



Taproot Foundation and LETC

Most organizations tackling social problems don't have access to the marketing, design, technology, management or strategic planning resources they need to succeed. Without this talent, few are able to have their intended impact on critical issues like the environment, health and education.

Taproot is a nonprofit organization that makes business talent available to organizations working to improve society. Since 2001, they've been working to demonstrate that pro bono service can be a reliable, high-quality, cost-effective, scalable resource for nonprofits that brings talent from marketing, technology, human resources, design and strategy fields to work for social progress.

Last spring, the Taproot Foundation determined that LETC is a perfect match with the kinds of organizations they serve. LETC was awarded a Key Messages & Brand Strategy Service Grant valued at \$50,000. A team of five professionals came to LETC to learn all they could about our mission and how we strive to meet it.

They visited classes and spoke with students, volunteers, board members and others. They looked at other organizations in the city offering similar services or serving similar populations.

The team's findings validated much of what we already know about LETC, but also highlighted the attributes and values that are so central to accomplishing the LETC mission.

"The words we heard over and over from so many stakeholders told us a great deal about LETC's core attributes," said Selma Idris, Taproot Project Manager. "We heard from students and volunteers alike that LanguageETC is a 'community,' and that its programs are 'empowering, motivating and results-oriented.' But more than anything, we heard the word 'respectful,' which really sets LETC apart as a place where students feel welcomed and safe."

According to Erika Anderson, Taproot Project Marketing Manager, "LETC was a fun and inspiring organization to work with. Everyone from the

staff, to the volunteer teachers, to the students all had a clear passion for what they do at the school. It was amazing to learn how much they accomplish, and how well they serve such a deserving community in the DC area. Their dedication and eagerness through the Taproot service grant process made this project a pleasure to work on. Together, I think we channeled the essence of what LETC is and hopefully empower them to know they have no limitations for the future."

The end product from the service grant provides LETC with building blocks to devise an overall marketing and communication strategy that will help get the word out to potential students, volunteers and donors about the work we do. We look forward to applying for a second grant as recommended by our pro bono team. We are eager to continue to develop better ways to reach out to the communities we serve, both through the Internet, external communications and better branding. Stay tuned for future developments!



Who We Are

With nearly 2000 students annually, LETC provides practical and affordable English language education in a diverse and welcoming environment. Our proven student-teacher partnership approach to education removes barriers, giving students the confidence to fully participate at home, work and in society. Our small classes with two teachers and extra-curricular activities empower students to become self-sufficient.

As a leading, nonprofit school and advocate for adult education in the Washington, DC region, our volunteer teachers help our students achieve success. With 70% of our students improving at least one literacy level each year, we have greatly exceeded the national average of 40%.

Our organizational focus is the successful integration of each individual immigrant into his or her community. Students come from 75 different countries on five continents, bringing different backgrounds and life experiences.

Schedule Language ETC is open 7 days a week to accommodate the diverse schedules of our students.

Hours: Monday – Thursday: 9 am – 9 pm
Friday – Sunday: 9 am – 5 pm

Fall 2010 Classes: September 13 –December 5

LETC Closed: December 24 – January 2, 2011

New Volunteer Training: January 8, 2011

Winter 2010 Classes: January 10, 2011 – April 2

For further information, call LETC at 202-387-2222.

Language ETC

2200 California Street, NW
Washington, DC 20008-3902
202-387-2222



Summer Class cont. from pg 1

much open space outside of the center of town. All they knew of what this country looks like is from television shows they'd seen, mostly CSI and crime shows that are set in the city."

Learning goes both ways in these classes. As Larry put it, "If I never got another opportunity to teach another LETC advanced conversation class, I would want to register as a student so as not to miss this special opportunity to casually converse with people from widely different parts of the world - in one room - about such a broad range of interesting subjects."

Summer classes are one more way LETC students expand their horizons, and for this Advanced class, expand their teachers' horizons as well.

A small contribution goes a long way at Language ETC.

Donate through www.languageetc.org (Click on *Network for Good on the home page*) or use this form. Student tuition is only \$120 for a three month term. Your contribution enables us to offer classes at these low prices and provide scholarships whenever needed.

Enclosed is a donation of \$ _____

Name _____

Address _____

In ___ honor or ___ memory of _____

Please notify: _____

Language ETC

2200 California St., NW Washington, DC 20008



Improving the lives of immigrants through education

An Evening of Celebration

This past May 25, on a beautiful spring night, Ambassador Pierre Vimont opened his stunning Kalorama residence to friends and supporters of Language ETC for a glorious "Evening of Celebration."

Ambassador Vimont warmly welcomed the assembled guests who enjoyed French wine and hors d'oeuvres while strolling through the gardens or enjoying the majestic rooms of the grand house.

Reverend Arsene Jasmin, a Haitian student at LETC, also addressed the group. He expressed his appreciation both for the support the community has shown his native country in the wake of the terrible earthquake this past year, as well as for the personal support he has received in his studies at LETC.

The event was a resounding success and raised over \$70,000 for Language ETC. Thanks to all who attended and gave so generously, and especially to Ambassador Vimont and his staff for making this magical evening possible.



PHOTOS BY ELSIE HULL



Top: Ambassador Pierre Vimont and Reverend Arsene Jasmin

Bottom: Distinguished guests enjoy the festivities



Board member Ellen Bennett welcomes donors

Summer Class Expands Horizons

Summer at Language ETC is a time to relax – not to worry about things like split infinitives and dangling prepositions. Students practice their English in six-week conversation classes free from tests and final exams, in an environment that is often more social than academic. The six-week classes provide ample opportunity for students to focus on speaking and listening skills.

For one evening Advanced class, the summer brought together a host of students from all over the world who otherwise would never have known each other. They came to class from twelve different countries, speaking eight different languages – French, Arabic, Portuguese, Spanish, Russian, Chinese, Korean and Laotian. Even at

LETC, where classes always include a variety of students from different countries, eight different languages in one room is extraordinary. They left with one life-changing experience as they struggled together to improve their English – while getting to know each other and learning so much about their respective cultures along the way.

To keep the conversation flowing, teachers introduced different topics each class, often from current events, like the BP oil spill or how the US health care system compares to those of other countries. Students also discussed how they believed their own countries would handle other modern problems, like national budget deficits.

In one memorable class, students were asked to discuss their earliest impressions of the United States. "When I asked students what surprised them most when they arrived in the US," recalls Larry Rausch, one of their teachers, "several of them mentioned the fact that they found so

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Letter from the Executive Director

It's back to school time, with its attendant high energy and hopes for the new year. We are fortunate to have over 300 returning and new volunteers, ready to teach and tutor. They're joined by students from all over the world who come to learn English so they can build better lives for themselves and their families. Over the coming months, they'll all teach and learn from each other as they work together in small classes and tutoring sessions.



Carolyn Morrissey

We're ready for the new beginnings each term brings. There have been some transitions in the months since our last newsletter. We will miss a number of Board members who have stepped down recently, including Frank Dicello, Fran Butler, and Ellen Bennett. Their important contributions to LETC are described below in a separate article. We know that they'll all continue to be involved and we'll see them regularly so we aren't really saying goodbye to them. We also thank departing Board member Fabián Rosado, who served as Treasurer for several years and was instrumental in the development of our current strategic plan. We'll miss his steady hand as we move forward but look forward to keeping in touch. We also had to say goodbye to Karen Kakouris, who worked hard on outreach to new communities through her work with embassies. She and her family have returned to Cyprus, as her husband's time in Washington as the Ambassador from Cyprus has ended.

We are very pleased to welcome three new Board members: Phil Baker, Mary Janice Dicello and Tamera Luzzatto. They each bring special skills to the Board and much enthusiasm for our mission.

Language ETC

(Language, Education, and Technology Center)

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We also welcome a new staff member, Lee Griffith, as the new full time Volunteer Coordinator. Lee will work with weekend teachers and tutors, as well as supporting week-day volunteers.

We have again received funding from the Office of the State Superintendent of Education of the District of Columbia through the Adult and Family Education Division. For the coming year we will receive both local and federal pass-through funds, which will enhance our ability to serve our students.

We have benefitted over the last year from two generous grants from organizations that provide teams of professionals to help nonprofits with specific projects. Elsewhere in this newsletter you can read about the wonderful work done by the team from the Taproot Foundation, as they worked with us on a Branding and Key Messages grant. While we did not have space to highlight them in this issue, we also want to thank the team of volunteers from Compass, an organization which provides pro bono consulting services to nonprofits, primarily using MBA's from top business schools. Our team studied how we could best use social media platforms to build community, raise awareness of our work and raise funds. We received excellent guidance for the coming year in how to best use numerous social media tools for all of these purposes. You can learn more about their recommendations in the coming months as we update our web page, post on our Facebook page, start a new blog, and reach out on Linked In!

We continue to develop more informal and formal partnerships with other nonprofit organizations as we work to enhance services to our students. In spring we became members of the DC Language Access Coalition, an alliance of organizations that advocate for language access rights in DC. The coalition has provided numerous educational sessions for our students to help them understand their rights in the community. This summer we also joined Defeat Poverty DC, a coalition of organizations and people "working to bring greater focus during the 2010 election season and beyond to the damaging effects of poverty on our entire city." You can read more about the coalition's work at defeatpovertydc.org. Through our participation in these organizations and our other community partnerships, we learn about additional resources available to our students, as well as spread the word about our classes. We will be providing an opportunity for our students to talk with representatives from numerous other programs at a Service Fair at LETC in October.

Last but not least, we are always pleased to provide tours and classroom visits to our readers. If you'd like to see one of our classes in action, or just have a quick tour of our site, please send me an email (cmorrissey@languageetc.org) or call me or one of our staff members. Our students and teachers welcome visitors!

Students Show Teachers Their Appreciation

"I love my teachers!" "Thanks for the hard work you do!" "You're an excellent teacher!"

These were some of the sentiments written on three colorful banners that greeted over 100 LETC volunteers as they entered the annual Volunteer Appreciation Reception in the church auditorium in June. The banners weren't the only way that students acknowledged the more than 21,000 hours of service that volunteers gave during the 2009-10 school year: teachers were also treated to a short video in which students enthusiastically thanked them in both English and their native languages. Laughter and heartfelt words of gratitude were the order of the day as students made clear how much their teachers mean to them and how important LETC is in their lives.

As teachers sipped wine and sampled a delicious buffet largely provided by student José Reyes, proprietor of El Tamarindo restaurant in Adams Morgan, LETC Executive Director Carolyn Morrissey welcomed the group and thanked everyone for their dedication. She pointed out that LETC's cadre of volunteer teachers is one of its most unique aspects. Each volunteer was presented with a certificate of appreciation for his or her service. Volunteers from daytime, evening and weekend classes had a chance to mix and mingle, share stories of their experiences, and network with each other. The reception brought a very successful year to a rousing close, and helped set the stage for an even more successful 2010-11 year.

End of An Era, But Not Goodbye

This summer marked the end of an era for the Language ETC Board of Directors: three of its longest-serving members—Frank Dicello, Fran Butler, and Ellen Bennett—stepped down when their terms expired.

Frank Dicello has been involved with LETC almost from the start. He began as a volunteer teacher in 1995, two years after the program's inception as an activity of Our Lady Queen of the Americas Parish, which remains a major supporter and the school's landlord. When the school was incorporated as a separate entity in 1998, Frank became a founding member of the Board. During his twelve years on the Board he served at various times as Treasurer, Committee Chair, Board Chair and even Interim Executive Director.

Fran Butler also first came to LETC as a volunteer teacher, in September 2001, having seen a notice about the school in her church bulletin. Within a few months she'd joined the Board, serving as chair of the Nominations Committee, an active member of the Development Committee, and a crucial link between the school and its surrounding neighborhood, where she is a resident.

Shortly after joining the Board Fran brought in her friend and neighbor

Ellen Bennett as a volunteer teacher. Soon Ellen and Fran were planning the school's first major benefit, a celebration of its tenth anniversary in 2003. As Fran recalls, she told Ellen, "If you're going to plan the benefit, you might as well join the Board." Ellen became chair of the Development Committee and Vice-Chair of the Board.

All three departing Board members said they've seen enormous changes in the organization since they first became involved. Frank and Fran recalled that in the early years teacher training was minimal or non-existent—teachers were simply handed a sheaf of papers and told to begin—and the staff was bare bones, with neither a program director nor a volunteer coordinator on hand. The founding Executive Director, Pilar Laugel, essentially ran the operation as a one-woman show, working seven days a week. The lack of support staff meant that when an Executive Director left or was unavailable, there was little institutional memory, and the transition between Executive Directors could be rocky. And, said Ellen—who, along with Fran, also spearheaded the celebration of the school's fifteenth anniversary—there was no established fundraising system.

The Board has also become a more formal entity, with three-year strategic plans and a revision of the by-laws—a revision that created the term limits necessitating the three Board members' departure. While they leave with some ambivalence, all three say they're confident they're leaving the Board in excellent hands. "The new members of the Board have brought new skills and new energy to the organization," said Ellen.

And all three retain a deep affection and respect for the school they have watched grow. "My experience and that of everyone who comes into the program," said Fran, "is one of such admiration for the students. They're so hardworking, and so eager to learn. And it's such an educational experience for the teacher."

Frank, who will continue as a volunteer teacher, agreed. "The students have come here to make a better life for their families," he said. "With their determination, they spur you to do your best."

Board Chair Jennifer Browning expressed the sentiments of the entire Board in thanking Fran, Frank and Ellen for all they have done for Language ETC. "Their time, effort, energy and dedication will be sorely missed," she said.

Language ETC Donors, April – August 2010

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