

## From Bridge to Board

Silvia Ajanel, CLC Bridge to College graduate and newly minted Friends of the CLC board member, was born in Guatemala and came to the U.S. after high school. Though she had studied English as a foreign language, she didn't feel confident about her speaking and listening skills when she arrived in the U.S. and was grateful to have the opportunity to join a conversation circle at a supermarket in Brighton. It was thus that Silvia took her first English class in the U.S. at the back of a Purity Supreme.



As a single mother and busy professional, however, Silvia never thought college would be a possibility. She also thought she was too old: "I thought that going to college after thirty was hard. I couldn't imagine that I could do it after forty." But when her sister joined the CLC's Bridge to College program, she inspired Silvia to do the same.

Silvia was especially intimidated by the prospect of taking college-level English classes through Bridge. However, after a year of studying with Professor Mina Reddy, Silvia was fully prepared for her first year at Bunker Hill Community College. Indeed, her first English professor there was so impressed by Silvia's writing, she said, "Who was your previous professor? I need to have a word with her."

Math, on the other hand, had always come easily to Silvia. "For me, it was always numbers." High school students in Guatemala leave high school ready to start a profession. When Silvia was introduced to accounting in middle school, she knew that it would be her career. It was thus an easy decision to pursue an associate's degree in Business Management, with a concentration in Accounting, at Bunker Hill, where Silvia graduated with honors in May of 2022.

Today, Silvia brings her deep knowledge of QuickBooks and Sage accounting software to a rewarding job in accounts payable for a transportation company. The Friends are thrilled that she will also bring her accounting know-how to the board. Silvia is equally excited: "It did change my life, going to the CLC. If I could give something back, the satisfaction for me would be amazing."

## Message from the President

One of our most important functions as an organization is providing deserving students with scholarships. Yet when I talk to the CLC's students, I am reminded of the deeper impact being created.

When our students empower themselves through education, they become a beacon of inspiration, and everyone around them begins to see new possibilities. Brothers and sisters start having new confidence, friends start seeing new opportunities, and their children are inspired to chase their highest ambitions.

This is the real magic of what we do. It's about helping our students lift up everyone around them. It's a chain reaction that keeps growing, showing just how powerful perseverance, generosity, and education can be. It's all about our students leading the way, and it begins with something as simple as a scholarship.

Inspired by our students, we invite you to contribute to this chain reaction. Share your experience and appreciation for the Friends, the CLC, and the CLC's incredible students with your loved ones. Pass along this newsletter, and help spread the word about the extraordinary transformations happening within our community. Your involvement amplifies our impact, weaving you into this story of community empowerment. Have a wonderful holiday season.



Louis NeJame  
President, Friends of the CLC

## Meet This Fall's CLC Students



Who are the students of the Community Learning Center? Where do they come from, what are they doing, and where do they want to go? Here's what this fall's class looks like.

The CLC is privileged to have a diverse group of students who bring a ton of knowledge and energy from all over the world. Students hail from countries as diverse as Haiti, Ethiopia, Bangladesh, as well as El Salvador, Colombia, Dominican Republic, China, Korea, Brazil, Ukraine, Cape Verde, Tibet, Japan and Egypt.

98% are low-income, 63% are women, and 85% identify as people of color.

Our learners have bold goals for themselves! There are currently 81 students in the Adult Basic Education (ABE) division, some developing their reading, writing, and math skills and some preparing for their high school equivalency credential (GED or HiSET). In addition, 15 students are preparing for their citizenship exam in order to become US citizens.

The English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) division has 567 students across a range of programs. Among those in career-oriented programs, 15 are studying to be Certified Nursing Assistants and 14 to become Early Childhood Educators. Eighteen students recently graduated from the Information Technology program, and 13 finished the Biomedical training program in September.

And of course, let's not forget our amazing Bridge to College program, which is currently helping 16 students develop the skills they need to attend college and earn degrees. And the Friends of the CLC are still here to support last year's graduates, providing them with mentors and college coaches and ensuring they can afford books and laptops.

The CLC also has a unique new mini-course for English language learners called the Eco-club. This 10 week course for intermediate language learners will cover environmental themes through hands-on activities and guest speakers. Topics discussed will include recycling, energy alternatives, emergency preparedness, gardens and green roofs, plastic use, transportation, natural disasters, pollution and global climate movements.

We wish all the new and returning students best of luck this term, and hope you'll continue to help us support them!

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## Go Paperless!

To sign up for the online version of this newsletter, please visit [www.friendsofclc.org](http://www.friendsofclc.org). We will not sell or share your email address (we promise!) or use it more than a handful of times a year: for the spring and fall newsletters, the annual appeal, and updates about important events. Online communication saves trees and helps us keep channeling more than 90% of our funds to direct services. Thank you for your continued support!

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## Call to Action

Please continue to support the Friends of the Community Learning Center during this critical time. If you believe that educated citizens make strong, healthy communities and local economies, please donate:

**By check to:** Friends of the Community Learning Center  
5 Western Ave.  
Cambridge, MA 02139

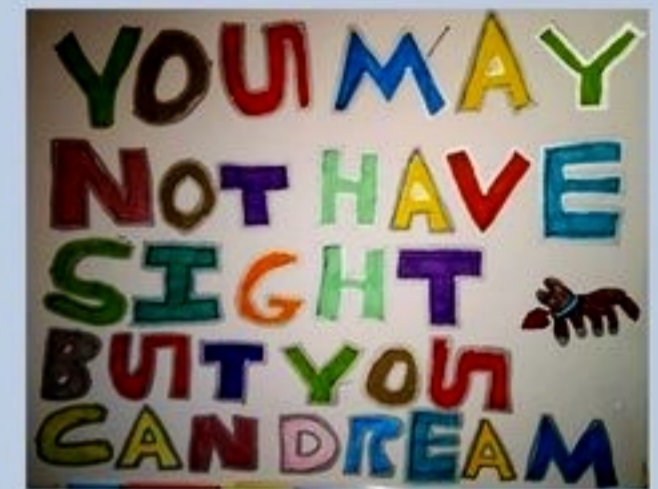
**Online at:** [www.friendsofclc.org](http://www.friendsofclc.org)

Or through your employer's Matching Gift or Charitable Designation program.

## Advocating with Arts: CLC Grad Kim Plaut

"Take away the 'dis,' and insert 'cap,' and you end up with capability." It's this self-created slogan that guides Kim Plaut in her advocacy work with Mass Advocates Standing Strong, a statewide organization that, in Kim's words, "helps people with disabilities find jobs and advocate for themselves." It's this same slogan that anchored Kim in the four years she spent at the Community Learning Center working towards her high school equivalency credential and in her additional year in the Bridge to College program. She continues to live by this slogan at Bunker Hill Community College, where she is in her first year studying studio art.

Art has always been important to Kim. For now, she creates and sells her art at Gateway Arts, a studio art center, gallery, and store in Brookline where adults with



disabilities develop their careers as artists: <https://gatewayarts.org/about-gateway/mission/>. One day, she would like her own online art gallery. No matter the venue, however, Kim's art is inseparable from her passion for disability rights. A regular presenter at the Mass Advocates Standing Strong annual conference, Kim has also testified in front of the state legislature and been quoted twice in legislative papers. So it's no surprise that when she's making bright posters or doing beadwork, Kim incorporates words, phrases, and slogans that are meaningful to her and that uplift those around her. As a nod to her own disability, her signature of sorts is a small seeing eye dog. But Kim doesn't like definitions. One of the main things she appreciates about the Community Learning Center is that "a lot of people were there to help me when it was necessary to not be defined by my disability, but to find alternative ways to learn."

Kim is especially passionate about supported decision making, a philosophy that promotes giving people the tools they need to live as independently as possible and to have a voice in the decisions that determine the quality and direction of their lives. Supported decision making is not intended to necessarily be a total replacement for guardianship. Indeed, Kim wrote one of her first papers at Bunker Hill on the relationship between guardianship, supported decision making, and power of attorney. "I did more than people expected of me," Kim says. She hopes to inspire others to do the same, not just people with disabilities.