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adult literacy program: volunteers needed

Library's adult literacy program in need of tutors

■ Literacy tutor, student become friends

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Suzanne Rausch (left) tutors Patricia Marti in reading comprehension during a study session last week at a Panera Bread restaurant in Tulsa. They are part of Tulsa City-County Library's Ruth G. Hardman Adult Literacy Service. STEPHEN PINGRY/Tulsa World



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Posted: Friday, September 12, 2014 12:00 am

By NOUR HABIB World Staff Writer | 0 comments

Despite studying English for five years in school, Patricia Marti has not quite completely mastered the language.

"You have to live in the city to catch the language," said Marti, a native of Venezuela who has only been in the United States for about a year.

Marti moved to the U.S. with her husband when the engineering company he works for transferred him to Tulsa. A pathologist in her country, Marti wants to start practicing here.

To do that, she's working on her English. She has taken classes at Tulsa Community College, has joined English clubs and attended conversation circles. But the most useful tool for Marti so far has been the library's literacy tutoring program.

"It's a whole hour just for me," she said.

Marti heard about the Tulsa City-County Library's Ruth G. Hardman Adult Literacy Service through a friend. She added her name to the waiting list in January and was paired with her tutor in March.

The literacy service matches volunteer tutors, who have attended a library training workshop, with anyone 16 or older who reads at or below a sixth-grade level.

English Language Learners, like Marti, are also paired with a volunteer, if they know

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To learn about the Tulsa City-County Library's Ruth G. Hardman Adult Literacy Service, or to apply to become a volunteer tutor, visit tulsalibrary.org/literacy or call 918-549-7400.



enough conversational English to communicate with the tutor.

Suzanne Rausch signed up to become a tutor in March and was paired with Marti.

Rausch, who has a background in journalism, said she and Marti started out just getting

acquainted.

"Now, we're friends," she said.

The pair meet nearly every week for an hour, doing everything from learning synonyms and antonyms to reading passages and answering questions. Sometimes, Marti brings her medical books to Rausch for help understanding them.

"Suzanne has been wonderful for me," Marti said.

In addition to moving toward her goal of receiving a medical license — her first test is this winter — Marti is noticing a difference socially.

"I feel more confident when I speak with other people," she said.

The service currently has about 120 active volunteer tutors and 160 students, said program coordinator Jennifer Armistead. That means about 40 students are on the waiting list.

A push for more volunteers is being made during September, which is National Literacy Awareness Month. Tutors do not need to have teaching experience.

"We're looking for somebody with patience and a willingness to help," Armistead said.

Volunteers are asked to commit to tutoring for at least one hour a week for a year. Tutors and students usually meet at any public place that is convenient for both, often at a library branch.

Some students stay in the program for six to nine months, while others stay for years, Armistead said.

"It all depends on the individual and their goals," she said.

Armistead said about 14 percent of adults living in Tulsa County have below basic literacy levels.

That can make it difficult to fill out job applications, read prescription labels or locate intersections on a map, according to the literacy service's website.

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