

The Power of Language



Jorge's family lived off the land raising corn, vegetables and livestock in rural Mexico. Traveling with his burro up a mountainside to harvest corn, left him little time for school, but he completed sixth grade. Gradually, members of his family traveled north seeking a better life.

Immigrating to Washington at age 16, Jorge knew no

English. He lived with his sister's family and later met and married Maria and had three children. Unable to speak, read or write English severely limited job opportunities. Jorge served at two Mexican restaurants and Maria checked at two grocery stores. She worked days and he nights, which provided health benefits. By making a down payment on a house, their American dream came true. Unfortunately, stress overtook Jorge's health, rendering him temporarily disabled.

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They were now dependent upon social services. He knew the way out was learning English, and discovered free assistance through the St. James Immigrant and Refugee Assistance Program.

This is where I met Jorge and his family. I tutored him weekly for three years. At first, he couldn't write a complete sentence. His disability status became a blessing when he enrolled in affordable English as a Second Language (ESL) courses at a community college. I helped with homework and he is now able to write, read and speak English. These new skills empowered him to get a full-time position with benefits at a grocery store. He is a living example that language brings power.

~Margaret Ames, SNJMA

Reflection: How important is being able to communicate in a common language?

Resource: <http://www.stjames-cathedral.org/immigrant/>
<http://www.refugees.org/resources/for-refugees--immigrants/>

Action: Contact a local agency that provides ESL and become a tutor.

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