

AFTER YOU READ: According to the authors, what does BWC do? What questions do you have about worker centers? Find one in your community, and invite them to speak at your program.

Gizele Bombardier, Lorryne Reiter, and André Simões are staff members of the Brazilian Worker Center in Boston, MA, and they are enrolled in an English for Organizers class at their workplace. They are Brazilian immigrants. They come from different backgrounds but they share the same commitment to support the rights and dignity of all people.



How Can the Attorney General's Office Help?

The job of a state attorney general is to represent the interests of the public. Find out who the attorney general is in your state. Is he or she elected or appointed?

In Massachusetts, the Attorney General's office has a Fair Labor Division. If you think your employer broke the law, you may file a complaint with the Attorney General's office. Workers may also sue their employers for wages owed.

Visit the website of the Attorney General's office in your state. Find out how you would file a complaint against an employer.

Breaking with Tradition

Martha Estela Perez-Williams

BEFORE YOU READ: Patriarchy means a family or society where fathers or men have more power than women. Share what you know about patriarchy. What is your experience with it in your family or in society?

I Was Supposed to Be a Housewife

If you grow up in a Mexican family, you learn traditional family values. You learn to respect the elderly, build a support system for the family, and share as much time with each other as you can. Traditional family values are tied to a patriarchal culture. So, you also learn that women do not get to make decisions freely. Women suffer violence in families in many ways, and mine was no exception.

It was a rule for me to get married, obey my husband, and take care of a home. I was supposed to do all the housework, take care of my two sons,

You are the last thing on your list of priorities.

and take care of my husband. Meanwhile, I was trying to be a perfect student so I could keep my scholarships. In

Mexican culture, you are not a woman. You are just a mother and a wife. You don't have the right to make your dreams come true. You are the last thing on your list of priorities.

Education Changed My Life

However, I wanted something different. Even though my ex-husband wanted to control my dreams, I finished my bachelor's degree. My next goal was to get a master's degree and then a Ph.D. I worked very hard to become a professor in the country where I was born. While I was in those programs, I learned about the law and that women have rights. This is not something that was taught to me when I was growing up.



Mural in Oaxaca, Mexico. "Silence kills." Photo by Manfred from: <http://www.thisfabtrek.com>.

Education changed my life. Studying gender in college gave me the strength to break from tradition. For example, I understood that my husband's controlling behavior was a form of psychological abuse. Since I had a job and was not financially dependent on my husband, I was more free to break away from him. If women have jobs and decent pay, they can make decisions for themselves and not feel afraid.

Moreover, my dear relatives and lovely friends were so helpful when I had a difficult time. For instance, when I told my mother that I was going to get divorced she told me, "If you

already made the decision, then do it. Time flies by, and if you don't do it, you will regret it." With those words, I felt her support. In addition, my grandmother took care of my kids while I studied and worked.

Divorced and Reborn

Getting divorced was one of the hardest decisions I ever made. I broke up my own family. On the other hand, I was reborn. It was my first time dealing with a home by myself, and it was not easy, but one of my sons told me one day that I had made the right choice because he saw how I developed my career. Today, my oldest son is a high school teacher, and the younger one is studying to be a teacher. They followed in my footsteps. I raised them with a feminist consciousness and I'm proud of it. Fortunately, the new generations are more at liberty to make decisions and not be judged.

A New Challenge

That might be considered a story with a happy ending. But that was not the end of it. Life has more surprises. Now, I'm in the United States as an immigrant. I have married a man here who is the love of my life. What is next for me? As you see, life is testing me again. I am middle-aged. I left a job I loved so much and decided to start life in a new country. The hardest part is learning English. It is like working with a machine (my brain!) that has been used a lot and then trying to reset it and download a lot of information. My brain is not brand new. But my mind is flexible, and it can grow.

I'm sure that the same flexible mind that helped me to break tradition is going to help me to adapt to this country and to accomplish the goals I set for myself. Since I was a little kid, I've been conscious that life is not a fairy tale, so my prince was not a man. My "prince" was my education. I love to work, to learn, and to teach. I'm not afraid to take on challenges if I see that something better is waiting for me. That is my philosophy of life.



Martha Estela Perez Garcia is a Ysleta Community Learning Center student in El Paso, TX. She has been a professor in Mexico for 16 years and has published some books and papers about violence against women, has participated in academic meetings as a speaker, and wants to work in the education field again in this country one day. She is persistent, collaborative, reflective, creative, and adaptable.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. Name a few ways that Martha took leadership in her life and in the life of her family.
2. Martha uses a metaphor when she says, "My 'prince' was my education." What does she mean?



An extended family. Photo from pixabay.com

Custody Battle

How I Found My Voice

Samantha Paquette

BEFORE YOU READ: What is a custody battle? Share what you know. What does the gavel in the picture on the right represent? Read the caption to learn more about child custody.

Diving into the Unknown

In the summer of 2015, my son was three years old, and I was 22. I was trying to co-parent with my ex, but it was difficult. I often saw on social media that he was not with our son when he was supposed to be. My ex would leave our son with his parents. Since my ex did not spend time with our child, I decided I would not send him to visit as often. My ex was not happy about this. He likes to be able to control every situation.

In September 2015, my ex came with the police to remove our son from my custody. The police served me with a 30-day emergency custody order. There was nothing I could do until the court date. I was completely devastated. From the day he was born, I had

He told lies about me. He tried to make me look like an unfit parent.

never gone more than a few days without our son. None of the information on the custody order was true. My ex fabricated all the reasons why the court should give him emergency custody.

During those 30 days, I was a mess. I was scared and confused. How could this happen without any evidence? Meanwhile, my husband filed for full custody of our son. He told lies about me. He tried to make me look like an unfit parent. I was afraid that the system would fail my family. I was afraid the judge would believe these lies. I felt incredibly small. With a heavy heart, I dove head-first into the unknown of the family court system. I felt crazy with fear, but I learned that



Custody means to have control over or supervision of something or someone. If you have custody of a child, you make decisions and are responsible for the child. If the child's parents divorce, a judge in family court may determine how custody will be divided between the parents. Image from: pix4free.org.

sometimes when we face our fears, we find our voice.

I Had No Money for a Lawyer

At the beginning of the custody battle, I thought I was going to fail my son. At the time, I had little faith in the family court process. I had never even collected child support, due to my lack of faith in the process.

I didn't have a lawyer, and I wasn't financially stable. It was so stressful that I wanted to give up and just let his father win. His father had a lawyer, so I thought he had the upper hand. But I changed my mind when I realized, "I am the mom, and my voice matters; my views

matter." No one knows my son like I do. I know his favorite color, his favorite shows and songs, and his best school subjects. I know how to make him feel better when he's sick, and so much more.

Those are things that could not be taken away from me. They are things that could not be faked. With a new inner confidence, I decided I would

Sometimes when we face our fears, we find our voice.

go to every court date and fight for my right to custody. I knew that being his mom would give me the power I needed. You cannot argue with my status as “Mom,” no matter what my bank statements says. My voice was strong, even though it shook with fear.

I Found My Voice

After gaining that self-confidence, I began to advocate for me and my son. Who makes the school plans for my son? Me. Who remembers his doctor appointments? Me. Who has the ability to talk in a genuine way about him, without it sounding like a pre-written statement? Me. I

have that power. The judge saw me and heard me because I gave her something to see and hear!

Remember: no matter where you come from or who you are, you can fight for your children. Showing up and standing up for yourself is the first step. When the storm passes, you will see how amazing it can be to just believe in yourself.

Still Growing

Now it's 2023 and I still make our son's doctor appointments, I get him ready for school every

day, and I put him to sleep every night. I still co-parent with my ex, even though he is so difficult. It is in our son's best interest is to have both parents in his life.

The whole experience has made me who I am today. I wrote this story so other parents who are going through the same thing will feel less alone.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. Tell Samantha's story in your own words. Use sequencing words like *first*, *then*, and *later*.
2. Even though Samantha is afraid, she gets the courage to communicate with the judge. How does she do it? Share a time you communicated about something despite being afraid. How did you do it?

Samantha Paquette is a GED student at Westbay Adult Education in Warwick, Rhode Island. She still has her son and is also them mom of two other children. Being a writer has always been a passion of hers. She wants to go to college for a business degree because she has dreams of opening her own coffee shop. She hopes this story helps other parents involved in custody cases to fight and not give up.



Advice from a Gray Panther

“Stand before the people you fear and speak your mind — even if your voice shakes.”

— Maggie Kuhn

Maggie Kuhn was a founding member of the Gray Panthers. Look her up online and find out more about her. Research the Gray Panthers and share what you learn with your classmates.



Reaching Out to Solve a Problem

A Healthcare Center in Haiti Addresses Sexual Violence

Adesky Moise

BEFORE YOU READ:

1. What does it mean to “reach out”? Share some times in your life when you have had to reach out to others to solve a problem.
2. Note that “to reach out” is a verb. The noun is “outreach.” Try using both the verb and the noun in sentences.

We Faced a Big Problem

Life is very challenging. Making life better for yourself and others helps you feel useful and alive. My community in Haiti faced a big problem with sexual violence. I worked in a healthcare center, and we decided to take action on this problem.

We Reached Out to the Community

Trying to solve this problem was very complicated, but it was worth trying. We understood that to be successful, we would need the community groups to support us. We invited the community groups to a series of meetings. Some meetings were for high-risk groups, such as young people, girls and boys ages 14 to 25. Other meetings were for parents so they could understand the problem. In addition, we reached out to community leaders: pastors, politicians, leaders of popular organizations, and *hougans* (*vodou* priests).

Reaching out to community leaders was a good idea because it gave us access to resources. For example, we found a radio station that would give us two hours of free broadcast time per week. We also found free places to hold meetings and people who donated food for the meetings. By reaching out to the community, we found many people who agreed to promote the idea of fighting against sexual violence.



Clinic workers conduct outreach to youth. Photo by Cara McCarthy from pixnio.com.

We Asked People to Share their Stories

One of the most important activities we did was to sponsor a writing competition about the topic of sexual violence. We created small groups of people from high-risk groups, and they supported each other to write their stories. A jury of community leaders evaluated the essays. The best ones were published in a booklet. All groups received gifts and recognition for their work. We shared copies of the booklet with other communities, and this allowed other cities to read about the consequences of sexual violence and how to avoid it.

We Got Results!

In a short time, our records at the health center showed a reduction in sexual violence cases. We received feedback from many parts of society. People congratulated and thanked the staff for our leadership. It is a good feeling to fight for something and get results!

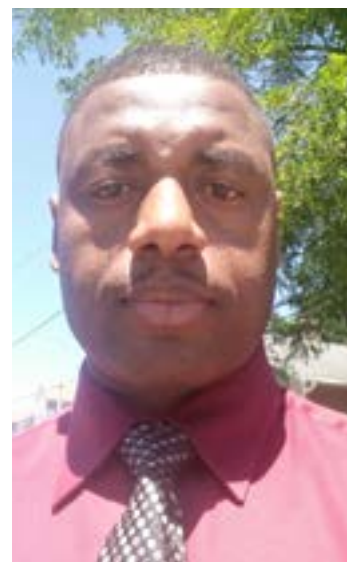
Sometimes, people need a leader to highlight a problem and then help solve the problem. However, the leader can't do it alone. Our health center used evidence to diagnose sexual violence as a big problem in our community. Then we took action by inviting community members to be part of the solution to this problem. The results were astonishing. We did it together.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. What steps did Adesky's healthcare center take to address the problem of sexual violence? Be specific.

2. What forms of communication did they use to reach out to people in the community?

3. What does Adesky say about leadership in the last paragraph. Do you agree or disagree? Read the articles on pp. 3-15 about "leadership and initiative" to learn more about this skill.



Adesky Moise is a student at the Bridge Writing Workshop at the Brockton Adult Learning Center in Brockton, MA. He is from Haiti where he worked as a physician, including 15 years at different public health organizations such as Ministère de la Santé et de la Population (MSPP), Haiti Health Network, and other organizations.

Examples of Outreach in Your Life

Make a graphic organizer like the one below. Fill it in with information about a problem (large or small) you faced and how you reached out to others to try to solve the problem.

Problem:	To whom did you reach out?	What happened?



Out of My Comfort Zone

A Student Motivates Her Peers and Advocates for a New Program on Her Campus

Agustina Sanchez



Graduates of the Sweat program receive their certificates. Sweat is a program that trains students to be fitness instructors.

BEFORE YOU READ:

1. Notice the title and the graphic on the next page. What does “comfort zone” mean? Is it a good idea to push yourself out of your comfort zone. Why or why not?
2. Read the headings in the article. What do you think this story will be about?

First, I Had to Convince Other Students

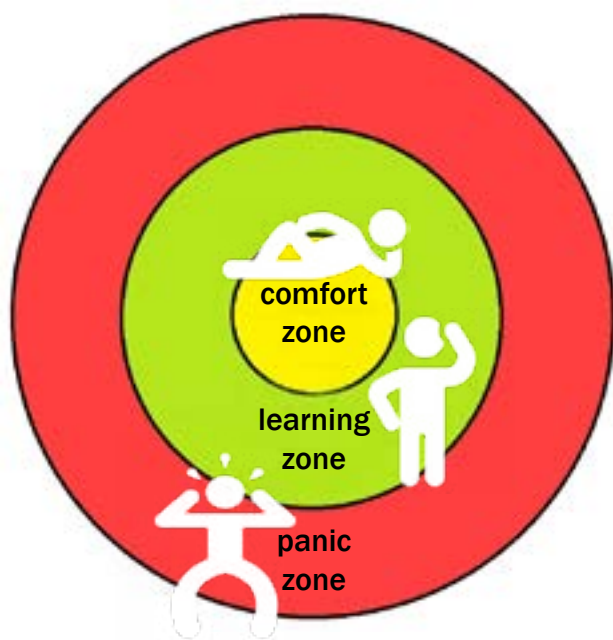
I have been the leader many times at work, home, and school, but one time that I surprised myself was a time that I brought the Sweat program to the St. Rose location of Highlands Community Charter School (HCCS). Sweat is a program that trains you to become a Group Fitness and Bootcamp instructor. It is important to me because it was my first certification at Highlands Community Charter school.

To take the lead on this effort, I really had to

get out of my comfort zone. I had to prove to the Sweat program that a lot of students at St. Rose were interested in participating. And I had to convince the students that they should go ahead and try it. I was nervous because I was afraid that if I was not successful in bringing the program to St. Rose, all of the students that I had motivated would be disappointed in me. On the other hand, the administrators of the program would be disappointed if they brought the program to St. Rose and no one joined. I had a lot of pressure on me, but I was determined to bring the Sweat program to the St. Rose location.

No Results

It was a long process! The counselor at the school told me I should get at least 20 signatures from all the students interested in the program. If I did, I would have to submit a request to the



administration to see if they would approve the Sweat program coming to St. Rose. So, I got the signatures, sent them to the counselor, and submitted the request to the administration. Time went by and I didn't hear from anyone.

An Accidental Meeting Provides Another Route

Then one day, there was a free dental cleaning event at another HCCS location, so I went. Unfortunately for me, I was not able to get my teeth cleaned, but I did meet (Doc) Murdock Smith the executive director of HCCS. I helped translate for the people who didn't understand English, and I stayed almost until it was over. I helped Mr. Smith bring the food and water for the dental workers.

He asked me how everything was going for me at St. Rose. I went ahead and told him about the Sweat program and how a lot of us wanted to join but it was not available at our location. I explained to him how I had collected signatures from all the students but had not yet heard anything from the administration. I think my conversation with him had an impact, because a month later we had the Sweat program available at the St. Rose location.

Success!

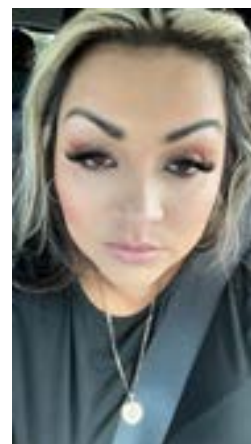
All of the students were very excited! It was not easy, but we all participated and worked really hard. We got through the program and passed the test. We even received a certificate and had a celebration once we completed the program. It was very rewarding to know that we were all persistent.

This leadership opportunity was very special to me because I wasn't sure if I could do it or not. I got the signatures, submitted the request, and then when we got the program, I motivated people to join. I even took advantage of my conversation with Mr. Smith to advocate for the program! I felt proud of myself as a leader. A lot of people were interested in the program, but they were just afraid or embarrassed to try it. Once they tried it, they loved it and they completed it. It is good to feel like a leader. I was proud of myself and my classmates for all the hard work and dedication.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. What steps did Agustina take to bring the SWEAT program to her school? Be specific.
2. What happened on the day of the free dental cleaning? What qualities and skills did Agustina use during this chance meeting with the executive director of her school?
3. Look at the diagram above. What types of communication are in your comfort zone, learning zone, and panic zone?

Agustina Sanchez is a student at HCCS in Sacramento, CA. She is the mother of four kids. She came to the U.S. when she was 10 years old. She has had ups and downs, but she says, "Every day, I wake up in the land of opportunity, and I try to work on bettering myself. If I can help a person or two on the way, I will do it without hesitation." She is thankful to coach Alvaro Venegas, the founder of SWEAT, and to coach Annyssa Velasquez, who pushed her to succeed. She also thanks Murdock Smith, for helping to bring the program to the school.



Giving and Compassion

Our Family's Heritage

Renee Chaco-Aragon

BEFORE YOU READ: Have you received teachings from your parents or grandparents that have helped you through hard times? What are they?

My Family Comes from a Long Line of Struggles

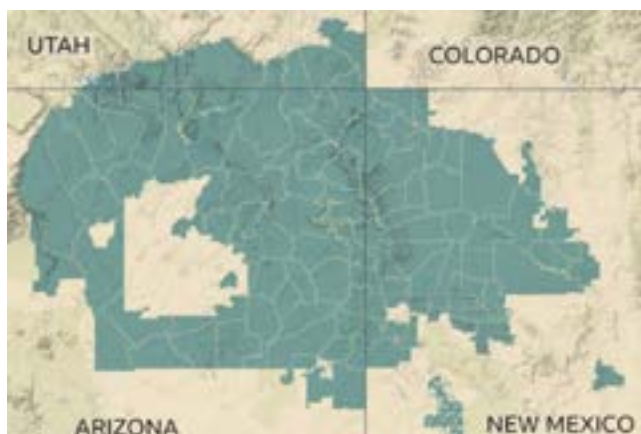
My name is Renee Chaco-Aragon, and I am a member of the Navajo (Diné) Nation. I live in Tohajiilee (Drawing Water), New Mexico, which is part of the Navajo Nation. I belong to the Zia People Clan (Tlogi) born for the Red Running into the Water People Clan (Tachiinii). My parents are Eddie and Angie Chaco. They have been married for almost 50 years now. I have learned many teachings from my parents. My family comes from a long line of struggles; however, the teachings of my parents and grandparents have sustained us through our hard times.

My Mom Taught Me that Giving is a Blessing

My mom became an orphan when she was very young. Her dad, in a drunken rage, killed her mom and took his own life. Despite this loss, my



Renee Chaco-Aragon with her parents.



A map of the Navajo Nation (in green).

Source: <https://dinelanduse.org/boundaries/>.

mom had her grandparents to raise her with all the love and care a little girl could hope for. My dad came from a broken home with no father to guide him. Through God's love, he provided for twelve children, four being stepchildren.

Talk about compassion! Through these struggles, my mom became a giver and my dad became compassionate but also cautious.

The teaching my mom passed on to me is: giving is a blessing. There are so many hidden treasures in it. My mom would say, "Money will not return and say how much it loves you. Money will not return and respect you. And money will not be around forever. So, use your money to give to others, to give life, to lend a helping hand without wanting anything in return. Use your money to help the elders and orphans. You can

never give more than God gave us. He gave us air, water, fire, and everything we need to survive, so use what He gave us to give to others.”

My Dad Taught Me Sacrifice and Compassion

My dad would say, “Be careful what you get yourself involved in.” He would say, “Not everyone will watch out for you. You have to watch out for yourself.” My dad took care of my mother by taking over where her grandparents left off, trying his best to give her what she wanted. He took in her four children as his own and provided for us all. Through this, my dad has shown me what true sacrifice and compassion is.

I Share Their Teachings

I am grateful for these teachings, I try my best to pass these teachings on to my children. As a mother of two biological, two adopted, and three step-children, I often resort to these teachings to get through life. I look and see my parents getting older. However, what they taught me will be passed on for generations to come.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. How did Renee’s parents communicate their lessons?
2. How do you communicate about values in your family or community? Do use an oral tradition (telling stories)? Do you act as a role model?
3. Renee wrote another article for *The Change Agent* called “Children Count.” It’s on pp. 39-40 of [Issue #50](#). Consider that story in light of the values she learned from her parents.
3. Read more articles by and about Indigenous people in [Issue #48](#) of *The Change Agent*.

Renee Chaco-Aragon is an online student at Grand Canyon University. She is using the Tohajiilee, NM, FACE program and Adult Education to help her obtain her Bachelor’s degree in Counseling. This essay was originally published on p. 3 of the Indigenous Peoples issue of [The Change Agent](#) (#48).



The four elements: air, water, fire, earth.
Photo from <https://commons.wikimedia.org>

Nation within a Nation

Under federal law, Native American tribes are considered “dependent domestic nations.” According to the [Federal Bar Association](#),

“As sovereign entities, Indian nations are guaranteed the power and/or right to determine their form of government, define citizenship, make and enforce laws through their own police force and courts, collect taxes, and regulate property use. Yet the fight to preserve tribal sovereignty and treaty rights has long been at the forefront of the Native American civil rights struggle.”

What nations of indigenous people are in your state? Find out about it and share what you learn in an essay or a slideshow presentation.

What to Do If You Get Lost

Kim Ly



Fruitvale station and busway in Oakland California. Photo from <https://commons.wikimedia.org>.

BEFORE YOU READ: Think about the phrase “to get lost.” Use it in several sentences. What strategies do you use to avoid getting lost?

I Learned the Route

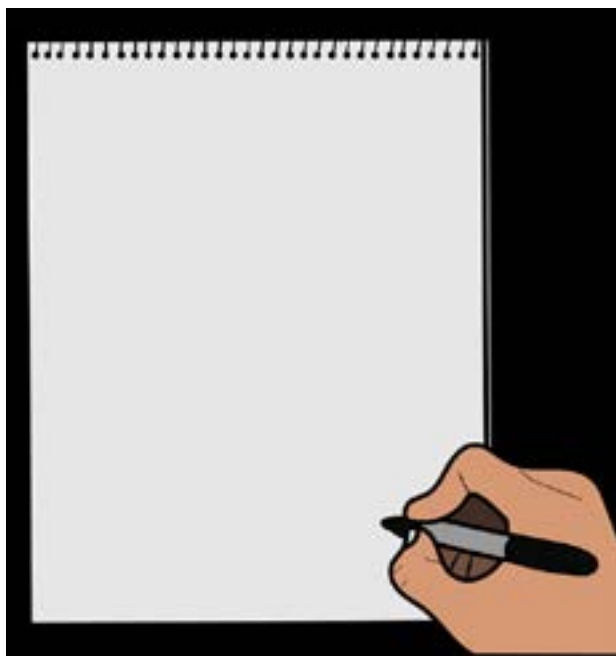
After being in the U.S. for two months, my sister and I went to visit our cousin in Oakland. Her daughter’s friend, Uncle Ky, found a job for me. I decided to stay.

In the morning, Uncle Ky took me by bus to a sewing company. I stayed there to work and he came at 5 pm to show me how to take a bus home. The second morning, he took me to work again. I told him that I could take the bus home by myself.

The Plan Changed

At the end of the day, the boss asked some of us to stay late and work overtime. He said he would drive us home. I did not understand English, but one of the Chinese ladies who I worked with encouraged me to stay. She said, “No worry. The boss is a nice person. He will drive me home too. I will be with you in the car.”

Making money was very important to me, so I decided to stay. I asked the supervisor to make a call home. At this time, I did not speak English, but she understood me when I pointed to the phone. However, I wasn’t successful in making the call and didn’t know how to ask for



If you were going to write a note to help someone not get lost, what would it say?

help. Later, I found out that I had to dial 9 before dialing the phone number.

I Had the Address on a Piece of Paper

It was dark when the boss drove us home. He drove two ladies and me to the bus station in Oakland Chinatown. The two ladies were dropped off there and went on the bus. I didn't know this place. The boss asked me something, but I didn't understand. Then, I showed him a piece of paper that had my cousin's address. Because I was in a strange place, I had to make sure I would get home safely, so I asked my cousin to write down the home address for me. Therefore, I had the address in hand to show to the boss. He was very kind, and he took me to the address.

How to Not Get Lost

When I stepped in the door, I saw my younger sister crying so hard! Her eyes were red and swollen. She thought I was lost because it was so late, and I was in this town without being

able to speak English. A deep feeling of family relationship was in my heart. To prevent getting lost, my young sister wrote down the company address and my cousin's address, and the sentence "I got lost" on a piece of paper. She told me: "When you get lost, just show this to the police and they will help you." Luckily, I didn't have to use it.

AFTER YOU READ:

- 1.** How did Kim's family support her to not get lost? What did her colleagues at work do to help her? What about her supervisor and her boss?
- 2.** Many people in Kim's life collaborated to help her get to work and home. They formed a "team" around her. Who is on your team? What do they do to support you? Whom do you support?
- 3.** For more stories on navigating public transportation, see [Issue #43](#) of *The Change Agent*.
- 4.** Write a note for someone to have in case they get lost. What information would you include?



Kim Ly is a student at Alameda Reads in Alameda, CA. She is the second child and the eldest sister of seven younger brothers and sisters, which made her strong and confident. She believes it is better to be calm, accept the situation you face, and improve it. She always tries to be a good model for her younger siblings to follow.

My Supporters Help Me Reach My Goals

Lourdes Gloribel Perez Andrade

BEFORE YOU READ:

1. Do you have supporters in your life? How have they helped you reach your goals?
2. ICE stands for Immigration and Customs Enforcement. The job of ICE employees is to enforce immigration law. Share what you know about ICE.
3. What does *habit* mean? Discuss a *habit* you are trying to change. What would help you make the change?

Many Challenges

When I was 14, I came to North Carolina from El Salvador. Later, my two children were born in this country. When I was 23, my son was 8, and my daughter was 6, a police officer stopped me because my headlights were broken. The police took me to the police station and fingerprinted me. They found out that ICE was looking for me because I missed a court date in 2011. ICE picked me up and took me to a detention center in Louisiana. I called my mom, who lived with me, and I told her what happened. She cared for my children for the six months that I was held in ICE custody.

Many Goals

Now, I am 27 years old. I work about 60 hours a week, and I attend Literacy Together to learn English and to pass the GED. With more education, I will have a better job, and with a better job, I will earn more money. Then I can save money for my children's education, help



my family in El Salvador, and save money for a house. Eventually, I want to have a college degree.

Many People Help Me

I get support from my tutors, family, and friends. My most important American friend and supporter is a teacher at my daughter's school. She supports me by helping my kids do their homework. She goes with me to parent-teacher meetings. She even takes my children out to celebrate if they do well at school and at home.

I have two tutors from Literacy Together; one tutor is for English and the other one is for the GED. They support me by meeting with me in zoom class every weekend.

My other American friend supported me by giving me work. He helped me create my cleaning company. He gave me advice about studying,

and he talked to my kids about the importance of studying. Both of my American friends supported me by sending letters to ICE about me.

My children support me by doing their best not to bother me while I am in class or when I am doing my homework. Before my mother moved, she used to help me with my children so I could continue with my education. Finally, my boyfriend helps me by watching my children when I need it during my classes.

Making Progress

My biggest obstacle is time. I have two jobs. In the mornings for about four hours, I clean houses and Airbnbs. Later in the day, I work an eight and a half hour shift at a factory. On the weekends, I do my chores, as well as spend time with my family, friends, and tutors. Another obstacle is reading and understanding English. I often feel nervous or embarrassed when I speak English. For the past month, I have changed my *habit* of listening to music in Spanish to listening to audiobooks

in English. I can see that my vocabulary is improving.

At the beginning of the time with my tutor, I struggled because there is a lot of reading for the GED, and I was not able to understand what I was reading. I am glad that I have continued. Every time I take a test, I see some progress, and I feel proud. Last month, I was impressed because one of my employers noticed that I could engage in a longer conversation with her!

AFTER YOU READ:

1. Take notes in the chart below to show how Lourdes gets support. (When you take notes, do not write in complete sentences. Paraphrase what the author says. Don't use her exact words.)
2. Make another chart. Fill this one out with information about *your* support network.
3. Write an essay about your support network.

Lourdes Gloribel Perez Andrade is a student at Literacy Together at Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College, Asheville, NC.

Supporter	What They Do or Did
mom	
Literacy Together	
American friend (#1)	
tutor (#1)	
tutor (#2)	
American friend (#2)	
tutor (#2)	
children	
boyfriend	

No One Stands Alone

Akane Terada

When I first started living in Cambridge, I felt so lonely. The pandemic forced me to stay at home. Since I came here for my husband's job, I didn't have any friends. When I lived in Japan, I thought I was an "indoor" person, but it was tough for me to stay at home as a housewife all day.

Despite being in a foreign country, I began to feel the kindness of the people around me. For example, I found out that the library offers English classes. I hesitated. I was not sure if I had the courage. At that time, they held the classes only online. I applied to one of the beginner classes.

After that, I met a lot of people in the same situation as me. It helped me to make friends and expand my relationships. It was such a good opportunity for me not only to learn English but also to share information with other people. Later, I learned that the City of Cambridge offers classes and tutors to English learners. Now I take classes at the Community Learning Center. My teachers and tutors inspire me and motivate me.

After a while, one of my Japanese friends invited me to a Zoom meeting for Japanese wives. The name was "Chatty Cardinal." We chose this name because it encourages us to feel free to talk—just like the birds sing! Also, the cardinal is a typical American bird, and its red color reminds us of the Boston Red Sox. In these meetings, we share news and updates. I am glad we can catch

up with each other every month.

Now, Cambridge is one of my favorite cities. I like to experience different cultures and interact with many people from other countries. I enjoy spending my time learning English and meeting my new friends



after the class. I feel comfortable enough that I am willing to help if someone needs assistance. It is obviously very hard time to spend time alone in a foreign country. Right now, I feel the importance of people around me. No one stands alone, we need one another to live a happy life.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. What groups and institutions help Akane feel less alone?
2. Discuss the difference between private groups (like Chatty Cardinal) and public organizations (like Akane's school).

Akane Terada is a student at the Community Learning Center in Cambridge, Massachusetts. She lives in Cambridge with her husband. She takes English class three times a week and enjoys meeting classmates from different cultures. She loves cafe-hopping and baking in her free time.

No Man Is an Island

Efren Macias Ojeda

BEFORE YOU READ: The metaphor in the title comes from a poem by the same name. What does it mean? (Note: “Man” refers to all people. What other words could be used instead of “man”?)

Our Troubles Started

It all started when I got married. The first year was difficult. My ex-partner had a job as an anesthesiologist. At that time, I was working at Telcel. My ex-partner’s work schedule was short. My work schedule was very long. For that reason, we started having troubles in our relationship.

Our first step was to look for professional help. We had therapy with a psychologist for almost six months; however, that did not help us. Our second step was to separate so we could think, but that didn’t help us either. Finally, we decided to get a divorce.

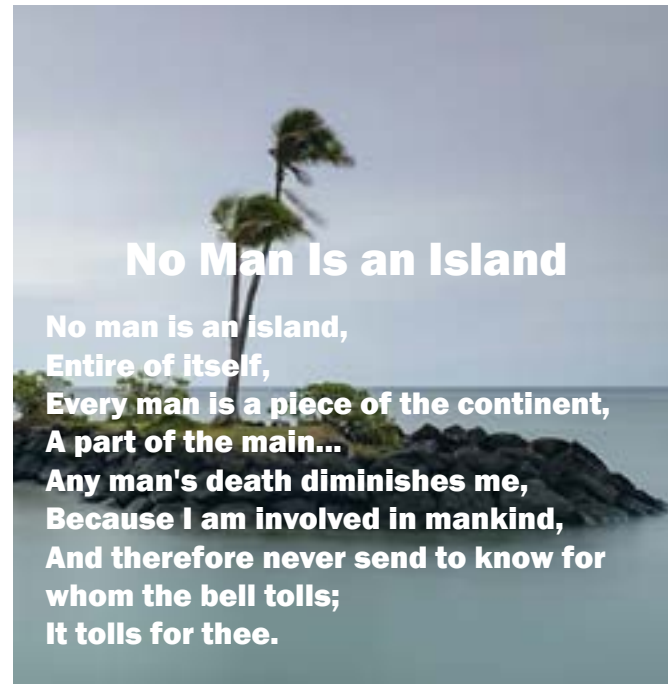
I was so upset. I started to have problems at work. I was not concentrating or making good decisions. I was isolated from my family and friends. I felt depressed. Then I had a car accident. I was badly injured, and I needed to stop working for almost four months. I asked myself, “What else could go wrong?” Soon, I found out.

When I went back to work, my boss made my life difficult. He changed my schedule from the day shift to the night shift. He scheduled me to work on the weekends. I accepted it, but it bothered me. Finally, he fired me.

My World Collapsed, But I Got Support

My world collapsed. I didn’t know what to do. I called my mother and friends because I felt alone. They started to visit me. They helped me prepare meals and clean the house. They took me to my physical therapy and doctors’ appointments. Most importantly, they gave me support.

We need good people with us; we can’t do it alone. I know it is difficult to make new friends



Read and discuss this excerpt of a poem by John Donne.

now as adults because we all have problems and have been hurt at least once in our lifetime. But we must reflect on our childhood and try to carry forward that feeling of family. What I mean by that is we need to be more social, help others without expecting anything in return, not be judgmental, and love unconditionally.

My life’s purpose is to stay close to my family, make more friends, participate in activities with my neighbors and community, and grow.

AFTER YOU READ: How does the author show that he is not “an island”?

Efren Macias Ojeda is a student at Ysleta Community Learning Center in El Paso, Texas. He is from Mexico, and he has a degree in electronic engineering. He likes to play basketball, go out with friends, and travel. This is his second article published in The Change Agent.



A Lifelong Learner

Carmen Chu

BEFORE YOU READ:

1. What are some things you've learned recently (not necessarily in school)? In what ways are you a lifelong learner?
2. How do you and your family use the public library?

My Children Encouraged Me

When I came to the U.S. in 2008, my three energetic children were 13, 11, and 7 years old. They were my major reason for coming here. I wanted to provide them with a bright future. However, I was terrified of being here because I felt that I was an outsider.

My children, on the other hand, liked it here very much. They were thrilled to study at schools, and they made friends. They learned a lot about different cultures and traditions. They often shared their joyful school life with me. They continually encouraged me to take English classes. They knew I was an introverted person, especially since my English was not very good. They wanted me to reduce my stress and boost my happiness in this foreign country.

My Teachers Were Patient and Dedicated

I went to the Alameda Adult School, and one of my classmates introduced me to the literacy program. Alameda Reads opened the door and welcomed me. Their motto is "Learning is Lifelong." Their staff were pleasant and patient. They talked with me and listened to me. I took their writing, reading, and conversation classes, and I joined their book club. In the writing class, my dedicated

I always practice my English with the friendly staff and lovely patrons.



The public library in Frederick, Maryland. Describe what you see in the photo. Does this library look like a welcoming place to you? Photo by Carol Highsmith from picryl.com

teacher gave me great encouragement to write an article for *The Change Agent*. My articles have been published twice before, and I felt ecstatic both times!

When I studied in the reading class, my teacher used the newspaper called *News for You*. I learned about a lot of current events from around the world. I built up my vocabulary. Also, the book club was my favorite. I read a variety of books such as *Pass Go and Collect \$200* which is the real story of how Monopoly was invented. **Moreover**, my teacher taught us how to play this well-known board game. I'm grateful to have this chance to learn English at Alameda Reads. It enriched my life and built up my confidence day by day.

A Job with Friendly Staff

Thankfully, I got a job as a library aide at the Alameda Free Library in 2009. I shelved all the books. I had the advantage of reading many

different kinds of books, so I have become a *bookworm* now. I always practice my English with the friendly staff and lovely patrons. They're pleased to talk to me.

Moving Forward with My Goals

When I felt more confident about improving my English, my family and Alameda Reads advocated for me to chase my dream. My goal is to go to college. I'm interested in art. As a beginner, I will take Introduction to Drawing and Painting. I will check the class schedule to make sure it works for me, and then I will apply online. I am eager to accomplish this challenging goal.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. Note the transition word, *moreover*, and the idiom, *bookworm*. What do these words mean? Try using them in sentences.
2. Read another article by Carmen on p. 38 of [Issue #57](#). Write a paragraph about the people and organizations that have supported her.
3. Read a third article by Carmen on p. 36 of [Issue #50](#). Look up the democracy movement in Hong Kong and find out what is going on now. Share the information with your class.



Carmen Chu came to the U.S. from Hong Kong in 2008. She is a student at Alameda Reads, in Alameda, California. Her English classes take place in the Alameda Free Library, where she also works. She has been published two times previously in *The Change Agent*. She has been overjoyed to learn English with classmates from diverse backgrounds.



Libraries Are a Public Resource



A public resource is paid for by taxpayers. More examples of public resources are: parks, schools, fire departments, roads, and bridges. Even if you never use the fire department, it is clear why it is important for one to be publicly available. How do you feel about contributing taxes to public resources?

Learn more about public libraries in this illustrated history by Ariel Aberg-Riger at [Bloomberg.com](https://www.bloomberg.com).

My Friend, Lydia

Xiuping He

BEFORE YOU READ: What do the words *optimist* and *pessimist* mean? Try using them in sentences.

She Inspires Me

My friend Lydia inspires me. Like me, she is an immigrant from China. But not like me, she is very optimistic.

She moved to Connecticut from China two years ago with her family. Connecticut is quiet and rural. I was thinking it must be a big challenge for Lydia. When she first came to Connecticut, she tried to learn to drive. She is not good at driving. It took her four tests to get her license. Sometimes she drives two hours to the Asian supermarket in Boston to buy groceries for her family.

I remember I was depressed for a long time when I first came to the U.S. Lydia is different.

Usually, when people move to other countries, they have to get used to different food and different cultures. Everyone needs to adjust their mind. I was depressed for a long time when I first came to the U.S. Everything was new. I had to learn English. I complained about everything. Lydia is different. She faces everything with a smile.

She Is Busy and Glad

Every time I see Lydia, she is always busy and glad. One day I saw that she bought some flour and learned to make dumplings for her kids. I was impressed. I asked her, "Are you tired? Do you feel a little lost? You used to have a housekeeper in China to do this, but now you are a housewife!"

She smiled and told me a story: "You have a half glass of water. If you see the glass as half empty, you have a negative perspective. You are a *pessimist*. You go through life feeling depressed.



Xiuping He (right) with her friend, Lydia.

If you see the glass as half full, you have a positive perspective. You are an *optimist*. You go through life feeling happy, and you have less stress."

Lydia's words woke me up. Even though she felt a great shock moving to the U.S., she is optimistic. She goes to school to learn English, takes her children to new places, and gets involved in activities. On Sunday, she goes to church and makes new friends. Her daughter got an award at school. Things are getting better for her.

Lydia supported and inspired me. Gradually, I started to appreciate the good things that happen in my life. I appreciate my surroundings. We have a choice in life. Lydia can do it. We can do it too.

AFTER YOU READ: What evidence does the author provide to show that Lydia is an optimist? How is it helpful to Xiuping to have a friend like Lydia?

Xiuping He is a student at the Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center in Boston, MA. She is from China. She loves Boston and likes to make friends. She believes everyone should be optimistic and remember that all difficulties will become valuable experience.

A Loss Can Be a Win

Nicolay Atkins

BEFORE YOU READ: Based on the title, what do you think this article will be about?

Soccer Is Just a Game, But...

People struggle with a lot of things in life. Sometimes it can be hard to send your children to school, to pay the bills, and to put food on the table. Struggles can make your life a living hell. They can make you want to give up on life. But it can make all the difference if you have positive people around you when you need help.

I love to play soccer. It's my favorite sport. When I was 16, I played on a team. We worked hard and had fun, but it was also sad at times.

Why am I talking about sports when I started out talking about life's struggles? Yes, soccer is just a game, but it taught me something about struggle.

You Have to Want to Win

To be the best in the league, we had to train five days a week! We worked very hard and made sacrifices. Sometimes, people of the community would come and watch us practice, and they helped motivate us. The coach showed us how to play like a team and move as one. He told us that we should play like a team that wants to win!

The first match we played my team won! We laughed and talked about the fun things that happened in the game. The next week we were back to training! We practiced hard. We won more games and our team went to the finals. We played hard but the other team scored on a penalty kick. After that, we tried so hard to score, but we did not. The other team won the final match.

If You Fight, Then You Win, Even If You Lose

My team was sad, but we were also happy. We fought hard together and improved our skills. We did better than we expected. We made friends and



we felt support from our community. We learned what it means to work together on something and to put your whole heart into it. We learned the importance of teamwork.

The struggles we face in life can be hard. They can build you up and mash you down. To face your struggles, it's good if you have a team that knows how to move as one. Maybe your team is your family, and you are all helping each other. Or maybe your team is your friends. When struggle comes at you, stay with your team and just fight to the end and be positive.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. What does the author learn by playing soccer?
2. Who is on your team?
3. Have you ever had experience with a loss also being a win? Tell your story.

Nicolay Atkins is a student at Lehman College Adult Learning Center in the Bronx, NY. He loves to play football. This essay was originally published in [Issue #44](#) of The Change Agent.

Write for The Change Agent

CALL FOR ARTICLES

THE CALL FOR ARTICLES is published on our website on February 15 of every year. The deadline for that “Call” is in early May. The articles we select from that set of submissions will be published during the following school year – in August, November, and February. Learn more at: <https://changeagent.nelrc.org/write-for-us/>.

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A small selection of the themes we have covered:

