Abisi Adult Education Center

December 2024 | January 2025

AAEC: Celebrating 2024, Embracing 2025

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As we step into another year of learning and growth at Abisi Adult Education Center, we look forward to all the achievements, victories, and renewed hopes that 2025 will bring. With hard work and dedication, we know our students can reach their goals.

Last year ended on a high note with a big celebration at AAEC. Students came together in large numbers to say goodbye to to 2024, enjoying games, prize raffles, and breakfast pizza. The festivities spanned three days in December, to ensure that all classes had chance to celebrate together.



The money tree raffle winner Chenda Pol (right) poses with AAEC Director Betty McKiernan (center) & her ESOL teacher, Donna (left).

A special highlight was the raffle for the Christmas tree, complete with \$100. The lucky winner was Chenda Pol from Donna's class -- congratulations! Additionally, the student raffle raised over \$450 for the local charity, "It's All about the Kids," supporting children in our community.

Now that the holiday season has passed, it's time to roll up our sleeves, dive back into learning, and work toward our English and academic goals. *Let's make 2025 a a year to remember!*



Classmates & friends come together to celebrate the holidays at AAEC.



Posing with a gift prize won at AAEC's

annual Holiday Gift Bazaar raffle.





A Generous Gift in Honor of Elizabeth Tsapatsaris

This holiday season, the Tsapatsaris and Curtis families have once again demonstrated their incredible generosity by donating 30 Market Basket gift cards to be distributed to deserving students at the Abisi Adult Education Center.

This thoughtful contribution, along with the significant scholarships they award each year at graduation, honors the legacy of Elizabeth "Betty" K. Tsapatsaris, a beloved teacher in the Lowell Adult Education program.

We are deeply grateful for their continued support, which makes such a meaningful impact on our students' lives.



The Story of Abisi Adult Education Center: A Legacy of Service & Leadership

This story is a special edition of our "Meet the Abisi Team: The People Who Make a Difference" feature. Abisi Adult Education Center has been a vital part of the Lowell community for nearly 50 years, helping adults learn and succeed. In this two-part feature, we'll first share the history of AAEC and the inspiring work of its leaders, Fred Abisi and Betty McKiernan. In part two (next month), Fred and Betty will answer questions from students, as well as share their thoughts and advice.

The Abisi Adult Education Center (AAEC) has been helping adults in Lowell since 1977. It is a place where people come to learn, grow, and create better lives for themselves and their families. This article shares the history of AAEC and the two leaders who helped make it what it is today: Fred Abisi and Betty McKiernan.

How It All Started

In the 1970s, Fred Abisi started working in adult education. Before 1977, adult education classes were only offered two nights a week. When Fred became the first full-time director, everything changed.

Fred began building the program from the ground up. He hired the first full-time teacher, Betty Tsapatsaris, and started classes in the old Lowell High School building. Even though the building wasn't in great shape, the program grew quickly. More and more adults came to learn English, get their GED, and improve their skills.



AT THE HELM: Former Director & Abisi Adult Education namesake, Fred Abisi (left), stands proudly with Current Director, Betty McKiernan (right), at the dedication plaque of the Abisi Adult Education Center, celebrating nearly 50 years of combined leadership that has grown the program into one of the largest adult education centers in Massachusetts.

(for those interested in pursuing U.S. citizenship). And while we still have a large

Dominican Republic, Mexico, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Thailand,

Cambodian student body, the reality is that we have a very diverse student

population that comes from all over the world -- including Haiti, Brazil, the

Fred and Betty both love the diversity of students. They say that it makes the

program exciting and meaningful. Betty is quick to point out how the staff at AAEC feels like a family, working together to help students succeed. Fred was

quick to agree, adding that the program's success comes from having talented

teachers who care about the students. As he explained, "You can't do it alone.

Abisi Adult Education Center has always been a place for immigrants to learn and succeed. In the 1980s, many Cambodian refugees began attending classes at Abisi (then called Lowell Adult Education) to learn English, earn their high school credentials, and gain knowledge about American history and culture in preparation for the citizenship test

Türkiye, Afghanistan, and Ukraine, just to name a few.

44 Abisi Adult **Education Center** has always been a place for immigrants to learn and succeed.

Overcoming Challenges

Running a program like AAEC is not always easy. There are challenges, like finding enough money, meeting government rules, and dealing with leadership changes. But Fred and Betty stay focused on the students, above all.

It's like a family,"

Looking Ahead

Fred and Betty are proud of what AAEC has accomplished. They believe the program will continue to help people for many years to come. Whether students are learning English, finishing high school, or gaining new skills, AAEC is a place where they can succeed.

For almost 50 years, the Abisi Adult Education Center has been a place of hope. It has changed the lives of many people in Lowell, thanks to the hard work of its leaders, staff, and students. 🐨

FREDERICK ASSAD ABISI

ADULT EDUCATION CENTER

IN RECOGNITION OF 40 YEARS OF UNWAVERING DEDICATION, COMMITMENT, LEADERSHIP AND LOYALTY TO THE **STUDENTS AND FACULTY OF THE** LOWELL PUBLIC SCHOOLS **ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAM**

Dedicated November 8, 2014

The dedication plaque renaming Lowell Adult Education Center to the Frederick Assad Abisi Adult Education Center.

DECEMBER 2024 / JANUARY 2025 || ABISI ADULT EDUCATION CENTER || PAGE 3 ESOL Students Visit Lowell City Hall & Lowell Fire Department

On November 19, students from Carrie and Daisy's classes went on an exciting field trip to Lowell City Hall. They had learned about city government in class and now had the opportunity to see where their city leaders work.



Mayor Daniel Rourke gave the students a tour of City Hall. They visited the Mayor's Office, the Mayor's Reception Room, and the City Council Chamber, where weekly council meetings are held.

Afterward, the classes toured the JFK Central Fire Station. There, students spoke with the firefighters about their duties, saw their protective gear and tools, and got a first-hand look at a ladder fire truck. They also met a police officer and examine a police cruiser parked at the station.

Thank you to Mayor Rourke and everyone in the city who helped make this trip a success. Your efforts made this experience both enjoyable and educational for our students.





Students asked questions, explored a ladder truck (right) & handled firefighter tools (left)

Did you know an immigrant created one of the most iconic clothing items in the world—blue jeans?

Students from Carrie and Daisy's classes learned about the origin of one of the most popular pieces of clothing in the world: blue jeans. This special presentation was a part of their Social Studies classes, taught by Gail Forman.

Gail shared the story of Levi Strauss, an immigrant from Europe who came to America in the 1800s during the Gold Rush. Strauss, she explained, invented jeans to meet miners' need for strong, durable pants while working to extract gold.

To celebrate the lesson, students were encouraged to wear jeans and other denim clothing. Many participated and proudly posed for photos at the end of the class, showcasing their jeans-inspired outfits!



Students "strike a pose" of their denim style after learning about the origin of blue jeans in a special Social Studies lesson!



Teacher Gail engages students with a lesson about Levi Strauss & the history of jeans.

Citizenship Classes Update + New Sessions Starting Soon!

On December, 22 students successfully completed the free citizenship classes offered by Abisi Adult Education Center (AAEC).

Participants included current and former AAEC students, as well as community members. They worked hard to study Form N-400, the Application for Naturalization, and to understand key words and phrases used in the naturalization interview. Additionally, they practiced English speaking, reading, and writing skills while learning the 100 civics questions.

Interested in taking a citizenship preparation class?

Classes start in January. Class Size is Limited!

> Sign Up Today to Reserve Your Spot!

For more information or to enroll in a class, please email Gail at gforman@lowell.k12.ma.us or call/text her at 978-918-3519.



Students from the in-person citizenship class stand proud with their certificates of class completion.



In-person students ask each other questions to practice for their citizenship interview.

In-Person Class Location: AAEC Room 12 Start Date: Thursday, January 30th Time: 9:30 - 11:30am

Remote Class (on ZOOM): Start date: Wednesday, January 29 Time: 6:00 - 7:30 PM.

A Festive Holiday Celebration at the Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association

The holiday spirit was alive and well at the Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association (CMAA), where students celebrated the holiday season with joy and enthusiasm!

The festivities kicked off with a lively game of Christmas bingo, complete with candy cane prizes that delighted everyone. Students then got into the holiday mood with a sing-along of traditional Christmas carols, practicing their English while spreading cheer.



CMAA ESOL students show off their holiday spirit with colorful, festive sweaters.

The highlight of the celebration was a Yankee swap, featuring an array of exciting gifts provided by teachers Kathy and Martha. Laughter and fun filled the room as students unwrapped and traded their surprises.

To top it all off, the students organized a massive buffet showcasing delicious dishes from their home countries, making the celebration not just festive, but also a rich cultural experience. It was a memorable way to ring in the holiday season!



Students feasted on an amazing array of dishes representing their home countries.



The Yankee Gift Swap was the highlight of the day.

DECEMBER 2024 / JANUARY 2025 || ABISI ADULT EDUCATION CENTER || PAGE 5 Inside the Classroom: Student Interviews

Learning English is a family affair for Brazilian students **Lidia Oliveira** (Meg's class) and **Andressa DaCruz** (Martha's class). The pair share a unique bond as mother-in-law and daughter-in-law—Andressa is married to Lidia's son—and they come together to improve their English at the Abisi Adult Education Center. In this interview, they talk about how learning English at AAEC has changed their lives in the United States and share some exciting news: Andressa is pregnant with her first child, who will also be Lidia's first grandchild. Congratulations!



Andressa (left) and Lidia (right): thankful for AAEC, and one another.

How many years have you lived in the United States?

Lidia: I have been in the United States for 13 years and have been studying at AAEC for three years.

Andressa: It will be three years since I came to the United States, and it will also be three years since I started at this school.

What is the biggest challenge you have faced when immigrating from Brazil to the US?

Lidia: My biggest challenge was the language. When I arrived, my husband had already been here for many years. I worked hard, adjusted my immigration status, got my Social Security number, and got my driver's license. I had to choose between studying or putting my children through college. At that time, I decided to focus on my kids. My daughter, who came here at age 15, is an engineer, and my son, who arrived at age 12, graduated in criminal justice.

Andressa: Aside from adapting to the climate, which is completely different from Brazil, I think the language is the biggest challenge for anyone who comes here

without speaking English. It's very difficult to try to communicate, find a job... whatever you need to do requires at least basic English.

How have the classes at AAEC influenced your experience in America?

Lidia: Oh, they were so important! I learned so much more here! We have general knowledge, which I love, and now I understand everything I read in English. It has improved everything for me!

Andressa: It was very important because I had an emotional block when I came to the United States. I came alone, and anxiety held me back a lot. In my first year of studying here, I struggled a lot. I missed many classes because I felt a lot of fear and anxiety when trying to communicate. But with the support of Carrie, my first teacher, who was very patient and essential to my development, I was able to improve.

I brought her to the school when she arrived from Brazil.
 I told her, 'Now you're like my daughter, and you're going to study, too.
 -Lidia Oliveira

Then I was a student of Jen, who also helped me a lot. Now, I've reached the highest level, with Martha, who is amazing. It's been a great evolution and a big step for me.

Were you ever in the same class? Lidia: No. I brought her to the school. When she arrived from Brazil, I told her, "Now you're like my daughter, and you're going to study, too."

She was shy at first, but she kept going, and now she's where she is. I'm very grateful to AAEC because education has no age. I'm 53, she's 24, and we're going to keep pursuing our dreams.

[AAEC] was very important. In my first year of studying here...I struggled a lot. I felt a lot of fear and anxiety when trying to communicate. But, with the support of Carrie, my first teacher, I was able to improve.

-Andressa DaCruz

What do you like to do in your free time when you're not at school, and how do you improve your English outside the classroom?

Lidia: I love watching [TV] series. I also go on outings with my husband to parks and restaurants. Andressa: I try to improve my English daily, like when I go to the supermarket or stores.

How did you become mother-in-law and daughter-in-law?

Andressa: I have a friend who is the wife of my mother-in-law's nephew. So I met my husband, Jhemmyson, online. I was in Brazil, in the state of Amazonas, and he was here. After six months, I came to the United States. Now I'm pregnant with our first child!



Inside the Classroom: Student Interviews continued from page 5



Andressa & Lidia share a very special bond.



What is the biggest challenge you have faced when immigrating from your country to the US?

There's a common idea -- not just in Brazil, but everywhere -- about tension between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. How do you handle that?

Lidia: (Laughing) For me, that has never existed. When my son fell in love with her, I helped bring her here. My son is autistic, and she's so good for him. My son-in-law is like my son, and my daughter-in-law is like my daughter. Now she's giving me my first grandchild. She's the love of my son's life, and he's the love of my life. If we ever have any disagreements, we talk it out—no fighting. We all live together in the same house. I respect her space, and she respects mine. When she arrived, I told her, "My son is yours."

Andressa: I didn't just gain a mother-in-law; I gained a second mother. She's so loving and caring. We treat each other like mother and daughter, so our relationship as mother- and daughter-in-law is really good. Now during my pregnancy, she's helping me so much! I'm so grateful.

Do you have a dream you would like to achieve?

Lidia: I dream of learning a lot of English so I can travel the world. When the time is right, I want to go on a cruise with my husband. We want to live life, you know? We've spent our lives just working and raising kids.

Andressa: My dream when I came here was to reach the level of English I have now within two or three years. That was a dream I've already achieved. Now, I want to try to get my GED and earn my high school diploma. But my biggest dream is to become a personal trainer.

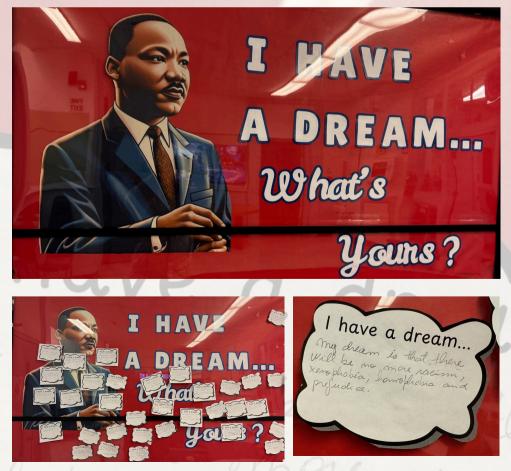
Honoring Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. ~Share Your Dreams at AAEC~

Martin Luther King, J. is known for his contributions to the American civil rights movement and for his dedicated fight for the rights and dignity of all people. He delivered (1963) his iconic speech, "I Have a Dream," which envisioned a United States free from segregation and racism. His legacy inspires us to continue working towards a more just and equitable world.

January marks the anniversary of Dr. Martin Luther King's birth. Here at Abisi, we have created a bulletin board to honor his role as one of the most important civil rights activists.

This year, Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, will be observed on January 20th. As a reminder, MLK Day is a national holiday and there will be no classes that day.

Students are invited to write their dreams on paper, which will be the displayed on the walls of AAEC.



HSE: Choosing Our WORD of the Year!

The end of the year often makes us think about what we've done over the past 365 days, our lifestyle, and changes we want to make in the future. This reflection often leads to setting New Year's resolutions. These resolutions are usually big, ambitious goals that promise to bring big changes. But many times, they are hard to accomplish.

For our first journal writing of 2025, the gold group chose ONE word that will keep them motivated for the year of 2025! We used dictionaries to find the true meaning of the word and then reflected on how we can "live" our word throughout the year of 2025. Happy New Year!!

Here are the words we chose!

Alison- Patience || Melita- Vision || Marie- Achieve || Glory- Faith Chandararoth- Passion || Naphtaline- Appreciation || Xavier- Achieve Josue- Discipline || Sreyli- Ambition || Caleb- Creativity For this year my word is "passion." Let your passion be the driving force in your life, igniting your creativity and pushing you to achieve your goals.

My word this year is "vision." Vision is the ability to think about or plan the future with imagination or wisdom. For this year, my vision is to be the most creative and organized and make money to buy the car I want.

> What would YOUR word of the year be?

word "achieve" to succeed at reaching my goals by getting the results of receiving my high school diploma!

This year I'm going to use the

Melita Deroslin

Marie Yok

Chandararoth Srong

High School Equivalency Testing Winter 2025 Schedule

Abisi Adult Education Center 408 Merrimack Street || Lowell || 978.937.8989

All Testers must present a current, government-issued, photo ID at the time of testing.

Friday Evenings, starting at 5pm Saturday Mornings, starting at 8am

GED and HiSET on Paper (PBT)

January 10th/11th February 7th/8th March 7th/8th

Thursday afternoons @ 12:30pm One subject test may be scheduled

HiSET on Computer (CBT)

January 9th February 6th March 6th

GED

January 23rd February 13th March 20th

What is Volunteering?

The definition of volunteering is " the act of offering your time and work to help others and to help your community." Volunteering gives a person a sense of accomplishment and pride.

Are you interested?

There are many ways to volunteer in Lowell.

How to Start Volunteering:

- 1. Think about what kind of volunteer work you would enjoy.
- 2. Find an organization that matches your interests.
- 3. Fill out a volunteer application and explain how you can help.

Do you want to volunteer or learn more about it?

You can talk to **Margie Miller**, one of Abisi's career advisors who also serves as a liaison with MassHelp, connecting students with valuable job resources and support.



Email Margie at *mmiller@lowell.k12.ma.us*. Or, you can *visit with her at Abisi on Mondays and Wednesdays from 8:30 am to 12:30 pm*.

Margie is happy to help you get started volunteering!



IN THE COMMUNITY



MillCityGrows.org 978-455-2620

Purchase fresh, locally grown produce in Lowell, MA, all season long!

2025 Winter/Spring Indoor Mobile Farmers Markets

University Crossing Lobby 220 Pawtucket Street Lowell Senior Center Cafeteria 276 Broadway Street

Biweekly Wednesdays 1pm - 4pm

> January 22 February 5, 19 March 5, 19 April 2

Biweekly Thursdays 10am - 12pm

> January 16, 30 February 13, 27 March 13, 27 April 10

We welcome these payment options: SNAP/EBT, HIP, APPLE PAY, WELLSENSE, MCG E-GIFT CARDS, CASH, CREDIT, DEBIT, S3 OTC/HEALTHY GROCERY CARD

Free parking near University Crossing for Mobile Market shoppers: UMass Lowell Salem Street Parking Lot 294 Salem Street, Lowell (Please look for parking signs)

Servicos de Consultoría <mark>Migratoria</mark>

¡GRATIS!

- Ciudadanía (N-400)
- Renovación de Green Card (I-90)
- Peticiones Familiares (I-130)
- TPS y DACA
- Permisos de Trabajo (I-765)
- Ajuste de Estatus (I-485)
- ¡Y mucho más!

PARA HACER UNA CITA CONTACTA A:

Margarita Bonavide 978-566-4152 immigration@latinxcenter.org



WWWWWK. addition





Did you know ??

The Pollard Memorial Library in Lowell offers <u>free and discounted</u> tickets to a variety of museums and attractions in Lowell, Boston, and the Metro Boston area?

All you need is a library card to start exploring!

Visit the library or check their website (hlowelllibrary.org) for details on how to reserve your tickets today.

Discover, learn, and have fun—all while saving money!



TO YOUR HEALTH





Beginning January 6th: Expanded In-Person Hours for Lowell CHC Primary Care

New Hours:

Monday - Thursday: 8:00 a.m. - 8:00 p.m. Friday: 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. Saturday: 9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

To make an appointment, or to become a patient, please visit <u>Ichealth.org</u> or call 978.937.9700.



NEW Service Coming to Abisi Starting January 21st

Beginning in January (through April), the Lowell Community Health Care Outreach team will visit Abisi Adult Education one day each week to:

- Answer your health-related questions
- Schedule appointments
- Provide community health resources & information

Take charge of your health—right here at school! Stay tuned for weekly dates!



COMMUNITY SERVICES

Trouble Paying Heating Bills?

CTI Fuel Assistance may be able to help you.

Each year, Community Teamwork offers HEAP, also known as Fuel Assistance, to an average of 11,000 eligible households challenged by the high cost of heating.

Who can apply?

Homeowners & Renters

Payments can be made for:

- Oil
- Kerosene
- Electricity
- Natural gas
- Propane
- *Heat included in the rent
 *Some restrictions may apply

2024-2025 HEAP Income Eligibility

Family Size	Maximum Income
1	\$49,196
2	\$64,333
3	\$79,470
4	\$94,608
5	\$109,745
6	\$124,882

CTI Fuel Assistance Program To schedule your appointment,

call: 978-459-6161

Online application: Follow Link or Scan QR Code commteam.org/fuel





visit LRTA.com

More

DON'T BE AFRAID ... BE INFORMED!

With the change of the U.S. administration coming January 2025, you might feel worried.

Don't be afraid. Be informed.

At Abisi, we are here to support you. If you have questions about immigrant rights or other changes, we will do our best to help & share new information as we get it.

You are not alone...we are here to help!

Talk to your teacher. Let us know if you need support or resources. Check the information desk in the main hall at AAEC for flyers & notices.



CAREER & TRAINING NEWS

MASSHIRE

NCTI

TRAINING OPPORTUNITY

HANDS-ON PLUMBING

Free 200 Hour Training Program

March 3 to May 17, 2025

On-Site Learning: Mon-Wed: 4:00 PM - 8:00 PM Saturday: 8:00 AM - 12:00 PM

Online Learning: Four hours/weekly

Nashoba Career Technical Institute (NCTI) Westford, MA

Eligibility:

- High School/GED/HiSET
- Massachusetts resident
- · Unemployed or underemployed

For more info:

Call Caitlyn at 978-805-4731 200 hours of Training

COMING

March 2025!

- Earn Industry-recognized Credentials
- Plumbing Tier 1 (110 hours)
- OSHA 10 Construction Safety
- CCST TracPipe & Viega (PP/MP)
- Hot Work Safety Training



✓ CNC Lathes and Mills ✓ Metrology and Inspection Safety and Health ✓ Manual Lathes and Mills ✓ Blueprint Reading NIMS Milling and CNC Lathe ✓ Exposure to Master CAM ✓ Tooling U Online Certification 🗸 GDT ✓ Career Planning Eligibility h School Diploma/GED/HiSET thorized to work in the U.S. Math for Machining

To learn more about this training opportunity:

Call: Caitlyn at 978-805-4731 () Visit: masshirelowellcc.com/cnc



