

# Neighbors Link

**OUR MISSION:** To strengthen our community by actively enhancing the healthy integration of recent Latino immigrants. **OUR STRATEGY:** To Educate, Empower, Employ

## You've Got to Have 'Friends'

With energy and passion, this essential group of Neighbors Link volunteers devotes itself wholeheartedly to our mission to Educate, Empower and Employ recent immigrants. With the tremendous leadership over the years of Agnes Hassell and with members hailing from across Northern Westchester, **The Friends of Neighbors Link** is central to the success of our organization. When they are not organizing highly successful fundraising events, 'The Friends' are planning enlightening programs that build understanding about the issues surrounding immigration and the extraordinary challenges faced by immigrant communities.

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Photo by Megan Feldman

*Sarita Roy volunteers her time as an English tutor because she sees the difference it can make in the lives of her students.*

## Volunteers Teach from the Heart

**T**hrough the doors of Neighbors Link, more recent immigrants than ever before come to find work, someone to talk with, and a place to learn and improve themselves. It's in this time of need for so many that the dedicated adult and teen volunteers of Neighbors Link truly shine.

Every Thursday evening, adult community members come to Neighbors Link to work with learners in small group ESL (English as a Second Language) tutoring sessions. Led by Joaquim Mendez, a trained Westchester Community College ESL instructor, Neighbors Link staff member Luisa Granda, and student volunteer Caryn Laska, the program attracts about 50 learners each week. Some of our adult tutors, Bob Schmidt, Nancy and Chris Kearin, and Robin Capaccio, have been volunteering at Neighbors Link for many years and have established valuable mentoring

relationships with their students.

Sarita Roy is a social worker and one of many Neighbors Link volunteers essential to the success of its English language program. "Our learners are desperate to learn the



*Volunteer Robin Capaccio (right) is a Thursday evening ESL tutor.*

English language. If they want work or to navigate this culture, they know they need to learn to speak English. I see real determination."

In addition to the more structured ESL courses taught professionally

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*Friends of Neighbors Link Executive Committee member and former Co-Chair Love Wootten (left) and Co-Chair Agnes Hassell (right), enjoy an event with Neighbors Link Executive Director Carola Bracco (center).*



*Maru León, Friends of Neighbors Link Executive Committee (left), and Barbara Jackson, 'Friends' Co-Chair (right) are also Board members.*



# Volunteers Teach from the Heart

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at Neighbors Link through Westchester Community College, volunteers like Sarita conduct a variety of small group ESL classes, tutoring sessions and informal conversation groups virtually every day of the week.

Together with co-coordinator and Neighbors Link



Photos by Megan Feldman

*Adult tutors connect with learners using a variety of teaching techniques.*

board member Mary Weiss, Sarita mentors a teaching program Tuesday evenings in which high school students tutor learners



in English. The Tuesday evening tutoring program, initiated by Horace Greeley as part of their Casa de Lengua Club, now also includes teens from local high schools like Fox Lane, Byram Hills, Yorktown and John Jay. Sarita also hosts her own class of learners on Thursday afternoons.

These volunteer-taught programs are part of a continuum of classes offered on a drop-in basis to accommodate the fluctuating schedules of the learners, over 300 of whom come to Neighbors Link to participate. Each English learner has a permanent folder that records their progress through the program and allows them to be placed according to proficiency. “Once learners are assigned to their groups, they get so

focused. It is an inspiring thing to see,” observes Sarita.

Tutors use games and white boards to make learning English fun and interactive for the native Spanish speakers. Finding new teaching strategies and keeping things interesting is a “wonderful, constant challenge,” said Sarita.

She finds the youth volunteers to be hard-working and compassionate, and she is touched to see the relationships that form between the teens and their adult students. By learning how to teach and how to connect with others, she feels the teens are benefitting as much as their students.

Seventeen year-old Caryn Laska is one such teen. In the three years she has been volunteering at Neighbors Link, Caryn has made herself indispensable. She began as an English tutor and now also acts as administrative coordinator for the Thursday adult volunteer ESL program as well as Family Night, a biweekly social and educational group for immigrant families. She independently coordinates with dozens of volunteers to provide scheduling coverage for these two programs.

According to Caryn, the Neighbors Link strategy to ‘Educate, Empower and Employ’ doesn’t just apply to



Photo by Megan Feldman

*Volunteer Caryn Laska (center) is a Horace Greeley High School senior and an invaluable support to the teen volunteer effort.*

the organization’s Latino clients. “I have been educated and empowered to handle this job at such a young age.” Giving her this opportunity, she said, is in line with the organization’s culture. “It doesn’t matter what age you are here. You are respected for what you are capable of.”

Eleventh grader Sam Heffernan is a volunteer project leader from Hackley School, where he says “community service is a big part of our education.” Sam and the other Hackley student leaders coordinate teen volunteers and help teach small conversation groups at Neighbors Link on Sunday mornings. While the Sunday program was initiated and is managed by Hackley School students, it also has the support of volunteers attending Fox Lane High School, Westchester Community College and other nearby schools.

At first, Sam thought it would be intimidating to teach adults. But it didn’t take him long to see, “They’re



*Evening ESL Volunteers from Horace Greeley High School, including, left to right: Noah Sheinbaum, Gayle Schneiderman, Ali Goldfarb, Josh Kerschner and Dan Simon with coordinators Board member Mary Weiss and Sarita Roy.*

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*“It’s a sense of accomplishment when you can help others improve their lives.”*  
—Teen Volunteer  
Sam Heffernan



*Sam Heffernan coordinates the Hackley School volunteer tutoring team.*

eager to learn from us even though we are younger.” He and the other teen volunteers have the valuable opportunity to practice their Spanish with native speakers, so they are learning from their students too.

“It’s a sense of accomplishment when you can help others improve their lives,” said Sam. ■

## Caring Volunteers Make a World of Difference

Shirley Buontempo, Neighbors Link’s Program and Volunteer Manager, marvels at the talent and dedication of volunteers. “The impact of volunteers is impressive and our clients appreciate the time that volunteers spend with them. In turn, through volunteering, community members can gain a greater understanding and connection to the immigrant community.”

Neighbors Link depends on over 200 community volunteers who devote valuable time, energy and enthusiasm. They are an integral part of the Neighbors Link mission: To strengthen our community by actively enhancing the healthy integration of recent Latino immigrants.

For more information on volunteering visit our website at [www.neighborslink.org](http://www.neighborslink.org) or email Shirley at [sbuontempo@neighborslink.org](mailto:sbuontempo@neighborslink.org). ■

## Using Technology to Support Our Clients

Photo by Megan Feldman



*Volunteer instructor Firoz Pathan teaches computer skills to eager learners two evenings per week.*

Adult volunteer Firoz Pathan has a degree in computer science, but grammar is his passion. He began as a Neighbors Link English tutor four years ago and then was asked to lead the organization’s computer class.

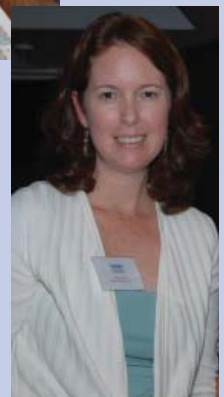
His 18 students use the computer skills they are learning to help their children with homework. They are also gaining skills for clerical office work, job hunting and home budgeting. There is a waiting list for the class due to the limited number of computers and volunteer instructors.

Susan O’Brien, long time volunteer, created and maintains our website. Visit [www.neighborslink.org](http://www.neighborslink.org) to learn more about our programs.



*Kathy Rothschild, our donor software specialist, has been part of the volunteer staff at Neighbors Link for many years.*

*Alison Quinn is our volunteer accountant and one of the Friends of Neighbors Link.*



*Volunteer Suzanne Grant edits the Neighbors Link newsletter, keeping our community and supporters up to date.*



# Learning Links Volunteers Help Children Bridge the Gap

Across town at Mount Kisco Elementary School, longtime Neighbors Link volunteer and recently hired staff member Rebecca Jamo is making a difference. Joining Grace Postigliano, Rebecca helps keep things running smoothly for the 40 grade school-aged children who participate in the Learning Links program. Now in its second successful year, Learning Links was initiated by Neighbors Link in response to an overwhelming community need for an after-school program.

Rebecca was recruited for the key position of co-coordinator while volunteering as a Neighbors Link ESL tutor. “This is something I can do to help people since my parents were immigrants also,” she said. “It would have been beneficial if there were a place like Neighbors Link around for them.” Grace Postigliano, co-coordinator and the person who first had the vision for this program, knows the families of Mount Kisco Elementary School well and is able to tailor

*“This is something I can do to help people since my parents were immigrants also.”*

*—Learning Links Coordinator  
Rebecca Jamo*



Photo by Megan Feldman

*Students get the help they need during homework time at Learning Links.*

Learning Links’ services to the children’s individual needs.

So each weekday at three o’clock, Rebecca and Grace begin their workday at Learning Links. They have seen firsthand how these children of low-income families thrive with the opportunity to participate in enrichment activities and receive curriculum-based tutorial and homework help.

According to the elementary administrators and teachers, Learning Links is helping to close the educational achievement gap. In addition to homework tutoring, the program teaches children “how to pay attention, be more outspoken, not afraid



Photo by Megan Feldman

*Rebecca Jamo takes a break from her administrative duties at Learning Links to enjoy time with the children.*

of raising their hand, and how to get along better with their classmates,” observes Rebecca.

Rebecca also coordinates the high school and adult volunteers who assist the Learning Links teachers. More than 30 teen and adult volunteers provide invaluable assistance to the Learning Links teachers, including helping the children with their homework.

The Horace Greeley student volunteers—who have formed a Learning Links Club at the high school—are key to the success of the program. Club presidents Noah Sheinbaum, Hillary Weinberg, Jacob Ward and Mary Ross coordinate the daily logistics for student volunteers and are responsible for scheduling and communications. Students from other area schools also volunteer in this program and are always welcome.

Funded through Neighbors Link and modest sliding-scale tuitions, Learning Links’ enrollment has exceeded expectations and there is a long waiting list for the fall.

“For me it’s not a job. It’s a place to come in and have fun with the children,” said Rebecca. “Even though it’s only for a couple of hours a day, I couldn’t be without them.” ■



*Volunteer staffer Fiona Woods assists in Family Support Services at Neighbors Link several days a week.*



Photo by Marilyn Shapiro

*Neighbors Link Executive Director Carola Bracco (left) with long-term volunteer and Latin Sol Sewing Program coordinator Ana Muralles.*

## Additional Programs and Classes at **Neighbors Link**

With a clear mission to help Educate, Empower, and Employ new immigrants, the following economic development and adult education programs are offered at Neighbors Link.

These programs are in addition to case management for issues impacting personal and family development, including medical and mental health, housing and homelessness, domestic violence, alcohol and drug dependency and other issues critical to the stabilization and development of healthy individuals and families. WestCOP Mount Kisco Head Start preschool is housed at Neighbors Link and is directed by Linda Bremner. Our Learning Links after-school program in partnership with Mount Kisco Elementary School is coordinated by Grace Postigliano and Rebecca Jamo.

### **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND ADULT EDUCATION:**

#### **Job English**

Morning classes for day laborers, Monday through Saturday 9am–12noon. Taught by Westchester Community College and Neighbors Link volunteers. By learning “Job English” students increase employment opportunities and often graduate to other ESL classes at Neighbors Link.

#### **ESL Classes**

Monday through Friday evenings. Taught by Westchester Community College and Neighbors Link volunteers. ESL students are typically employed and possess 3-6 years prior schooling, with varying levels of English proficiency. Note: *Children’s Program offered during ESL classes.*

#### **Worker Center**

Day workers assemble at 7am for jobs, using a lottery system for fairness created by the day workers themselves. Homeowners and Contractors may also choose workers without using the lottery system, based on need for special skills and/or English abilities, etc. Over 6,000 jobs negotiated annually. Note: *Workers may attend morning English classes while waiting to be hired.*

#### **Job Bank**

A referral service typically conducted by telephone, connecting homeowners and business owners to housekeepers, restaurant employees, masons, carpenters, painters, etc.

#### **Management Apprenticeships**

A participatory training program which teaches business management procedures applicable to local establishments such as restaurants, warehouse distributors, landscape nurseries, etc. Training includes cash receipts and disbursements, inventory management, and bank deposit preparation.

#### **Learning Links Children’s After-School Program**

This after-school enrichment program provides homework and tutorial help to low-income children in grades K-5. Located at Mount Kisco Elementary School.

#### **Computer Classes**

Tuesday and Thursday 7-9pm. Evening classes in small group sessions, offering personalized instruction in basic computer skills. Note: *Children’s Program offered during classes.*

#### **Latin Sol Workshop**

Tuesday and Thursday 7-9pm. Sewing and Craft Workshop offered for students wanting practical experience under professional supervision. Training is also provided to help students track inventory and analyze home business costs. Note: *Children’s Program offered during Workshop.*

#### **Community members and friends:**

*Please call us to find out how our workshop members can give personal attention to your basic alteration jobs.*

#### **Family Night**

Friday night program for Family Learning and Socialization. Family Night features pot-luck meals and educational seminars on healthy marriage dynamics, child development, household budgeting, school support, job networking and community building. Focus is marriage and family life. Note: *Children’s Program offered on Family Nights.*

#### **Neighbors Link Café**

Open 15 hours daily, 365 days a year, the supervised Café provides alcohol free socialization and community building with table games and recreation. With refreshments sold below market prices, the Café produces significant income to help offset the annual operating expenses of Neighbors Link.

Additionally, Neighbors Link offers a free **Legal Clinic** for constituents needing help with unpaid wages and general immigration issues as well as a **Health Care Clinic** offering health screenings.



27 Columbus Avenue, Mount Kisco, NY 10549

Tel 914-666-3410 Fax 914-666-3430 www.neighborslink.org

## You’ve Got to Have ‘Friends’

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Collectively, these hard-working individuals form an exceptionally talented and capable group – true partners who have chosen to contribute their skills and resources to advancing the important role that Neighbors Link plays in our community. Their passion and enthusiasm are a constant source of inspiration to us all.

Volunteers Adriana DiGiacomo, of Chappaqua, NY, and Judy Murphy, of Tarrytown, NY, are serving as Co-Chairs for the Friends of Neighbors Link annual “Festival de Primavera” fundraising event— “Rolling into Spring Casino Night”— on Saturday, May 2. Adriana and Judy have dedicated many months of hard work and intricate planning to this event. These two co-chairs, and all the Friends, help make our programs at Neighbors Link possible.

For information or to volunteer with The Friends of Neighbors Link, please call Marianne Delaney at 666-3410 x14. ■

*Judy Murphy (right) and Adriana DiGiacomo (below) are ‘Friends’ and Co-Chairs of the “Rolling into Spring Casino Night” event on May 2 at Westchester Country Club.*

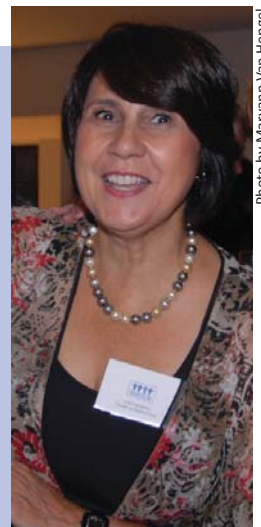


Photo by Maryann Van Hengel



Photo by Megan Feldman

*Neighbors Link clients know that by learning English they will have better opportunities to succeed.*





Photo by Davi Russo



## JOB BANK / HIRING SITE / 365 days a year

Open at 7am, 7 days a week, 365 days a year / Skilled Workers and Day Workers Available  
 27 Columbus Avenue, Mt. Kisco, NY 10549 914-666-3410 x 11 [www.neighborslink.org](http://www.neighborslink.org)

FESTIVAL DE PRIMAVERA 2009

# Rolling into Spring CASINO NIGHT

Join us for a festive Monte Carlo evening of cocktails, dinner, dancing and casino games to benefit Neighbors Link

**Saturday, May 2, 7:00pm**

Westchester Country Club,  
 99 Biltmore Avenue, Rye, NY 10580

All proceeds from the event benefit Neighbors Link Programs. For more information please call Marianne Delaney 914-666-3410 x 14 [mdelaney@neighborslink.org](mailto:mdelaney@neighborslink.org)

**SAVE THE DATE: SATURDAY MAY 2, 7pm Westchester Country Club**

Looking for spring help around your home or yard? Call Luisa Granda at 914-666-3410 X11 to learn more about using our hiring site or job bank.



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[www.neighborslink.org](http://www.neighborslink.org)

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