



# VENTURA VILLAGE

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## The English Learning Center: Always Evolving

By: Kala Hotakainen

The English Learning Center (ELC), a program of Our Saviour's Community Services, welcomes students from all countries of origin to learn and build English language skills. Still, we notice demographic shifts in our student population and are constantly tweaking our program to reflect students' needs.

Recently, we've seen a surge in students from Ecuador. In the last six months, the ELC has welcomed 89 students from Ecuador, eight times the number we saw in that time frame last year. Today, students from this primarily Spanish-speaking country comprise one-quarter of our student population.

There's no waiting list at the ELC and students can start at any time during the year. We offer classes online and in-person, in the mornings and evenings. Our students from Ecuador are primarily seeking in-person, evening classes. As an example of working hard to meet students' needs, we're considering converting administrative space to more classroom space to maintain small class sizes and ensure all students can take classes in their preferred time and format.

Since opening in 1981, our program has been a place where students can learn in a supportive community. Last fiscal year we were fortunate to work with students representing 32 countries.

No matter what external factors or trends come our way, the ELC will continue to be a place where everyone can build skills and community!

### Ventura Village News

- Our March General Membership meeting will be Wednesday the 8th at 7 PM in person at ICCM Life Center, 1812 Park Avenue, and on Zoom.
- Our website, venturavillage.org, has been redesigned and updated! You can find more information about meetings, events, and happenings in our neighborhood.
- Our Neighborhood committees meet the last Thursday of the month. Check our website for updates and agendas.
- Elle, our Park Board naturalist, stops by the PCC every Tuesday from 6 PM to 7 with a new learning experience.
- Brothers EMpowered will have their monthly food shelf Friday, March 8th from 3 PM to 5 PM at the PPL CVI Building at Franklin and Elliot.
- If you are involved with a block club or interested in finding out about them, the Banyan Community at 2529 13th Avenue South sponsors a meeting with food on the second Saturday of the month. The March meeting will be at 11 AM.

## Neighborhood Worker involved in State Legislation

By: Steve Dreyer

The "Driver's License for All" bill was passed through the Minnesota House of Representatives on January 30th and is now before the State Senate. Jovita Morales, who works at the Waite House Food Shelf, has been working to get this bill passed since 2008. At that time she helped develop a leadership training program called Mujeres en Liderazgo (Women in Leadership) and they chose the issue of undocumented immigrants not being able to obtain a driver's license and the problems it causes.

Before 2003 people trying to obtain a legal driver's license were not asked if they were legal citizens. They were just asked to pass the written and driving tests. In 2003 then-Governor Tim Pawlenty's administration made being a citizen a prerequisite to obtaining a driver's license as a reaction to the 9-11 terrorist attacks.

Jovita's lobbying group, along with other immigrant advocates and representatives of business, agriculture, faith, and labor groups, has worked to change this rule. They testified that immigrant and refugee communities are critical to the state's economy, and that expanding access to driver's licenses is a practical step in addressing our state's workforce shortage.

Under the bill, which is co-sponsored by Representatives Aisha Gomez and Maria Isa Perez-Vega from the House and Zaynab Mohamed, Bobby Joe Champion, and Scott Dibble from the Senate, licenses would be available for driving and identification purposes, but not to register to vote or obtain a REAL ID. 18 other states and the District of Columbia have similar laws. The bill has been supported by law enforcement groups, including the Minnesota Police and Peace Officers Association. They contend the streets will be safer when every driver is legal and has taken the same tests, knows the rules and has insurance.

Jovita has taken a leave of absence from her job at Waite House to help complete this legislation. She helped form the "Minnesota Immigrant Movement (MIM)" group to help lobby for these changes. She has seen many examples of how this bill would benefit people she knows and our community as a whole. We all benefit because immigrants and refugees are important contributors to our neighborhood and economy.

Information Supplied by: Jovita Morales

Visit our website for more news, events, and meeting information!

