



Winter/Spring 2020

# Neighbors Link

VOLUME 30

**OUR MISSION:** To strengthen the whole community by actively enhancing the healthy integration of immigrants

## Program to Foster Parent and School Partnerships

Studies show that students do better both academically and socially when their parents are actively engaged and involved in the school system. However, many families face obstacles to parental involvement, including language barriers, work schedules and different understandings of the role of parents in their child's education.

To address some of these issues, Neighbors Link launched a new Parent Education program in Mount Kisco and Ossining. The goal of this program is to ensure that parents understand how the local school system functions and have the skills needed to navigate school routines, homework and report cards so they can help their children succeed. By bringing in school administrators to speak with parents, it also helps the school system employees understand some of the barriers to parental involvement.

"It was wonderful to meet and discuss



*The principal (Dr. Brett Miller, back row right) and assistant principal (Mr. Jason Spector, back row left) of Fox Lane High School came to Neighbors Link to talk to parents about Back to School Nights, provide information about various staff members and how to reach them, and reiterate the importance of a partnership between families and the schools.*

**"It was wonderful to meet and discuss how to empower parents to be partners with our school."**  
**- Dr. Brett Miller, Principal Fox Lane High School**

how to empower parents to be partners with our school," said Dr. Brett Miller, Principal of Fox Lane High School. "It was clear through

the thoughtful dialogue, that programs such as the Parent Education Program at Neighbors Link provide a vital link between the school and community."

Parents of children from birth through high school in the program have noticed a significant difference in how they interact with the schools.

A parent of a 9th grade student indicated that "before coming to this program, I didn't understand how the schools worked. I thought there were only teachers in the schools. I didn't know there were so many other adults, such as guidance counselors and social workers, to support our children. One of the most important things I learned is that I don't have to be afraid to communicate with my daughter's school. In this program I learned how to open an email account and how to use email and I now communicate with my daughter's teachers and counselor regularly, both by phone and by email."

Parents in the program will continue to meet regularly throughout the year, receiving support as they navigate the school system and help their children succeed.



*Parents attending Back to School Night and meeting with Fox Lane Assistant Principal Ana Piquero.*



# Rapid Expansion of English Language Programs

English language education provides immigrant families with essential tools for integration and has always been a critical part of Neighbors Link programming. Our English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programs include instructor-led leveled classes with Westchester Community College and BOCES as well as volunteer-based conversation groups and one-on-one tutoring.

**Over 800 learners participate in ESOL programs with Neighbors Link annually** and in the past year, our programs have expanded dramatically, with new opportunities in our centers in both Ossining and Mount Kisco. With the many classes, conversation groups and tutoring, learners in Mount Kisco have the opportunity to attend up to 21 hours of ESOL programming each week and learners in Ossining can attend up to 16.5 hours of programming weekly.

Sonica comes regularly to ESOL and citizenship classes in Ossining and she commented that, “I am progressing thanks to the practice I have received at Neighbors Link. The program staff is kind and has helped me improve so much. I need to practice my



English, in particular my speaking, and the classes at Neighbors Link have allowed me to do so.”

Volunteer-led English conversation and tutoring is a key part of Neighbors Link’s mission of healthy integration. When long-term residents sit side by side with newer neighbors, practicing English, relationships are formed. Catherine (Kate) Ray, a volunteer in Ossining, said that “the chance that I might meet somebody on the street, in the library, in the grocery store whom I’ve met at Neighbors Link makes this community much more attractive to me. Everything about Neighbors Link is wonderful for both the students and the volunteers.”







## COMMUNITY MEETINGS

*Neighbors Link Community Law Practice held multiple community forums to discuss the "public charge" rule change and what that might mean to families in our community.*

## WELCOMING WEEK

*Families in our Parent-Child Together program helped us celebrate Welcoming Week with the New York State Office for New Americans and Welcoming America!*



# NEIGHBORS & FRIENDS



## FALL LUNCHEON

*At our Fall Luncheon, Former Deputy Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas gave an inspiring talk on the value and benefit of welcoming immigrants to our communities and gave an inside look at the development of immigration policies including the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program.*



## HOLIDAY MARKET

*Thank you to the many community members who donated new unwrapped toys and gift cards, and who volunteered their time for the Neighbors Link Holiday Market. Across our sites, parents selected gifts for over 800 children and nearly 70 volunteers came to help out!*

## AUTHOR WORKSHOP

*Author Joe Wallace gave a 3-part storytelling and book-writing workshop in our Family Center. Participants wrote and illustrated original books (precious stories from their childhoods) and went home with a bound copy!*





# Driver's Licenses for ALL New York State Residents

On December 16, 2019, New York's "Drivers' License Access and Privacy Act" went into effect. This enables all New York State residents to apply for driver's licenses regardless of immigration status, by providing a limited license that will require driver's education and insurance. It will also build trust between immigrant New Yorkers and New York State and local law enforcement. This new measure is a victory for public safety and for all who drive in New York State.

"Neighbors Link's mission is to make the entire community stronger through the healthy integration of immigrants. Certainly, we are all safer and stronger when every resident of New York State who needs to drive can do so legally, driving a properly insured vehicle. Westchester County relies on its immigrant workforce to sustain the quality of life that makes it such a desirable place to live. Immigrant consumers are critical to our local economy," says Carola Bracco, Executive Director of Neighbors Link, adding that Neighbors Link has been providing workshops for those seeking to obtain a driver's license.

Under prior law, New Yorkers without certain types of proof of status in the United States were unable to get New York driver's licenses. The old law created hardship for immigrant families when parents were unable to drive to work or to drive children to school or doctor appointments. Because of the old law, many New Yorkers were unable to get official documents proving their identity and were unable to license vehicles or purchase car insurance.

Neighbors Link is grateful to all the advocates who attended rallies and wrote or called their elected officials and to the many elected officials who championed this law. For more information on New Driver Workshops at Neighbors Link, visit [www.neighborslink.org](http://www.neighborslink.org) or call 914-666-3410.



*In New Driver Workshops at Neighbors Link, participants learn about the process of obtaining a driver's license in New York State. Hundreds of community members have already attended these workshops in Mount Kisco and Ossining and more are planned throughout 2020.*

## Congratulations!

Congratulations to our Controller Kathy Thorsberg for receiving the Katherine Niles Award from the Junior League of Northern Westchester (JLNW)! The award recognizes a Sustaining Member who utilizes her JLNW training and experience to continue to make a difference in the community. Kathy (far right) has certainly made a difference at Neighbors Link and we congratulate her!



## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE CENSUS



### EVERYONE COUNTS

The census is a count of every person who lives in the United States.



### IT DETERMINES YOUR REPRESENTATION

The data collected by the census is used to determine the number of seats each state has in the U.S. House of Representatives.



### IT'S ABOUT MORE THAN \$675 BILLION

The data collected by the census is used to distribute more than \$675 billion dollars in federal funds, grants and support to states, counties and communities.



### IT'S IN THE CONSTITUTION

The U.S. Constitution mandates that everyone in the country be counted every 10 years.



### YOUR PRIVACY IS PROTECTED

It's against the law for the Census Bureau to publicly release your responses in any way that could identify you or your household.



### WE CAN HELP

In March 2020, every household will receive a notice to complete the census. Neighbors Link will hold information sessions and people will be able to complete the census in our center.

## Remembering our Friend Suzanne Grant

Suzanne Grant was a deeply valued member of the Neighbors Link community and we were all shocked and saddened by her sudden passing in 2019. From 2006 – 2018, Suzanne wrote and designed the Neighbors Link newsletter. She spent countless hours volunteering her time to share Neighbors Link news with our community. In 2013, Neighbors Link honored Suzanne with our Outstanding Adult Volunteer Award. At the time, Suzanne said, "I enjoy sharing news of all the ways Neighbors Link supports our community – and our community supports Neighbors Link. I get to write about topics that build understanding and strengthen ties among new and established residents." Suzanne was also a member of the Friends of Neighbors Link.

Suzanne was an incredible force for good, not just at Neighbors Link, but throughout our community. She will be deeply missed.





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GIFTS

- 1. YOU DONATE
- 2. THEY MATCH
- 3. DOUBLE THE IMPACT

Did you know that many companies will match employees' donations to Neighbors Link?  
Check with your HR department to find out if your gift will be doubled, tripled, or more!  
For more information, contact Eva Kelly at 914-666-3410 ext. 114 or [ekelly@neighborslink.org](mailto:ekelly@neighborslink.org).

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