Hello everyone! Hope all of you and your families are doing well. It is Spring time (actually almost Summer), which means that it is time for new beginnings, a fresh start, or set up new goals. It is surprising that it has been one year since the pandemic broke out and we have gone through this difficult time. The good news is there have been plenty of vaccines and hopefully soon we will be able to go back to meeting each other in person!

At EIA, we are a volunteer effort, a program of the YWCA Berkeley/Oakland, that provides English learners an opportunity to further improve their English-speaking skills through informal English conversations. Within the last year, EIA had a surplus of volunteers who signed up and wish to contribute, but unfortunately our enrollment of partners are very low. However, we are constantly making efforts to promote our program and to increase the enrollment of partners. We have expanded our program to welcome Bay Area community members and students from adult schools and community colleges. As more people are getting vaccinated, hopefully soon travel restrictions will lift and we can welcome more international partners.

Since last Spring, EIA has moved to online registration and virtual meetings. Although we are not able to meet in person during this pandemic, we are pleased that many of us are able to overcome the challenges of technology and time difference and still be able to "meet up" with our fellow partners and volunteers and share your experiences during this difficult time. One of our favorite things to do is reading emails of thankful messages from our fellow partners and hearing their fun experiences and interactions with their volunteers. We enjoy hearing these stories and we are delighted that our program has allowed people of different cultures, skills and personalities to join together and help each other improve and enhance our knowledges.
It is with great pleasure to share my experiences with Cixiao, Chie and Yan, wonderful students from UC Berkeley and the YWCA Berkeley/Oakland's English In Action Program (EIA). Though I was fortunate to have several students in this English exchange program, I could not write about all of them in such a short period of time and space. Yet their photos are included.

~ Partners From China ~

Cixiao Wang was from China. She was, like myself, an educator and she was in the process of completing her Ph.D. dissertation at UC Berkeley. I was immediately touched when I first met her and she showed me around the UC Berkeley Education Building where she was doing her research. She was precious...sweet and sensitive. Soon I learned that she was also an Artist, and we began our EIA sessions with lunch and art painting together at my home. We enjoyed going to the Rose Garden in Berkeley and also meeting at local cafes for coffee. After the first week of meeting her, she invited my husband, George, and me for dinner at her Albany apartment. It is there that George and I enjoyed a superb homemade Chinese dinner cooked by Cixiao and her lovely roommate, Yan Liu who was also from China. Yan later became another student of mine and she shared her Dance and Art History expertise with me. Her Chinese dancing was phenomenal. We also had her husband, Jacob and her for dinner when he came to the USA for a visit.

~ Partners From Japan ~

Chie Yamaoka was from Japan, my very first student, and a charming mother of her special young daughter, Chinatsu. She was also a devoted wife to her husband, Toru, who was a Visiting Professor at UC Berkeley. Chie and I had loads of fun attending different cafes, stores and the bookshop in the Gourmet Ghetto of Berkeley, having dinner with her family at our home, and a lunch out with her mother and sister at Fourth Street who both visited her from Japan. Chie was special also. For many of my students I also invited them for Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners, and also birthdays and goodbye parties at my home.

~ Check Out EIA Album for more pictures ~!
My very second EIA partner was from Jeju Island, Korea, Jinseong Cho, and we first met in early 2017 at Phil’s Coffee House for English conversation. He initially had difficulty pronouncing certain vowels and consonants of the English language. We worked ardently to correct and polish his speaking of English from 2017 to the present. I had even used the tape recorder to record the correct pronunciations of vocabulary we spoke in our sessions for him to review and practice. My husband, George, and I were invited to meet his family at the UC Berkeley Graduation Ceremony of 2019 which Jinseong participated in, and then we joined him and his family for a great Italian dinner to celebrate afterwards. Jinseong has since then traveled to two more countries for Post Doctoral positions. We are still conversing on the phone 3-4 times a week and his English is superb. My special experience with Jinseong has “made life so worthwhile” and the English In Action Program at UC Berkeley an invaluable and fulfilling part of my life. Helping and teaching English through English conversations with the UC Berkeley EIA Program is so rewarding. If a positive change is memorably accomplished then my mission is “joyfully near the horizon!” Jinseong now speaks English fluently and expressively.

The hardest part of EIA is letting go from my heart when all these students have to depart back to their homeland country. When Chie left back for Japan, there was such sadness in my heart. When Yan left for China I felt a loss of artistic inspiration. But when Cixiao departed also for China, I cried for all three. What memorable experiences all my EIA students have left me with, and I am forever grateful for the English In Action Program of UC Berkeley for all these many students who touched my life. These wonderful students gave me invaluable hope that the world is filled with good people and is a hugely fascinating, diverse and wondrous place!

Letters From Two EIA Partners

Hi Ann. Thank you for the documents and the beautiful music. I spent almost all day repairing a device in my laboratory today. So I just watched the videos and other documents you sent me just now. The documents really broaden my horizon. And you have such a famous and marvelous father. Stories about him are really impressive. And also, I have to say it is really a pity. Hope you don’t think too much of your childhood. The tough days have gone and life is getting better and better. Through your music and your story about the cat, I can feel your love and kindness to your pets as well as this world. You are so kind and I learn a lot from you. And I am really looking forward to getting the scholarship, extending my stay in Berkeley and learning to play the piano from you. Thank you again for all you have done today. Let’s meet next week!

Best,
Zhan Kuang

(Zhan did eventually study piano lessons with me for 6 months).

Hi Ann. It is my great honor to have met you and to have been your student through the English in Action Conversation Program. During the past 1-1/2 years, we have had extensive discussions almost every week which included history, politics, culture and even cooking skills. These conversations have helped me a lot to promote my speaking of English as well as to adapt to my life in Berkeley. I would like to say many thanks for your patience in improving my English, for the enjoyable parties you have held, for the kindness you have given, and for the encouragement you provided in dealing with the pandemic. It will always be in my precious memory to have been your EIA partner which has been one of the most important and meaningful highlights during my stay in Berkeley. In addition, I would like to thank the organizers from the YWCA who provided the information to join this program.

Best Regards,
Bing Zhang

Jinseong Cho, Jeju Island, South Korea

Zhan Kuang, Bing Zhang, China
(Dinner at Da Lian)
Chie Yamaoka and her family, Japan

Airi Sugihiro, Japan

Bing Zhang, George, Ann, Lu Jin, Zhian Kuang

Sangok Son and her daughter Michelle, South Korea

Lu Jin, China
After a long drought, the Oakwood Bears finally won against the Hadlers in a thrilling basketball final.

Some More Stories from Laura Steinman

(Wednesday Conversation Group)

Our Wednesday women’s conversation group has continued to meet thanks to Zoom. With limited social contacts because of Covid, we enjoy seeing one another and discussing our latest news as well as what’s going on in the world—there’s certainly been much to talk about! Our members have been helping children navigate through virtual learning and keeping a 3-year old creatively occupied (Fan); giving birth and taking care of a new baby and even returning to part-time work (Maggi); assisting high schoolers needing help with their studies in virtual classrooms while single parenting a high schooler and a community college student (Najat); taking more advanced English classes and computer technology at Berkeley Adult School (Tamam); and teaching art and Chinese calligraphy classes in person at a college in China (Hai). Hai, who has never met with us in person, returned to China in September and has been joining us most weeks. We have met some of her students who put on a performance for us—song and dance. Another member returned home to China (Vivian). But with a child to take to school and work and the time difference, she can only visit occasionally.

Here is what one of our group members has to say about her experience with learning English.

"My name is Tamam. I’m from Syria and I have been living in California for six years. I had no opportunity to learn English in my country so I went to Berkeley Adult School to learn English starting from the very beginning. I have spent three years studying English and I like it. All of my teachers have encouraged me to go to college to complete my studies. This fall I went to two classes—an advanced level conversation class and a grammar class—and I received an A in both. I wish to continue my studies but distance learning is not easy for me. It was so confusing at first because I didn’t have any experience with tech. Now I have a great chance to speak through English In Action. I love the idea of the weekly meetings. It is a very good opportunity for me, especially right now during Covid-19. We talk about food, sports, education, and news. I am so lucky to be in this group."

"My name is Hai Zhang. I’m from China and have been living in Berkeley on and off for five years. I went to Berkeley Adult School to learn English. It’s a very good place to learn English, but there are usually more than thirty-five students in a class. So I didn’t get enough chances to practice speaking. When I learned about English In Action, I joined Laura’s conversation group. Because of the pandemic, we met on Zoom. I wanted to try it out at first. But after a few weeks, I didn’t want to continue because I couldn’t understand the conversation very well and it seemed that everyone’s English was better than mine. I wrote an email to Laura explaining my feelings, and we exchanged emails to figure out how to make it better for me. Now, she checks to see if I understand and I sometimes send her an email to ask questions. After 4 months, I started to understand more and more conversation. We talk about a wide variety of interesting topics and everyone is very friendly. Thank you English in Action!"

"I am Maggi and our little son was born almost five months ago. Even though the pandemic has changed everybody’s life drastically over the past year, for us there are also a lot of positive things. During my furlough at work, I could really enjoy pregnancy, taking naps in the middle of the day, going for long walks, and reading books about babies. Since Felix, my husband, is still working at home, he can help me take care of our son and I get breaks to enjoy time for myself. At work, I am super happy to see and talk to my colleagues, but I am also scared that, even with masks and social distancing, I could get infected. With the travel restrictions and its uncertainties, we have decided to go back to Germany so our families can finally meet their newest member. I will try to join our zoom meeting from Germany. I really enjoyed our weekly meetings and will miss everyone a lot."
I've been an English in Action volunteer for four years, working with visitors from Japan, China, and Kazakhstan. I currently meet weekly on Zoom with Yusuke Matsui, an epidemiologist from Japan specializing in infectious diseases. Yusuke tells me many visiting scholars from Japan chose to return home when the pandemic broke out, but he decided to stay in the Bay Area instead—moving from HIV research at UC Berkeley to COVID-19 research at The Gladstone Institutes in San Francisco. He is frequently asked to give presentations about the coronavirus, and he enjoys helping others become properly informed.

I've always found the English in Action program rewarding—helping others improve their English skills. Now I have the extra bonus of being able to ask Yusuke my COVID questions. He is happy to share his knowledge, often showing me research or clinical trial data that he uses in presentations. The slide shown here comparing COVID-19 to SARS and MERS, for example, comes from a presentation Yusuke gave in January to Japanese scholars living in Japan and the Bay Area.

FROM ROGER SCHRAG
(VOLUNTEER)

Jinyoung is ambitious and driven! Every time we chat, I leave a little more inspired. She’s applying to a number of UC schools right now to achieve her dream of becoming a data scientist.
I met Shih-Yu, who called herself “Winnie”, as a new partner in October, 2011. I met Satoyo as another partner in April, 2013, and the three of us started meeting together right away. Winnie is from Taiwan and Satoyo is from Japan, but they both spoke Mandarin Chinese, which was helpful when we had difficulty with English, which is the only language I know! Satoyo and her husband returned to Japan in 2015, but she and I have continued corresponding and sending holiday cards and greetings. Winnie and I continued meeting sporadically until she left some time in 2019. I just got an email from her last week, and she is back in Taiwan, working and being with her mother and sister. I sent her message to Satoyo, as she asked, and now the two of them are writing to each other. They both sent me photos which I will try to attach. Two are from Satoyo in a park in Tokyo, and one is from Winnie at a park near Taipei called Park Liuqiu.
FROM LENA LEE
(VOLUNTEER)

Yaping Du and I have the same Myers Briggs personality type. Her husband Zhou Li and my husband Paul Lee have the same personality type. We find it funny just how much we have in common.

I learned from my partner Akiko Tsukui that she doesn't have to drive back home in Japan and used to using taxi cab or Uber-like services to get around. She has explored many parts of the Bay Area despite not having her own car. I've been able to make a lot of recommendations and even show her around my neighborhood too.

From EIA

Thank you for submitting your stories and pictures! We really enjoyed reading all your stories and all the interesting things you all have learned from each other. It's great to hear that everyone enjoyed your meetings with your partners and volunteers. Some of you were able to meet in person and went on short trips. Some of you zoomed together and wished that you can see each other in person.

Well Summer is here! Excited to see everyone's faces soon!
"My volunteer is almost like a mentor for me. We can share all things - like traveling, movies, taking care of kids, or other hot issues. Recently, I was worried about my daughter's English. So, my volunteer gave super-cute English books and dolls to my daughter. My daughter loves them and they help my daughter's English a lot. Now, she started to speak in English in her preschool!! I feel relieved with my volunteer because we can share all of my concerns and interests. Thanks, my volunteer and EIA!"

- Dasom (Partner)

"Chris is great partner, fun to talk!"

- T (Partner)

"Jinyoung, I have enjoyed every minute we've spent together! Your ambitious and adventurous spirit is energizing and inspiring."

- Rachael (Volunteer)

"I wish to thank Former EIA Program Director Ellie Margulis and EIA Program Directors Karen Lei and Marilyn Watson for selecting all these wonderful UC Berkeley International scholars as partners in the English in Action Program. The EIA Program Administrative Staff has been superb in their successful matching of compatible partnerships and in continually supporting them in order to increase their improvement of English conversation with fulfilling and memorable enjoyment."

- Ann (Volunteer)
EVENT RECAPS

What interesting things have we discussed?

US CONSTITUTION

Led by Tom Smith (EIA Volunteer)
- America was discovered in 1492
- Declared Independence in 1776
- US Constitution took effect in 1789
- It is designed to protect the authority of the people, not the government

GUNS IN AMERICA

Led by Roger Schrag (EIA Volunteer)
- Bill of Rights ratified in 1791
- National Rifle Association promotes marksmanship, gun safety and the right to bear arms
- American individualism is a barrier to changes in US gun laws

STRUCTURAL RACISM

Led by Maria Guillen (Director of Programs & Empowerment)
- 1992: Berkeley declared Indigenous People Day on October 11 instead of Columbus Day
- Individuals seeking citizenship are taught US narrative that leaves out details
- True history contradicts our education system
- Settler colonialism is still a reality
HOLIDAY PARTY

- We got to hear about how everyone celebrate their Christmas and New Years. Thank you all for sharing!
- Some cool traditions that were shared were going caroling (not during this pandemic unfortunately), presents and pies!
- Of course, we all enjoy spending this time with family and friends!

SPRING PARTY

- It was great seeing some of our program participants at our Spring Party.
- Hope everyone enjoyed our little Jeopardy game!
- It is interesting to learn that one of our fellow volunteers is great with riddles.

LUNAR NEW YEAR

Led by Abbie Lei (EIA Program Assistant)
- Chinese New Year lasts for 15 days
- People like to decorate with red and gold that represent luckiness and prosperity
- Qilin (also called Nianshou) is a mythical creature that represents good omens and protection
- Some cultures celebrate their "New Years" in the Fall and they do Fall cleaning.
EIA PHOTO ALBUM

Ellen and Dasom

A Sunny Day at Alameda Crown Beach

2/17/2021
EIA CHAT SESSION
LUNAR NEW YEAR
Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!
Love from YWCA Berkeley English-in-Action

Wishing You a Wonderful Spring!
EIA Spring Party 2021 - 4/30/2021
DO YOU HAVE STORIES AND PICTURES TO SHARE?

Please submit them here: http://bit.ly/eia_news or email eia@ywca-berkeley.org

WANT TO LEAD A CHAT SESSION?

Let us know as well!

INVITE FRIENDS!

Know someone who might be interested in EIA

We welcome everyone!

Check out our website or contact us via email below

EIA Summer Virtual Office Hours

Tuesdays 9AM - 2PM
July through August

TO KEEP EIA RUNNING, STARTING FALL 2021, EIA WILL BE COLLECTING A PROGRAM FEE FROM PARTNERS WHO GETS SUCCESSFULLY PAIRED UP WITH A VOLUNTEER.

MORE INFO TO COME.
CROSSWORD PUZZLE

Across
3. first most popular country where our partners are from
5. cause of this pandemic
6. many of our partners are (profession)
8. what took effect in 1789
10. what city is EIA located in
12. a winter holiday
13. a holiday with fireworks and red envelopes
14. third most popular country where our partners are from

Down
1. name of the organization that EIA is under
2. language that we are practicing
4. name of the dog featured in our newsletter
7. second most popular country where our partners are from
9. name of the "lion" in the lion dance
11. who leads the Wednesday Conversation Group

HINT: ANSWERS CAN BE FOUND IN THIS NEWSLETTER … OR BELOW
CROSSWORD ANSWERS

HOPE YOU ENJOYED THIS MINI PUZZLE!