

KNOW YOUR NONPROFITS



COURTESY OF MARY ANN HYTKEN

This file photo from English Express shows some of the nonprofit's participants in the program in front of the Madaket.

Classes support county's English language learners

By Heather Shelton

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"Know Your Nonprofits" is a weekly column in the Times-Standard that takes an in-depth look at nonprofit organizations throughout Humboldt County. This week's featured nonprofit is English Express. Mary Ann Hytken, program leader/teacher, answered the following questions.

BRIEFLY DESCRIBE YOUR ORGANIZATION AND ITS MISSION » English Express catalyzes personal and social change for local immigrants through English language education and connections to community resources.

As a veteran public school teacher and college professor, I built the program from scratch as a volunteer, making connections to The Ink People and other future supporters along the way. English Express is the only program in Humboldt County where participants receive free educational and resource support within one program.

Since 2016, English Express has hosted hundreds of stu-

dents from over 30 nationalities. English Express' goal is to work with the most vulnerable in our community and to break the intergenerational cycle of fear, isolation, poverty, trauma and suffering that immigrant families and children face all too often. This population faces lack of access to English, systemic barriers due to not having citizenship and a mountain of fear and stigma on reaching out for help that results in unmet medical, financial, social, parenting, safety and myriad other needs. English Express builds confidence and connections and fosters self-sufficiency for our students.

English Express listens to the students first and creates a program based upon their needs. Through a melding of student-led instruction, adult ESL frameworks and my passion to serve, English Express offers a direct response to resolving economic, social and racial inequality with the following four courses of online instruction, year-round, for all first language students:

▪ English Express Beginners — For students who have

no prior English language instruction or students who want to review beginning English. This class covers pronunciation, vocabulary, verb conjugations, reading and writing.

▪ English Express Conversation — Provides students a space to practice conversation skills with pronunciation, grammar and idiomatic support.

▪ English Express — For beginning-high to intermediate-high students. This class teaches pronunciation, speaking, reading, writing, vocabulary, verb conjugations and common expressions.

▪ Towards Citizenship — This 12-week class, taught by Elizabeth Niemeyer, is umbrellaed (not funded) by English Express. Students study the 100 civics questions and answers in preparation for the naturalization test and interview. To date, 18 Towards Citizenship students have received their U.S. citizenship.

Local institutions see English Express as a main conduit for communicating with Humboldt's immigrant population. During the past year, almost 500 announcements have been

shared on our program's social media, the majority in both English and Spanish.

Resource information is received from a variety of institutions, including DHHS (Department of Health & Human Services), St. Joseph Health, Paso a Paso, CalFresh, Food for People, Humboldt Medical Program, Smile Humboldt, Head Start/Early Head Start, Northcoast Children's Services, First 5 Humboldt, Catholic Charities, Changing Tides Family Services, Centro del Pueblo and the community resource centers of Lolo, Southern Humboldt and McKinleyville. Direct connections to services are especially critical for our immigrant population during COVID.

WHEN AND WHY WAS THIS NON-PROFIT FOUNDED? »

English Express launched to provide accessible English language instruction and direct connections to support services within one program to Humboldt's immigrant community.

WHERE DOES MOST OF THE NON-CLASSES » PAGE 3

Classes

FROM PAGE 2

PROFIT'S FUNDING COME FROM? » English Express funding comes from local foundations, fundraisers and private donations. Foundations have included St. Joseph Health, McLean Foundation, Rose Perenin Foundation, Headwaters Fund and Humboldt Area Foundation.

HOW CAN PEOPLE GET INVOLVED WITH YOUR ORGANIZATION? » We are seeking support for outreach/development and grant writing. If interested, please contact Mary Ann Hytken at 707-443-5021 or maryannhytken@gmail.com.

TELL ME ABOUT A FEW OF YOUR ORGANIZATION'S RECENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS » Our new online program is enjoying increased enrollment, especially mothers with infants, extended family members of current students and men. A big thank you to HAF (Humboldt Area Foundation) for providing English Express with Chromebooks and to our local foundations for making it possible to keep our doors open for the first half of 2021.

Our accomplishments are best summed up by this recent student testimony: "Thank you, English Express, for not only teaching us to communicate effectively in English, but for connecting us with Humboldt. We are more than language, we are family. Thank you for educating us with love and respecting who we are. English Express empowers, inspires and motivates us to be bet-

ter."

WHAT CHALLENGES HAS THE PANDEMIC CREATED FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION AND HOW HAS THE NONPROFIT DEALT WITH THOSE CHALLENGES? » New challenges arrived. Students need technology training to join us online and some need financial support for internet service. The administrative and teaching hours required to run English Express online increased exponentially. In-person fundraising is greatly curtailed and the local immigrant community does not have the resources to support the program's fundraising goals. We raised only a third of our goal during last winter's online fundraiser.

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WHAT'S THE BEST WAY FOR PEOPLE TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT YOUR NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION? » Visit our website at english-expressempowered.com and our Facebook page at English Express Empowered.

To participate in the "Know Your Nonprofits" column, contact Heather Shelton at hshelton@times-standard.com.