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## Literacy volunteering beneficial to tutor, student



BANGOR DAILY NEWS PHOTO BY JONI AVERILL

Chris Dirmeir of Orrington believes being a Literacy Volunteer of Bangor tutor is as meaningful for the tutor as it is for the student. She carries two magnetic Scottie dogs in her Literacy Volunteers of Bangor bag. [Buy Photo](#)  
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**By Joni Averill**

BDN Staff

Life changes and family brought **Chris Dirmeir** from Long Island to Orrington in 2006, and while some things in her life did change, one thing didn't: her commitment to volunteerism.

Today, she works full time as an administrative assistant at Maine Vitreoretinal Consultants in Bangor and spends part of her free time teaching others to read through Literacy Volunteers of Bangor.

Chris is an English language tutor, a volunteer position she found on the Internet and one she absolutely loves.

She comes to this avocation filled with enthusiasm and her special “bag of tricks” to help her students learn the English language in the program formerly known as English as a Second Language, or ESL.

Chris explained to me during a visit to the Bangor Daily News that the ESL term no longer applies to those learning English because many of the students, while they don’t speak English, may speak more than one language. Instead, the program is known as English Language Learner.

LV-Bangor is gearing up for another session of ELL tutor training, which will be conducted 6-9 p.m. Tuesday and Thursday for four weeks, beginning Jan. 11, at United Technologies Center, 200 Hogan Road in Bangor.

The course fee is \$35. Scholarships are available, and you can register by calling LV-Bangor at 947-8451 or e-mail its executive director, **Mary Lyon**, at [marylyon@lvbangor.org](mailto:marylyon@lvbangor.org).

More information also is available at [www.lvbangor.org](http://www.lvbangor.org).

Chris said volunteers and students set their own schedules, finding times, dates and places to meet that are convenient for both of them.

Both tutor and student agree to a program commitment of at least one hour a week for one year, but “it’s a conscience commitment, not a formal one,” Chris said.

Scheduling can be interesting, especially if both tutor and student are working, and sometimes that schedule has to be very flexible.

Chris said it’s great if you are able to work with someone at the same time on the same day at the same place every week, but with today’s work schedules, that’s not always possible.

“You just do the best you can,” she said, “and you find where you can go to teach and learn. I often go to Starbucks or to the library, although it would be nice if we had a place where we had a bit more privacy.”

Mention of the Bangor Public Library brought up a funny incident Chris told me about.

When she arrived at the library for a regular lesson and found it closed, she called her student on her cell phone.

The student’s husband answered “and told me to look over by the park bench, and I’d see her coming up right behind me. She was there waiting for me. So we went into the Chinese restaurant for our lesson.”

Chris said finding ways to help someone learn English is fun and challenging and that identifying “common interests, or needs,” is really important. “And you have to be creative.”

For example, if a student uses public transportation, the tutor could get a copy of the city bus route. Aids to help with grocery shopping and banking are helpful, too.

If your student loves to cook, you can bring utensils to the training session.

Chris has been known to show up with measuring cups and spoons, or rulers, yardsticks and clocks.

One of her favorite tools is children's books, which students can learn to read to their children.

"And once I discovered how to copy and paste on the computer," she said, "I can do all kinds of things."

But to Chris, the "No. 1 benefit of being a literacy volunteer is that when you help someone else, you are helping yourself."

"Helping build someone else's self-confidence helps build your own self-confidence," she said.

"And there's nothing better than putting a smile on someone's face, laughing and connecting with them."

If you are up for that, you might consider calling the number above and joining Chris Dirmeir as a proud member of Literacy Volunteers of Bangor.

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