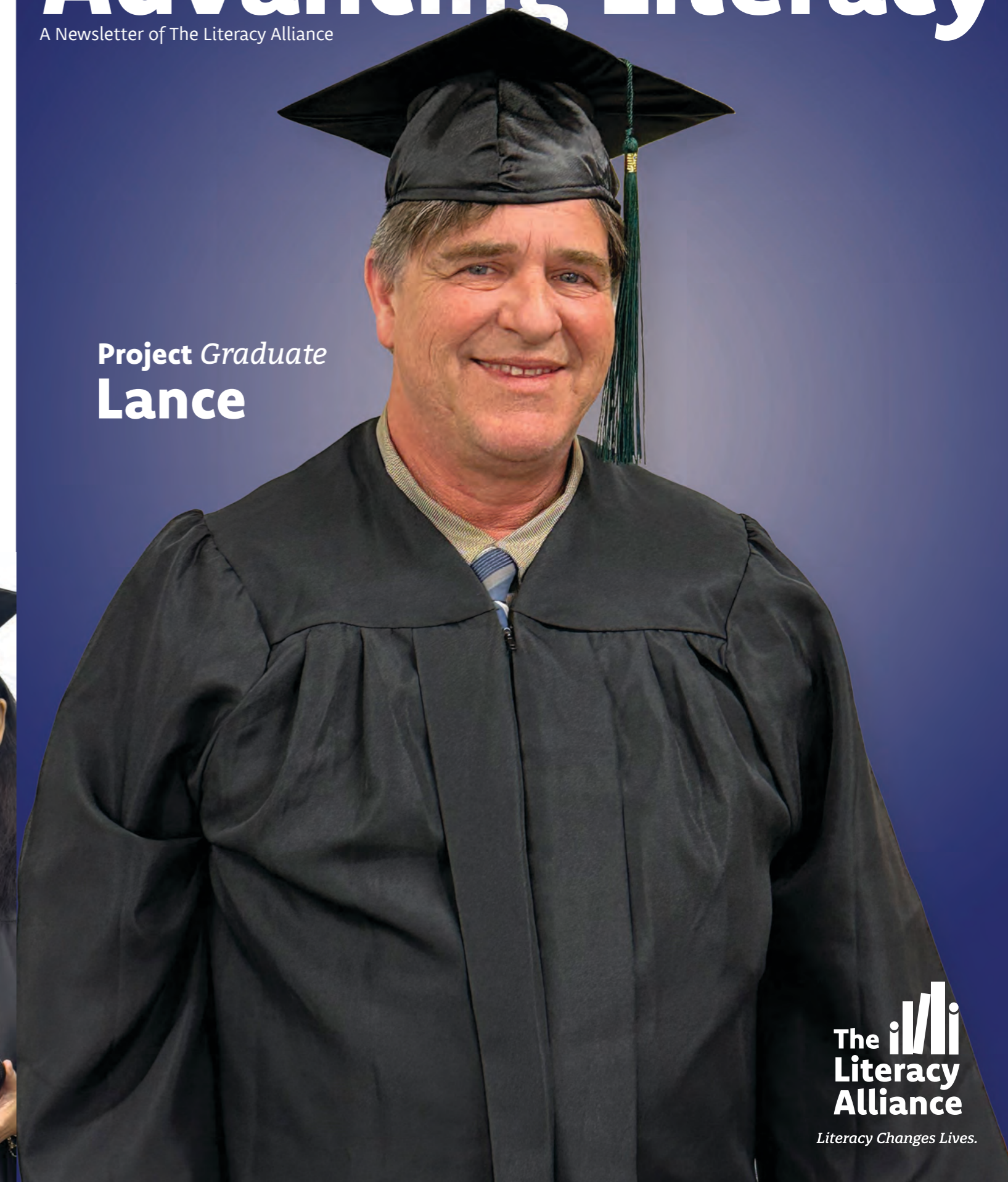


Advancing Literacy

A Newsletter of The Literacy Alliance

Project Graduate Lance



The **iLi**
Literacy
Alliance

Literacy Changes Lives.

Student Spotlight: Htishee

My name is Htishee. I was born in Burma, and I have two siblings an older sister and a younger brother. I have two kids, a boy, and a girl.

After finishing high school, the situation in my country was very difficult for further study and choosing the career I wanted. I graduated from college, but making a living was still quite challenging. So, I left my country and worked in Dubai. I was elected as a diversity lottery winner and received a green card to live and work in the US. I arrived in the United States on November 23, 2012, just before Thanksgiving. I met my life partner and got married in September 2013.

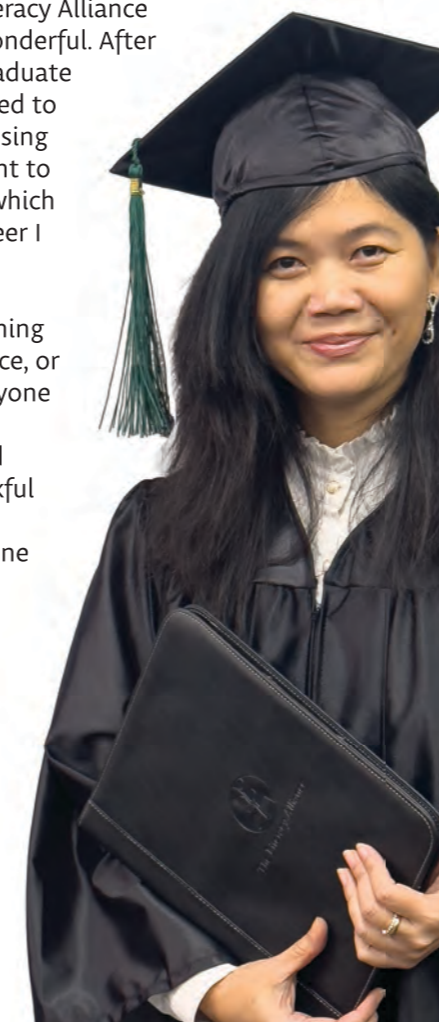
One day I woke up, and as I was getting ready to go to work, I realized I was so tired and weary. I told my husband I needed to quit my job. I started thinking about how to return to school while caring for my kids. I looked online to find a place to start, and that's when I found The Literacy Alliance. I was so happy that I found the right place to continue my education. The teacher and tutors worked hard and helped me build my skills. Now I am about to take the test for my high school equivalency (HSE) diploma.

"You can still learn something regardless of your age, race, or past."

My experience at The Literacy Alliance has been so great and wonderful. After seeing many students graduate from here, I am encouraged to be one of them. After passing my high school test, I want to continue my education, which will be related to the career I am passionate about.

You can still learn something regardless of your age, race, or past. So I encourage everyone to take a break and think about what you still need to learn. I am really thankful for this program, the management, and everyone involved at The Literacy Alliance.

Htishee met her first goal early in 2023 and passed the high school equivalency (HSE) exam.



Save the Date
Thursday, September 21, 2023
Summit City Comedy Club

LAUGHS FOR LITERACY!

Volunteer Spotlight: Joanne

Feeling welcomed from the start, Joanne has enjoyed her time subbing and volunteering with The Literacy Alliance. She is an employment specialist at Work One, where she has been employed for more than 23 years. Her previous experience teaching adult classes made her a perfect fit for the TLA's Project Graduate program. Joanne finds it fulfilling when someone earns their diploma after working hard, overcoming barriers, and sticking with it.



According to Joanne, "everything is done in a positive light" at The Literacy Alliance. The appreciation she has felt has been the best part of her experience. She suggests stepping outside of your comfort zone and asking, "What if that was me?" She says, "We can always find people who are in different situations. Helping someone else takes the focus off ourselves."

Ready to make a difference in our community, your life, and our students like Joanne? Contact Nikki, (260) 423-0008, or visit our website for more information.

Student Spotlight: Lance

This essay won First Place for the 2nd annual statewide IAACE essay contest!

It's never too late to complete your high school diploma and enter higher education. I'm a native of the Hoosier state, raised in California. I was born a month before John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, Texas, that November. Growing up, I can't remember when I didn't have a horse. We lived on the Old Rolling Ridge Ranch, twenty-seven acres of rolling hills in the middle of southern California. The very last of the undeveloped land, in a sea of homes, at night, the city lights twinkled like so many stars in the sky from our hillside home.

I lived with my family on the ranch. I had chores to do before and after school. As I grew, so did my duties—each year, another candle. Then came my sixteenth birthday, complete with a cake, candles, and a song. I'm sure there was more, but the only other thing I remember is my father setting me down for "the talk." No, it wasn't about the "birds and the bees," which greatly relieved me!

He simply asked, "Do you know how to read, write, add, and subtract?" "Yes," I replied.

"Can you write a check and balance a checkbook?" he asked. "Yes," I replied.

"Then you don't have to go to school anymore," he answered. "Yes, oh, yes!" I replied.

The very next day, my father enrolled me in a new school he affectionately called "the school of hard knocks." Soon I began working my fingers to the bone, and the ranch pay was less than nothing. As I spent each day at the ranch mucking stalls and bathing horses, my classmates went on to graduate. Soon the developer's bulldozers came knocking, and the ranch was sold to progress. Our heavenly hillside home was to be no more; we had to move. You see, we only worked there. My father didn't own the ranch. He graduated from the same school I was going to now—the school of hard knocks. As we were looking for a new place to live, my classmates were looking at which college to go to. As my classmates moved into their dorm rooms, we moved into the trailer park on the wrong side of the tracks. Soon I settled into one dead-end job after another. My classmates went on to graduate from college. I faithfully continued to attend my school of hard knocks. That was a lifetime ago when I heard those words from my father's mouth that set me on a hard path. Hard work and determination over time yielded a measure of success for myself and my family.

The years sneak up on you, and soon I found myself standing at my son's high school graduation. Deep down, I've always regretted not finishing my high school diploma. I've often wondered how my life would be different if I had gone to college. So, needless to say, I was pleased to see my son graduate from a real school. And with my father long gone and my mother standing by my side, my son announced his intention to attend college and go for a degree.

At that moment, I proclaimed that if and when he graduated with a degree, I would return to school and get my high school diploma. My son went on to earn two master's degrees in English literature and English composition. Soon he was offered a position at the University of Redlands, teaching an English class. The time had come for me to get serious about fulfilling my promise of completing my high school equivalency.

"Now, I can dream because of this opportunity through The Literacy Alliance. It all starts with the golden entry ticket—a high school diploma. This is the key to the college door. A door of endless possibilities!"

One day I was at the library and inquired about HSE classes. That's when I learned about The Literacy Alliance and enrolled in classes. The classes offer individual instruction. After testing, the only area I really needed to focus on was math, and my math skills are improving daily. Understanding the rules of math has helped me turn scientific notation from what once looked like some Egyptian hieroglyphics to something that actually makes sense.

I received a mailer the other day from Purdue University Fort Wayne. Within the pages were all sorts of fun workshops and classes. Now, I can dream because of this opportunity through The Literacy Alliance. It all starts with the golden entry ticket—a high school diploma. This is the key to the college door. A door of endless possibilities!

Lance achieved his goal and passed the HSE exam in March 2023. We can't wait to see what he accomplishes next!

Your gifts are helping more of our neighbors like Lance. You can read more stories on our blog.

literacyalliance.org/blog

Mission Statement

Literacy changes lives. Our mission is to empower people and strengthen community through education.

2022-23

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The Literacy Alliance

Notes from Melinda...

Advocacy, advocacy, advocacy! This spring TLA has been meeting with our local legislators to ensure that they are aware of the impactful work being done by our staff for students in the communities we serve. It is important that our leaders see how state and federal tax dollars are leveraged by other community supporters to create a return on investment that benefits all stakeholders. So far this year, I've met with Senators Andy Zay, Travis Holdman, Tyler Johnson, Justin Busch, Sue Glick and Liz Brown, Representatives Dave Abbott, Dave Heine, Chris Judy, Matt Lehman, Kyle Miller, Martin Carbaugh, Phil GiQuinta, Craig Snow and Denny Zent. Several of them have taken the time to visit our classrooms and talk with students. On March 30, I



In March, state representative Dave Heine visited our Project Graduate classroom at Redeemer Baptist Church in New Haven.

traveled to Indianapolis to testify at the Senate Appropriations Committee on behalf of the great work being done by Indiana Department of Workforce Development adult education programs across the state. DWD's adult education program had not received an increase in the state budget since 2005. As a result of advocacy work across the state by the network of 55 adult education providers, this year's appropriation was increased by \$4 million this year to \$16.9 million and \$8 million next year to \$20.9 million. Thank you to our elected legislators for their increased support.

Sixty-one of our students submitted an entry in the Indiana Association of Adult Continuing Education (IAACE) statewide essay contest this year and five received recognition for their efforts, including Lance Shepherd and Lindsey Todd, both of whom were in Kami Gavilanez' Project Graduate classes in Bluffton. We are so proud of their efforts and their winning essays are published in this newsletter for you to enjoy. Other honorable mentions from TLA included Juan Silva, Cody Manifold, and Arianna Preston.

Project Connect, our English language learning (ELL) program, is growing by leaps and bounds. This year we've been blessed to have catalyst funding from several sources that has allowed us to expand our reach and add new classrooms. We specifically thank AEP Foundation, Ambassador Enterprises and the Waterfield Foundation for intentionally supporting this important program that serves adults for whom English is not a first language. Project Connect helps these students become more effective in their jobs and navigate their community more confidently.

I love to share TLA's stories about our students and the impact our programs have made on their lives and in the community. If you belong to an organization that would be interested in hearing more about TLA, please let me know.

Melinda

Melinda Haines
Chief Executive Officer
melinda@literacyalliance.org
(260) 423-0001

Student Spotlight: Lindsey

This essay won honorable mention in the 2nd annual statewide IAACE essay contest!

How far are you willing to go? What sacrifices are you willing to make to achieve your goal? These have been recirculating questions in my life. These questions motivated me to join Project Graduate at The Literacy Alliance and finish my high school education.

My name is Lindsey, and this is my story. I was raised in Craigville, a small town near Bluffton. My public education ended in the 3rd grade. The next passing grade, I was homeschooled. My parents mainly decided to homeschool because of the special needs of my older sibling. My sister was diagnosed with juvenile diabetes at a very young age. With the school lunches constantly changing, my mother became worried for my sister's safety, and the school staff unintentionally overdosing her with insulin was a frightening possibility. The environment of public schooling was also a minor reason for their choice. I have always been a creative and honest, outspoken person. I believe my parents thought I could not flourish and grow in the public school environment, mainly because my personality did not always mix well with my peers.

When I was a child faced with rejection, my instinct was to pull away. If I could not get along with others my age, I would not try. The struggle I often felt attempting to connect personally with my peers was a large concern when considering joining The Literacy Alliance's HSE program. I hadn't had classmates since third grade and no form of public testing. I worried about being perceived as unintelligent by my classmates.

But as an adult, I now can differentiate between the mindset of a child and the mindset of maturity. If you are facing a problem and you refuse to accept the outcome, all that does is harm your character. If hardships possess any good qualities, it would be how humans find our strength to overcome them. I decided that this time I would not run away. Instead, I will look at the problem logically and find the root of my anxiety and self-doubt. Then break it down and deal with it. Afterward, I'll become able to grow past it. This was my final shove to join the classes. I decided to face my struggles head-on, both socially and academically.

Despite my troubles in the social scene, I have always remained a forward,

outspoken person, as I previously stated, which means I often carry myself with confidence, yet my self-esteem in my education has always wavered. Being homeschooled didn't make me any less intelligent than anyone else, yet a small voice in my head said otherwise. I refuse to lead my life being chained down by self-doubt. So how far am I willing to go?

How hard can I push myself to be the best version of myself? Because of this, I wanted to graduate, get my high school equivalency diploma, and to prove to myself and others that I am smart! I am capable!

I have been enrolled in Project Graduate for a month now. The step that once seemed so large was, in reality, much smaller than I had imagined. I realized I was even more prepared and capable than I had previously thought. Most importantly, The Literacy Alliance makes me feel welcome. The students and staff have helped make it the perfect learning environment. It does not make me feel nervous or unconfident. In fact, it has done the opposite; it was the step I needed to take in life to push me further.

"I am thankful for where this journey has brought me and excited for where I am yet to go."

My creative personality has led me to become a self-employed artist. Now that I am more confident in my intelligence, the next step in my education has become available for me; art college has been weighing on my mind. Even if art college does not become my next step, The Literacy Alliance has made it easy to look into careers, whether a future full-time or a part-time one, before deciding on my college education.

Enrolling at The Literacy Alliance has helped put me in a healthy state of mind. Being my best self means creating my best work. However, as an artist and a person, I will always continue to learn and grow. How far can I push myself? That will always be a question I find myself pondering. With the steps I've made, the next ones I'll take have become increasingly clear. I am thankful for where this journey has brought me and excited for where I am yet to go.

Lindsey achieved her goal and passed the HSE exam in March 2023. We can't wait to see what she accomplishes next!

Project Graduate
High School Completion Program

Old National Bank Foundation

On April 26, TLA was excited to welcome six representatives of Old National Bank, including market president Sarah Strimmenos and TLA board member Kara Densmore to tour our Summit AM Project Graduate classroom. One of the members of the ONB delegation was Nikki Thomas (holding the check in the picture below), a graduate of TLA and now a relationship banker at Old National Bank. Nikki Thomas gave an impromptu pep talk to the current students about her experience at TLA and her journey to ONB to encourage them to keep working hard in order to get their HSE and move ahead in life.



Old National Bank Foundation has been a strong supporter of TLA over the years, from sponsoring Laughs for Literacy to providing general operating support. This year the ONB Foundation provided support in the amount of \$10,000 and gave TLA the honor of visiting students and staff to see the program in action.

THE LITERACY ALLIANCE PRESENTS
Cheers to Literacy

Save the Date
Saturday, May 4, 2024
Allen County Public Library

Did You Know?

There is **no cost to students** for our programs! It is one of the many ways you are helping remove barriers for learners in Allen, Adams, and Wells counties. Please consider investing in the future of our communities by visiting our website, literacyalliance.org, or by using the enclosed return envelope to give the gift of literacy.

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