

Volunteer Tutor Finds the New Normal

Hande Guzey

BEFORE YOU READ: Share a time you worked as a volunteer. What did you do?

It was late January 2021 when I received a text asking if I would be available to work on Monday. I couldn't believe my eyes. Did I read the message correctly? After all these months of remote school, was I finally being called in as a substitute teacher? I looked at the message again. It said I needed a Covid-19 test, and if the result was negative, I could start next week.

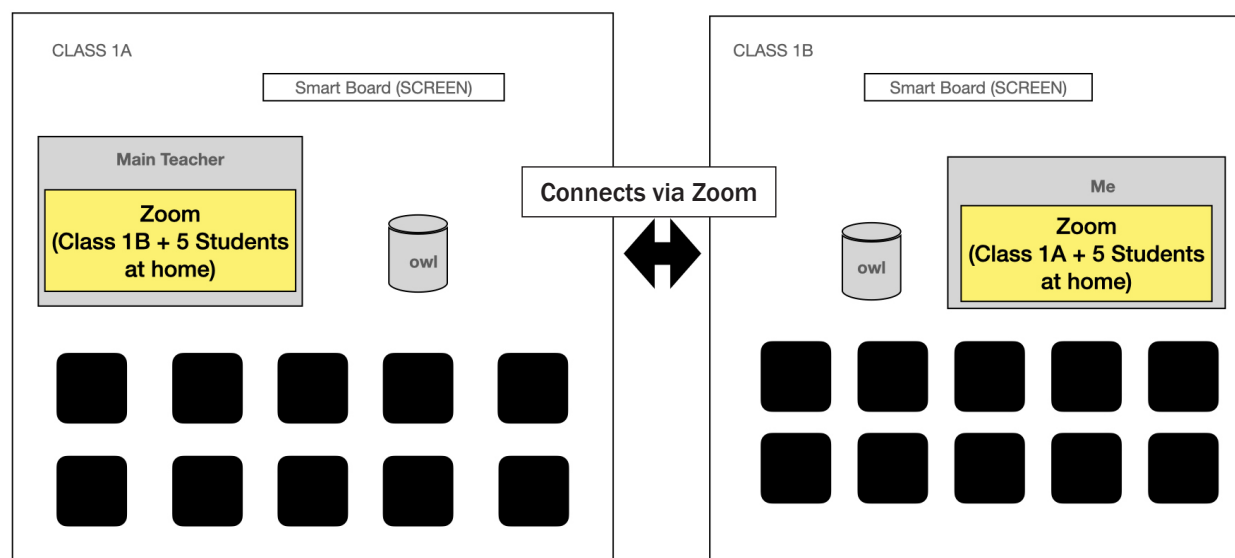
My heart was beating so hard! It felt like it was going in and out of my chest like in a cartoon movie. My soul couldn't fit in the small room where I was sitting. There were no words to explain my feelings. Working with children in-person again! My eyes filled with tears of happiness. How I missed the good old days!

Very quickly, the happiness was replaced by apprehension. Where was the nearest testing point? Would it be free? Would I get the results in

time? I searched online for the testing points near my home.

The test that the school required was not free, but I didn't let myself sink into despair. I talked to the agency that scheduled the substitute teachers. Good news! If I could get to the school before 4:00 pm, they would pay for the test.

I quickly walked to school and gave my documents to the person at the table. I watched children getting tested. How brave they were! When it was my turn, I closed my eyes as if I were in the



Let's say this class has 25 students. During the pandemic, about 20 attend in person. They are split into two classrooms. Five students attend by Zoom. The two in-person classes connect with each other via Zoom and with the students who are attending from home. They study all together at the same time. Owl is a 360 degree camera, mic, and speaker.

dentist chair. The nurse made me feel relaxed and calm. Her confident voice explained what she was doing. It was quick. My nose tickled a bit afterward. I took a deep breath and walked back home with my excitement continuing to grow.

The test result arrived the next night, which was on Friday. I tested negative for Covid-19. The weekend couldn't finish soon enough! I couldn't wait to be back at school again.

On Monday morning, I woke up early and checked my bag of school supplies, which were different from any other year: masks, hand sanitizer, and disinfecting wipes. And then I was off to the school, lots of butterflies fluttering in my stomach.

When I arrived, the security guards checked my ID and took my temperature. Then they let me in with smiles on their faces. During the pandemic year, I have learned how to see someone's smile behind their mask. We have all learned the new skill of hearing the smile in someone's voice and seeing the smile in the wrinkles around the eyes.

At the office, the school director came out to meet me. He asked me to teach kindergarteners instead of first-graders. Of course I accepted immediately. "I miss all of them so much. I can't wait to teach *anything* to *any* children! The age is not important." Being at school among the children made me feel alive again. The feeling was like a bear waking up from a long winter sleep.

Everyone was wearing a mask, even kindergarteners. It was challenging, but also it was adorable to see how they adapted to the new normal. We did most of our lessons outdoors, and it was quite chilly. None of them complained, even when it was rainy one day. We all just wore more coats, and sometimes we did lessons in the gym.

The following week, I was with first-graders. A boy crossed his arms and gave me an annoyed look. He said, "I hate wearing a mask."

"Me too!" I responded. "None of us likes it. But it's just temporary. We all need to be patient and do our best to take care of each other. Your mask protects your friends and our masks protect you from the virus. The good days will come soon

Why Volunteer?

Volunteering can be a useful way to explore careers and gain work experience. Learn more with this packet of articles and activities under "Extras" for **Issue #53**.

if we all follow the mask rules." He sighed, and continued with his day with the mask on.

In the past, I welcomed students either with a handshake, or a high five, even with a hug. However, in this new normal, I welcomed them with a squirt of hand sanitizer. In the past, they sat together at tables, but in the new normal, they settled into individual desks surrounded by plexi-glass dividers. Each class used to be a large and noisy group, but now, some students participated from home, some were with me in one classroom, and some were in another room with the main teacher. Those three parts connected to each other via Zoom (see diagram, p. 16). We all did our best to connect with each other. It was hard work, but it was also exciting—to be back in-person with the children, in our new normal world.

Hande Guzey takes Adult Literacy Zoom classes from volunteer tutors at the Los Angeles Public Library. Hande is originally from Istanbul, Turkey. She has a Bachelor's Degree in Mathematics. She works as a substitute teacher and a mathematics tutor in Los Angeles, California.



AFTER YOU READ:

1. Using details from the text and from the graphic on p. 16, what are some elements of the new normal in classrooms?
2. We underlined three examples of Hande's use of figurative language. Explain what she means in each of those sentences. Does figurative language help get her message across? Why or why not?

Children Count

Renee Chaco-Aragon



Children from the Tohajiilee (Navajo) Reservation in New Mexico play on a new basketball court. Thanks to the efforts of the One Accord Youth Council, the children in this community now also enjoy a new softball field and volleyball court.

BEFORE YOU READ: Describe a time you have stood up for a child or children in your family or in your community. In what ways do children need adults to stand up for them? In what ways can they stand up for themselves?

Standing up and expressing the need for change can be difficult, especially in a community affected by historical trauma. But, being counted is not impossible. Making a noise, having a strong will, and being covered with prayers are ways to bring change. In the summer of 2019, I finally stood up for myself and my community.

No Playgrounds, No Parks

I was not raised in Tohajiilee, New Mexico, the community I live in now, but my mother was. In 2010, I came here in search of a place to recover from a divorce. I wanted peace. My adjustment to this community was difficult at first, sometimes bringing me to tears, leaving me fearful of the

future, and often lonely. My children and I experienced culture shock. We came from a town that had different things for children to do. However, Tohajiilee had no brightly colored playgrounds, no peaceful picnic areas, and no sidewalks for walking or biking. There was nothing but open prairie. We had to drive over 30 miles to the nearest city to enjoy parks and other recreational activities.

I let them know that I was not going to stop trying. Someone would hear me someday.

I tried to make the best of our new home. Every evening, I would sit outside and watch the sun set over open land. I began to wonder what it would be like to see children playing basketball among the cedar trees. It got harder for me to ignore the children's isolation and watch them wondering around trying to find something to do.

The Children's Wish List

I decided to seek the assistance of our leaders. Together, we could figure out how to provide some type of recreational areas for our children. I spent a year going to chapter meetings, where I listened and offered ideas for our community, but nobody wanted to hear me. I would come home from the meetings and through frustrated tears, I would talk to my children and the neighborhood

children. I let them know that I was not going to stop trying. Someone would hear me someday.

I decided to write down their wish list of things

they wanted in the neighborhood. They did not want much. They wanted a safe place to gather — a playground and a basketball court. I decided I would take this wish list to the next chapter meeting. I went to the meeting and nothing happened. I felt defeated. I did not tell the children anything that night. I prayed and fell asleep.

Forming an Organization to Make Change

The next morning, there was a knock at my door. It was a local pastor. He introduced himself and said, "Something you said yesterday struck me to my core, and I am guilty of not helping to keep this community together." I told him the truth is hard to hear and hard to say, but it brings hope for change if heard by the right people. The time had

come for the children to speak. I gave him my children's wish list.

Since then we have formed One Accord Youth Council and started seeking donations. My children now have a softball field, bleachers, a volleyball court, and half of a basketball court. My children now have the courage to stand up and be counted. My children now have a voice. My children now have a sense of unity. My children now have hope and a sense of ownership in the community they will one day lead.

Renee Chaco-Aragon is a student at the Tohajiilee FACE program in Tohajiilee, NM. She is working on obtaining a Bachelor's Degree in Behavioral Science. She is a mother, daughter, sister, aunt, and grandmother, and she is a strong Native woman because of all the obstacles she has faced and overcome, not by her strength but by God's. She also contributed to the "Indigenous Peoples" issue of The Change Agent.



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What Can You Do?

What was the problem Renee faced, and what did she do about it?

Do some research online and see if you can find 1) a community organization that focuses on developing local resources, like parks for children, and 2) a local government official who could play a role in supporting the development of parks.

If you are interested in improving options for children in your community, write an email to the organization and/or the government official. Or call or visit them. Report back what you learn.

Read the articles on pp. 33 and 38 to see what other parents have done to advocate for their children.



Use your online subscription to The Change Agent to access a PDF of the "Indigenous Peoples" issue, published in March 2019. When did Native Americans in the U.S. get the right to vote? See our History of Voting Rights activity and an article by Sheila Mailman on p. 37 of Issue 26, "Democracy in Action."

What Can You Do If You Are Not a Citizen?

Dieuseul Camille



BEFORE YOU READ: What do you see in the picture above? What does it mean to “make things happen”? How do you make things happen?

If you are not a U.S. citizen, you might think that you can’t participate in a U.S. election. Actually, you can! How?

There are various ways to get involved. You can engage in debates and discussions. You can set up little meetings with friends and talk about the issues that are important to you. You can set up meetings at school, at church, or at work.

Also, you can try to motivate your friends who are U.S. citizens to vote. At my job, I have many friends who can vote, so I will organize a meeting with them to convince them to vote for candidates that I think will do a good job. I will

make sure they register to vote and they know where to go to vote.

Voting is an obligation for all citizens! Even if you are not eligible to vote, there is still a lot you can do. I suggest you help educate people about the issues and make sure that everyone around you votes!

Dieuseul Camille is a student at the Community Learning Center in Cambridge, MA. When he finishes studying, he hopes to get his GED. He is from Haiti, and he came to the U.S. in 2014. He thinks that voting is important because he has seen how many bad things can happen in the government and believes that voting helps people choose a good leader who will do the right things.



Have a Criminal Record?

You Can Still Find a Pathway to a Career

Lashon Amado

For those labeled as “criminals,” the path to success can seem impossible. Having a criminal record carries a stigma and there are other barriers that make it hard for ex-offenders to pursue the career of their dreams.

How do I know? I’ve been there. Growing up in Brockton, I was a product of my environment. I had adopted the street mentality and became a rebel in society. I have been stabbed, locked up, and sold drugs to survive in the streets. It was a vicious cycle that I realized had to be broken.

I discovered YouthBuild, a national organization that helps young people gain the skills and education they need to leave street life. Through the YouthBuild chapter in Brockton, I got my GED, and shortly after I gained some college credits. I was trying to make a change in my life, but my criminal background was a huge barrier. I was

being turned down left and right by potential employers even after successfully passing the interview process. Once employers found out that I had a criminal record, they essentially slammed the door in my face.

Although the path to a career is more difficult for ex-offenders, it is still possible. I have found that there are three important steps you can take to build your credibility within your community and with employers: Education, Volunteer Services, and Discipline and Honesty.

Education

They can take away your freedom, in most cases temporarily, but they can never take away your education. Education has a huge impact on your ability to succeed. Most importantly, it gives you the skills you need to get a good job. Furthermore, research shows that as offenders get more education, their chance of re-offending decreases. Employers will see from your educational background that you are indeed a hard worker; they might be less judgmental of your criminal record and more likely to give you a chance.

Volunteering

Volunteering is another method to gain transferable skills and build credibility. The job market is tough even for those who do not have criminal histories. Even entry-level jobs require previous experience. The best way to get your foot in the door is to do some volunteer work in the community. Volunteering not only provides you with an opportunity to gain experience, it highlights your character. It shows that you are headed in the right direction, and it will appeal to employers.



In YouthBuild programs, low-income young people ages 16 to 24 work full-time for 6 to 24 months toward their GEDs or high school diplomas while learning job skills by building affordable housing in their communities. Photo from Birmingham, Alabama, YouthBuild.

Discipline and Honesty

When an employer has to make a decision on whether to hire someone with a criminal background they feel they are taking a risk. They wonder whether you will commit another crime, possibly on the job. The best way to deal with this situation is to advocate for yourself and explain to your prospective employer that you have “changed.” But your words alone are not enough. You need to show examples of ways you have been held accountable (such as in school or as a volunteer) and you have delivered on your promises.

Sometimes it is enough to let time work its magic. If years have passed since you were last involved in crime, then your employer may give you the benefit of the doubt.

No matter what, you must be honest with your future employers. You must disclose any past criminal involvement in order for you to be able to build trust. Although it may be hard and embarrassing to disclose such information, you should do it anyway. Coming to terms with your mistakes and being honest about them is key to bringing about change. If you are in denial about it, then you won’t make much progress.

Don’t Give Up

The road to getting a career for ex-offenders is a tough one. In order to succeed, you must be able to put up a good fight and never give up. You must be able to step out of your comfort zone. All the methods of proving yourself to society may be strange to you. You may have never been acquainted with the college experience, understood the value of volunteer services, or had the willpower to resist instant gratification and refrain from crime. But with hard work and dedication, you can do it. Do not let your past mistakes define who you are.

Lashon Amado graduated from YouthBuild in Brockton, MA. He completed a Bachelor’s degree in Criminal Justice at UMASS Boston and is now working on a Master’s degree in Sociology.

Source: Smith, L., Tracy, A., & Steurer, S., US Dept. of Education, (2001). Three state recidivism study. <www.ceanational.org/PDFs/3StateFinal.pdf>.

What Else Might Help? CORI Reform!

CORI stands for Criminal Offender Record Information.

In Massachusetts, the Commonwealth CORI Coalition has fought for and won a new law that will reform CORI in the following ways:

First, landlords and employers will now only be able to see *conviction* data. This will prevent people from being denied housing and jobs for crimes they were charged with but did not commit.

Second, the new law will dramatically reduce the time it takes before one’s record is sealed from public view. Previously, it took 15 years after parole to seal the record of a felony, and 10 years after a misdemeanor. Now it will take only 10 years for a felony and 5 for a misdemeanor.



Members of the Commonwealth CORI Coalition fought for and won CORI reform. What do you think about the new law? In the photo above, what do they mean when they say, “CORI imprisons whole families”?

Source: <exprisoners.org>

I Help Myself...I Volunteer!

Mercy Mendoza Cruz

Having cerebral palsy has never stopped me from doing what I like to do. I am a volunteer at the Lakeview School in New Jersey. This is a school for people with special needs, and I graduated from Lakeview last summer.



Even though I don't get paid, I am learning so much about life and people.

I love this job because I get a chance to show that I can be independent. It is wonderful to work with the staff and students; it also allows me to prove to myself that I have a lot to offer the world.

There are times when I feel sad, but when I go to do my volunteer work, I feel happy. Work is good for me!

Even though I don't get paid, I am learning so much about life and people. That is worth more to me than money. Someday, the right paying job may come along. Until then, I will keep trying out all the beautiful and wonderful opportunities my volunteer job has to offer.

Mercy Mendoza Cruz is 21 years old and is a student at the New Brunswick Public Schools Adult Learning Center in New Jersey. Originally from Honduras, Mercy's goal is to improve her English and Math skills. Her positive attitude sets an example for all to see!

Volunteering: What about You?

What are some ways you give time in the community?	What are some volunteer jobs you might explore?	List the ways that volunteering might help you.

Take it a step further: Find volunteer jobs near you. Google “volunteer opportunity” and the name of your city or region. Would volunteering help you add skills to the list on p. 35?

Things I Have Done



Consider all you do outside of the traditional workplace. Include work you have done for your family, your community, and your place of worship. Put a check mark next to all that apply.

Working with People

- ☐ Take care of a sick relative
- ☐ Give medicine to a child
- ☐ Care for child who is disabled
- ☐ Help at a school event
- ☐ Make phone calls, use social media
- ☐ Visit friends and family in nursing homes
- ☐ Take care of children
- ☐ Teach or coach a sport
- ☐ Organize parties for family or friends
- ☐ Teach at my place of worship
- ☐ Help children with their homework
- ☐ Participate in events in my community
- ☐ Volunteer at a library
- ☐ Work with other parents in the schools
- ☐ Go on field trips for teens and help out
- ☐ Play music or dance for others
- ☐ Other _____

Working with Data

- ☐ Write checks and balance a checkbook
- ☐ Do a budget for my family
- ☐ Record income, maintain sales records
- ☐ Handle the finances for a small business
- ☐ Read a map, follow directions
- ☐ Apply for a loan or credit
- ☐ Fill out forms and applications
- ☐ Enter data onto a computer
- ☐ Select and price items to be purchased
- ☐ Choose colors for sewing, crafts, decorating projects
- ☐ Other _____

Working with Things

- ☐ Take care of plants, garden, farm
- ☐ Cook, prepare meals for large groups
- ☐ Clean and repair things at home
- ☐ Arrange flowers
- ☐ Care for animals
- ☐ Type, file, office work for an organization
- ☐ Use a computer
- ☐ Take photographs
- ☐ Operate TVs, modems, computers
- ☐ Build furniture
- ☐ Repair equipment, repair appliances
- ☐ Use tools, operate equipment
- ☐ Drive buses, vans, taxis
- ☐ Cut grass and other landscaping tasks
- ☐ Cut down trees
- ☐ Give haircuts, or do hair styling
- ☐ Take care of cars
- ☐ Other _____

Working with Difficult Situations

- ☐ Support someone in a health crisis
- ☐ Advocate for yourself or someone else to get health insurance coverage
- ☐ Survive homelessness, addiction, abuse
- ☐ Procure benefits from government agencies
- ☐ Interrupt a fight or mediate a conflict
- ☐ Provide court support or navigate the criminal justice system for yourself or others
- ☐ Handle bullies or support someone who is being bullied
- ☐ Other _____

Adapted from *Integrating Career Awareness*, p. 45, published by the National College Transition Network and SABES <www.sabes.org>, 2009. Download the complete curriculum and find other related resources here: <www.collegetransition.org>.