

# EMPOWERING ADULT STUDENTS

## Poway Adult School provides the tools and skills students need to succeed

By Anne Stokes

Since 1965, Poway Adult School has been empowering adult students with the skills and education needed to uplift themselves, their families and enrich their communities. Whether students are looking to learn a new art form, get healthy, earn their high school diploma, learn English, become a citizen, or start a new career, Poway Adult School is the place to start that journey.

“Maybe more than any place else in education, adult educators have the ability to truly impact communities because of the many roles that our adult education students play: our students are parents, family members, neighbors, workers, community volunteers, and business owners,” says Kathleen Porter, executive director of Career Technical, Adult and Alternative Education in Poway Unified School District. “When we impact one student, the ripple effect goes out through all of these other roles that one student has. So in changing one life, we are often impacting many lives and creating healthy, cohesive communities.”

### A catalog for the many

Poway Adult School offers a wide choice of classes and pathways, including adult basic and secondary education (including high school diploma or equivalency), English as a Second Language (ESL) and personal enrichment courses, including language, cooking, art, personal finance, health and fitness. Students can also pursue short-term career training pathways, including:

- Accounting
- Marketing and business
- Court reporting
- Office software, both Google and Microsoft suites
- Professional communications
- Real estate license preparation
- Nurse assistant
- Home caregiving
- Meeting business needs

Since the 1990s, Poway Adult School has worked with local businesses and industries to ensure students’ skill sets match what

employers are looking for. Through regular needs assessments, analyzing labor market trends and demographics, and feedback from businesses, students, teachers and other community partners, the school works to prepare students for what comes after graduation. Empowering adult students with the necessary confidence and skills to enter the workforce is a primary objective.

“Our whole goal in serving students is to provide them with the education, training and support they need to reach their goals. Many of our students have goals that involve them transitioning to the workforce or to higher levels of education,” Porter explains. “The school creates a plan of action to address identified needs. This can include new training programs, offering programs in different formats, new needs for data to measure success and a whole range of other actions.”

### Supporting students in their journey

While different students have different goals, many adult learners struggle with common roadblocks. According to Porter, students may face difficulties with transportation, childcare, and or a lack of confidence in their academic abilities. Educators and administrators work with students’ unique needs and situations to make sure students have the tools and support they need to achieve their goals.

“Poway Adult School has a team of student support staff that can help students identify potential obstacles that might get in the way of their success and then develop strategies or accommodations that can help ensure those barriers are addressed,” Porter says. “We have a counselor, career advisors, transition specialists, and a support for students with a disabilities counselor. All of these staff members are skilled at helping students create personalized career plans that will take potential obstacles into account and create SOS plans.”

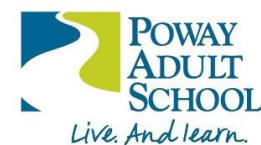
For many students, finances can be a big obstacle. Adult school programs that are associated with a public school district offer low- to no-cost career training options at a



Kathleen Porter of Poway Unified School District says adult school educators and support staff are committed to empowering adult students to overcome obstacles. Photo by Charlie Neuman

fraction of the cost compared to universities, colleges and private vocational schools.

“I think the quality of the content, instruction, and delivery provided by adult schools is far superior to most other institutions,” Porter says. “Adult school instructors have teaching credentials and have participated in teacher preparation programs. I think that’s important, because it means that teachers don’t just know their subject, they also know how to deliver content and support student learning. I think the quality of our staff directly contributes to the degree of our students’ success.”



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# THE WHOLE STUDENT

By Anne Stokes

## Dedicated educators say taking (and teaching) classes has myriad benefits

A fulfilling educational experience goes beyond quality curriculum, lectures and self-study. At Poway Adult School, it's the dedicated educators that play the most integral role in students' success. Through these long-time adult instructors' stories, we learn the importance of passion, connection and commitment to their students

### Naomi Lesberg, acrylic painting instructor.

Naomi Lesberg, a former middle school art teacher, started with one class at the adult school and now teaches five. Her classes are very popular and—with a limited number of students allowed in each class—students rush to register so they don't miss the opportunity to attend. She says it's been a great experience, especially since adults also use the classroom as an extension of their socialization circle.



"It sounds intimidating teaching grown-ups, but when you realize you're teaching something they want to learn, it's really cool," she says. "People should realize it's a lot of fun. You get to pick your own hours, how many people you want in your class and with the support I get from the adult school staff, all I just have to do is just focus on teaching students. These are great benefits."

Can art inspire world peace? If Lesberg had her way it would. "One of the best things is seeing people make friends with someone they may not have even spoken to in the past. Sitting next to each other, sharing a common passion, and then opening up a dialogue, that's good for making the whole world better," says Lesberg.

"I joke that if you put everyone together in an art class, it will lead you towards world peace."

### Lisa Lorraine Taylor, Total Fitness Workout and Forever Young fitness instructor



While it's important to keep your mind sharp, it's also vital to keep your body active too. For the past 21 years, Lisa Lorraine Taylor has been helping students of all ages keep fit and healthy.

"Starting a new fitness program can be intimidating," she said. "At first, students come in, take a seat and don't say much. But by the fourth or fifth class, they're laughing, interacting and encouraging each other. For me, that's the important thing, they want to show up because they've met people who make it exciting and who make it fun."

Taylor says her fitness classes attract students as young as 18 and as old as 87 years old. The secret to her success? Keeping it enjoyable.

"Think about everything that you've loved about any teacher or instructor and what you loved about their class. Now think about the things you didn't like and why they didn't appeal to you," she says.

"People that create energy and positivity around you also generate a successful learning environment. A total fitness workout is not just a physical benefit, it also enhances your emotional and mental well-being. Add fun to the mixture and you've found our purpose."

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### Carol Gratzke, Italian foreign language instructor

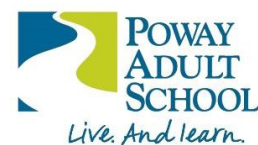
You might think going from CFO of a publicly-traded company to teaching Italian might be quite an adjustment, but for Carol Gratzke, it was a logical next step after retirement.



"As accounting has rules—there are all kinds of rules, tax laws have rules—so do languages, they have fundamental grammar rules. It just fit in with me respecting rules," she explains. "I just sort of fell into it and it's been a wonderful transition from the world of accounting to the world of foreign languages."

A self-admitted "Type A" personality, Gratzke stresses the importance of keeping active physically, mentally and socially, especially after retirement. Through Poway Adult Education, community members can keep active by taking a class or joining the school's roster of dedicated educators, if they possess a unique skill.

"If you have something to offer the community, by all means at least present yourself to our administrators to see if it's something that we can offer," she says. "We offer a plethora of classes and I know that if people take time to look through our catalog, they'll find something that will be exciting. Maybe it's painting or ceramics, or whatever interest you may have. Open yourself up to finding something new and bring a new creative mindset in your own life."





# CORNERSTONE OF THE COMMUNITY

## Poway Adult School monitors industry trends, student and faculty feedback to meet community's needs

By Anne Stokes

**P**oway Adult School offers students a wealth of learning opportunities with more than 300 personal enrichment and career pathway courses. Each quarter, the school averages over 3,400 enrollments in their Community and Career Technical Education programs. The school stays abreast of industry trends in order to best serve their students' career goals while simultaneously serving the community.

"Poway Adult School's slogan is 'Live. And Learn,'" says David T. Guzman, assistant director of Poway Unified School District's Career Technical and Adult Education. "Learning is a continuous journey, and we are here for our students. Whether it's a personal enrichment class to keep you healthy and active, or a computer technology course to enhance your job skills, our school is here to meet your needs."

### Meeting local industry needs

Staying relevant with industry trends and new technology is key to preparing students who are looking to start a new career in a continuously changing job market. Poway Adult School works with industry partners to identify gaps in the workforce and the skills needed in those areas to develop the courses that meet those challenges. Two new programs that were recently added to address those workforce demands are Home Caregiver Certification and Court Reporter Voice Writer. These courses are providing students the skills and knowledge to attain these high-demand jobs.

"We've already certified over 350 community members as certified Home Care Givers," Guzman says. "Because there's such a void in the industry right now, they just can't keep up with the vacancies. After each course, our business partners are already lined-up, waiting for students to be certified so they can hire them. That's how big the demand is right now in our community."

Poway Adult School's Court Reporter Voice Writing program is a perfect example of changing technology and practices to meet industry trends and needs. Voice



David Guzman, assistant director of Career Technical and Adult Education, says keeping programs affordable and accessible for all is important to the community. Photo by Charlie Neuman

writing is expanding the options beyond stenography in courtrooms throughout the state, and Poway is one of the few adult schools that offer this program.

"It's a high-wage, high-demand job that's going to be putting people onto a profitable career path," Guzman says. "It's not limited to court system duties, they can support with depositions, transcripts or closed captions, it's a wide-open field."

### Meeting students' needs

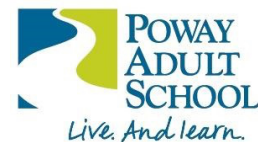
Student and faculty feedback are key factors in course implementation and refinement. While ensuring courses meet industry standards, it's equally vital that student and faculty input be included in the process. Administrators rely on this joint effort to ensure coursework is serving students and their future goals.

"Collaboration with students and teachers allows us to make any necessary adjustments to the curriculum by placing greater emphasis in certain areas or to reduce redundancy. It's all based on their input," Guzman explains. "Course success is achieved through universal feedback on the curriculum from all involved stakeholders."

Affordability is another vital aspect of Poway Adult School programs. Through

funding from grants or other financial support, some courses—such as ESL and the home care provider courses—are offered for free. For other career programs, costs are significantly less than other public and private organizations.

"I challenge others to look at the fees at various locations because there's a huge difference in cost," Guzman says. "While we strive to make our classes affordable, we also pride ourselves in providing a culture focused on student care, a positive learning environment and understanding the adult learner."



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# STEP BY STEP

## Adult school student who enrolled to learn English inspired to continue education and career development

By Kathleen Vivaldi

Jose Ernesto Quijada Hernandez had been living in the United States for a few years and was finding it difficult to learn English on his own. Then he moved to Poway and began an ongoing journey towards a better education and better employment.

“I decided to attend the free ESL (English as a Second Language) classes provided at Poway Adult School. In the beginning, it was difficult to get to class, since I didn’t have a car. I used to walk over three miles to attend school. But after a few months, I was able to see the progress.”

Hernandez praised Poway Adult School’s flexible class offerings, which include day and evening options, for enabling him to fit school into his busy schedule. But his most heartfelt appreciation goes to the career resource specialist and other school staff, who he says have supported him tremendously.



Jose Ernesto Quijada Hernandez stands at the display case of the popular French Oven Bakery and Cafe in the Scripps Ranch area of San Diego where he works in the kitchen cooking the sweet creations on display. Hernandez started at adult school to learn English, and now aspires to become a nurse. Photo by Charlie Neuman

**“I am grateful to be part of the school. Everyone provides support in every aspect of the journey.”**

**Jose Hernandez,  
Poway Adult School student**

The ESL classes were motivating and Hernandez was inspired to go further with his education. He took the next step and enrolled in the school’s High School Equivalency course, where he could take

the exam in Spanish. He studied, worked hard and, in October 2019, passed the test and earned his General Education Diploma (or GED).

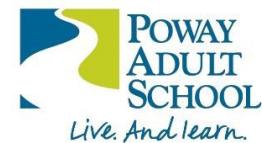
“The [Career Resource Specialist] helped me build professional skills and prepared me to take my GED test,” he says. “The counselors were always there for me ... the learning center and staff were always there to help me. I just can’t thank them enough.

“I am grateful to be part of the school. Everyone provides support in every aspect of the journey.”

In fact, attending Poway Adult School continues to have a huge impact on his life. Hernandez is enrolled in the adult basic education program and continues to improve his English skills for his career. While attending school, he is working as a lead baker and cake decorator at a popular

local bakery. Hernandez’s ultimate career goal is to become a registered nurse.

“Poway Adult School is a great option,” he said. “Many people are afraid to go back to school due to many reasons, but Poway Adult School is open to anyone who wants to learn. School helps to get better opportunities in this country.”



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# NO MORE FEAR

## Poway Adult School student is on the path to a high school diploma after overcoming fear

By Kathleen Vivaldi

Returning to school as an adult can be challenging, intimidating, and downright scary. This can be doubly true for students originating from other countries, who may have no experience inside an American classroom and may also be navigating language and cultural issues. For them, overcoming fear to take the first step towards continuing education can be a huge obstacle.

Radhika Devi recognized such feelings were holding her back, and committed to face her fear head on: "Having come from India and just jumping into everything here, I needed to overcome my fear," she says. "I needed to build my confidence."

For Devi, the answer was to enroll at Poway Adult School. She already spoke English fairly well, but wanted to improve her communication skills. Her biggest goal, she says, was to earn a High School Equivalency (HSE) certificate.

To date, Devi has taken ESL and Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education (IELCE) courses. Poway Adult School offers several options to acquire a high school diploma: preparing students to take HiSet or GED tests; earning a Poway Adult School High School Diploma; or through the National External Diploma Program (NEDP).

The NEDP, which Devi opted for and is currently enrolled in, allows students to earn their equivalency certificate by completing an online portfolio of life skill and academic tasks to evaluate their high school-level skills. At the end, they are awarded a traditional diploma. Most students complete the NEDP in 6 to 12 months, but—as skill levels and life circumstances differ for each student—they can take more time if needed.

Poway Adult School Assistant Director Pam Garramone explains, "The NEDP



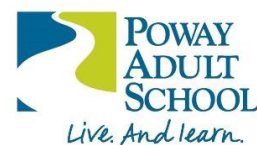
Radhika Devi says overcoming fear to start school was an obstacle, and that doing so has given her more confidence. Photo by Charlie Neuman

is a fully integrated high school subjects' curriculum that requires 100% mastery in a customized portfolio designed diploma. It is a flexible online performance-based option for adults to earn a high school diploma. Students enjoy integrated courses with real-life applications and may complete work at home, at school, the library, or wherever there is a computer. The flexible scheduling means students can earn a high school diploma while employed, enrolled in job training, or managing other commitments."

"The NEDP is designed for working people who want to continue their education," Devi says, explaining that she works full-time (at a job she got through Poway Adult School career services) and is married with two children. She expects to finish the program in about nine months, and takes comfort in knowing she can take more time if needed.

"I get great help from my instructors and counselors when I am in need," she says, adding it has been a great start for her and she has seen many positive changes within herself.

Devi says despite her initial fear of returning to school, she enjoys being a student and taking classes at Poway Adult School. "I am overcoming my fear, which is the biggest obstacle," she says. "I am becoming stronger."



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# GETTING BACK IN FOCUS

## Improved language skills help photographer and Poway Adult School ESL student continue career in her new country

By Whip Villarreal

When Elizabeth Wheeler immigrated from Tijuana, Mexico, to the United States, her English was extremely limited. It was impossible for her to carry a meaningful conversation in English. Even going to the grocery store or ordering food was a stressful task. Limitations she faced from the language barrier—and the desire to further the career she started in her native country—proved to be her motivating factors to improve her language skills. Determined to start learning, she discovered English as a second language classes offered in her community at Poway Adult School, and quickly enrolled.

**“I went to Poway Adult School to continue my career and not settle for a job I didn’t want.”**

**Elizabeth Wheeler, Poway Adult School student and professional photographer**

Wheeler says she received a college degree in photography and operated her own photography business in Mexico. She had aspirations of becoming a corporate photographer when she arrived in the U.S. and realized that understanding and communicating in English was essential for a successful career.

To help ensure her proficiency in English, Wheeler also attended professional communication certification classes. All of her courses spanned six months to complete when she attended in 2021.

“When I came to the U.S., I wanted to have something like I had before in Mexico,”

Wheeler says. “I was not only doing photography, I was working in marketing, creating brands and content for clients, and even offered website development. That’s why I went to Poway Adult School ... to continue my career and not settle for a job that I didn’t want.”

Even as she embraced the challenge of learning English, lockdowns from the COVID-19 pandemic forced her to attend classes remotely through online instruction. This presented to be a more difficult obstacle than she initially expected. Despite the challenges she faced, she persevered and even expanded her English vocabulary faster than she anticipated. She credits a bulk of her success to her teacher, Ms. Jacquie.

“When I was learning English, I had great help from my teacher, Ms. Jacquie [Jacquie Uriell, co-lead ESL teacher at Poway Adult School]. She’s the best teacher I have ever had,” Wheeler says. “I had previously taken English courses during my college career in Mexico and never really learned it well. Thanks to Ms. Jacquie, I learned so much and it allowed me to have the job that I have now. She also helped me with my interview skills and we practiced together. I will never forget that.”

After completing her courses at PAS, she was hired as photographer for a high-end medical spa in La Jolla. Wheeler has been working there for more than two years. Although she has completed her studies, she still occasionally returns to the campus to photograph school events as a way to help give back.

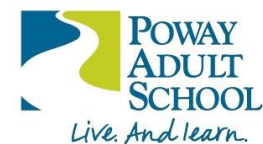
She attributes the opportunities she received to the education she pursued at PAS. Her advice for those who want to become fluent in English or to create more job opportunities for themselves is to not let doubt interfere with pursuing those goals.

“Don’t waste your time and don’t be afraid ... it’s not too hard if you have the



Improved language skills help photographer and Poway Adult School ESL student Elizabeth Wheeler continue career in her new country. Photo courtesy of Elizabeth Wheeler

right support system and teachers, like at Poway Adult School,” Wheeler says. “They are going to help guide you through your studies. It happened to me and I am so happy that I was able to find this place.”



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# FROM THE CLASSROOM TO THE CLASSROOM

## ESL classes empower parent to volunteer in her children's school, then land paying job

By Whip Villarreal

During the COVID-19 pandemic shut-downs in 2021, Vandana Sinha spent a lot of time contemplating her desire to improve her ability to speak English. A friend of hers who had already completed English as a second language course at Poway Adult School helped motivate her to enroll at the school herself. She went on to complete advanced ESL classes as well as professional communication and business technologies courses within the span of a year, and has found the education has not only opened her job prospects, but has helped her become more involved in her children's lives.



ESL classes empowered Vandana Sinha to volunteer in her children's school, then landed her a paying job.

**“At the time I was studying English at Poway, I also started to volunteer at my kid's school. This was something I couldn't do before because of my limited English.”**

**Vandana Sinha, Former Poway Adult School ESL student**

“The more and more I attended the classes, the more I was able to learn how to better communicate in English,” Sinha says. “The classes helped me a lot. At the time I was studying English at Poway, I also started to volunteer at my kid's school. This was something I couldn't do before because of my limited English. This gave me confidence and I thought if I could volunteer at a school, I could also find a job at one as well.”

Less than three months after completing her courses at PAS, she was hired as a data

technician at Oak Valley Middle school, and credits the education she received at PAS for obtaining the job.

Sinha is originally from India and received a Masters Degree in computer applications there. While attending classes in her college career, she did learn to read and write in English, but never really learned how to speak the language.

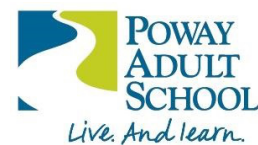
During the pandemic, the classes she attended at PAS were conducted online through Zoom, which she says made learning how to properly form an English sentence and speak it clearly was a challenge at times. However, she says there were some unexpected factors that helped her along the way.

Some of her classmates were from different corners of the world, like Afghanistan, India and Russia. She says that she found it helpful learning how to communicate through English by practicing with others from different cultures and countries. Additionally, she praised the teaching abilities of her ESL teacher.

“My teacher was Jacquie Uriell, who I referred to as Ms. J, and she was so good and helpful to the students,” Sinha explains.

“If she taught me English when I was studying it in India, I would have learned it a long time ago. She is one of the best teachers I have ever had and I have a lot of respect for her.”

Sinha's story is another example of how Poway Adult School can be a critical, life-changing education resource in the community. By providing educational opportunities tailored to the needs of its local adult students the school not only helps fulfill the broader goals of the California education system, but also helps improve the quality of life for locals one person at a time.



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# FAST LEARNER

## ESL student and mother of twins proves to be exceptional student once childcare needs met

By Whip Villarreal

Ana Briceida Ortiz embarked on a transformative journey when she arrived in the United States from Mexico in January 2023. When she began living in the U.S., she did not have any ability to read, write or speak English on any level. She wanted to take classes to improve her language, but—as a stay-at-home mother of toddler-aged twins—her childcare needs seemed like an insurmountable barrier.

Ortiz learned that Poway Adult School offers an ESL program at Valley Elementary School, right in her neighborhood. The ESL classes at this site also provide childcare so parents who have children who are younger than school age can attend school while their older children attend school. This assistance enabled her to enroll in English as a second language classes, which she continues to attend.

“When I started classes, my level of English was the lowest, but that is not a barrier for me because I have been learning little by little,” says Ortiz. “I have observed the positive change in my understanding of English and have even seen significant changes in myself.”

Ortiz recognizes that mastering English is crucial for her career goals and personal life. She says that she hopes that learning English will open up more opportunities to continue the career as a special education teacher—which she began in her native Mexico—in the U.S. Other motivations she cites include supporting her children’s academic development; visiting the doctor without needing to request an interpreter; and being able to carry on conversations with her English-speaking friends, neighbors, and classmates.

“I would love to be able to communicate with my children’s teacher, without having to use Google Translate,” explains Ortiz. “I look forward to being able to communicate



Ana Ortiz is able to take ESL classes because Poway Adult School helped meet her childcare needs. Photo Courtesy of Ana Briceida Ortiz

with my teacher at Poway Adult School and to be able to talk about different topics with more fluid communication in English.”

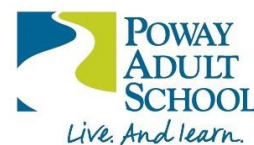
Her advice to those enrolled in ESL courses or struggling to learn the language is to attend classes daily, take class notes and listen carefully to the teacher. She emphasized the importance of class participation, reviewing lessons at home and practicing pronunciation and writing skills. Ortiz says that a helpful practice she found was to make study cards on important topics and ideas.

Ortiz’s ESL teacher, Lauryl Buckel, said that Ortiz is an exceptional student: “When Ana started in my class, she didn’t speak a word of English, but she’s always the first to show up and the last to leave. We had to start with the very basics, like the alphabet and simple phonetics, and it’s amazing how far she’s come so fast.”

Buckel said that within six months Ortiz was the only one in her class to score 100 percent on a citizenship test administered

in English. Now, roughly 18 months into studying the language, Buckel says Ortiz tests at a medium to high level and is well on her way to fluency.

“She is very bright, but what really stands out is just how hard she works,” Buckel said. “She’s a very dedicated student.”



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# COURTROOM CAREERS

## Poway Adult School offers a fast path to a high-paying job as a court reporter

By Gail Allyn Short

**C**ourt reporters play an invaluable role in American courtrooms, ensuring accuracy and transparency in the legal process as they capture every word spoken with precision and speed. It's an exciting and lucrative job, offering a front-row seat to real-life courtroom drama and a good living; the average annual salary for a court reporter in California is about \$89,000 according to Salary.com, with entry-level positions averaging about \$55,500.

It's also one of the many Career Technical Education programs offered at Poway Adult School, with a relatively low-cost program designed to get students from the classroom to the courtroom with just 12 months of training. Students also complete a requisite 40-hour internship and at the end are qualified to take the Certified Verbatim Reporter (CVR) national certification exam.

Three recent students from the school's court reporting program say the PAS program has them set on new career courses.

Kathleen Keenaghan was working in the legal field before she was laid off from her job in March 2020, and had been aware of a nationwide shortage of court reporters in recent years—there were more than 21,000 job openings for court reporters in the United States in 2021, as older professionals retire. She eventually enrolled in the program, and was preparing to take her exam last fall.

"There's so much opportunity and job security out there," says Keenaghan, "and I'm also staying in the legal field, which has been my happy place my entire career."

Keenaghan notes another benefit of the program is its relatively low cost (base tuition for the program is \$3700): "The school was great in implementing payment plans for students who couldn't afford to pay for it all upfront. So, they worked with me the whole time," she says.

Another student, Stephanie Cole, says she previously worked as a broadcast captioner back in England before moving to the United States with her then-husband and children.



Poway Adult School alumnae Stephanie Cole, Kathleen Keenaghan and Megan Hulse were all able to pass the Certified Verbatim Reporter (CVR) national certification exam through the adult school's court reporter CTE courses.

"I was looking for a second career, something that could help sustain me and my boys for the future," she says. After attending an informational meeting about the court reporter program at Poway Adult School, she enrolled. "As far as tuition goes, it's incredibly affordable, and their registration process was super easy. It seemed to all click into place"

Cole recalls taking the court reporting classes online from home at night and how her instructor worked to make the lessons interesting.

"My teacher did a really great job of mixing it up," she says. "So, it wasn't just three-and-a-half straight hours of legal terminology. We learned how to write things on the machine, then we would learn some legal terms and then we would have some dictation practice using the legal terms that we had just learned."

Cole started working as a freelance court stenographer this past October, taking depositions and working at hearings in the Attorney General's office. She says she enjoys the freedom of being able to control her hours.

"The freelance situation suits our family life much better. I can pick and choose my hours while my kids are at school and still be around for them," she says.

Megan Hulse, a former reading teacher for the Poway Unified School District, says she enrolled in the court reporting program in

2020 because she wanted a career change.

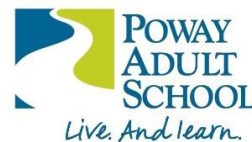
"The thought of being a fly on the wall and sitting in a courtroom and all the things that went along with that sounded really appealing to me," Hulse says.

As a student, Hulse says she liked the convenience of logging onto her computer at night for the lessons. She also liked that the course was largely self-paced, with live classes on Zoom once a week.

She recently passed the CVR exam, and the married mother of two says she is looking forward to her new career.

"Having that income and having the type of flexibility that I'm going to be able to have is just amazing," Hulse says.

"I'm coming up to that finish line, and I can't wait."



Poway Adult School is one of almost 300 adult schools in California that are operated by K-12 school districts. California Adult Schools provide education, training, and support services to ensure that adult learners reach their education and workforce goals. For more information, visit [powayadultschool.powayusd.com](http://powayadultschool.powayusd.com) or call (858) 668-4012.

# FROM THE CLASSROOM TO CLOSING DEALS

## Poway Adult School grad is turning knowledge into real estate success

By Nicole Carr

It is not surprising that Damon Bitts ended up working in real estate.

The retired Marine master gunnery sergeant and San Diego native says he grew up in a family where his father earned his living as a contractor and his grandfather and aunt worked as real estate agents. In addition, his father and grandfather once teamed up to refurbish and sell apartment buildings.

“I’ve always had an interest in real estate,” he says. “But of course, I had a higher calling.”

Bitts served in the U.S. Marine Corps for 26 years. Then, after retiring in 2012, he pursued a new career as a contractor at the Marine Corps Air Station Miramar in California.

“In 2016, I was complaining to my wife about how expensive homes were getting, and she just so happened to have gotten the Poway Adult School pamphlet with all the upcoming courses,” he says. “She was flipping through it and said, ‘Hey, they’re offering real estate licensing classes.’”

The couple read that Poway held its real estate classes from 6-9 p.m., so Bitts could attend after work if he wanted, and they thought the tuition was budget-friendly at \$125 a course.

“That’s a reasonable price for the amount of education that you’re getting,” he says. “So, she said, ‘Why don’t you do something about it?’ I said, ‘Fine. I’m going to get my real estate license.’”

Poway Adult School offers a range of certification and college credit courses that prepare students for in-demand jobs that pay well. The offerings include job-readiness and career planning workshops and seminars, as well as career courses in areas such as applied technology, computer applications, nursing assistant, court reporter, accounting, business, finance and real estate.

The real estate program is designed to enable students to study for and pass the California state real estate licensing exam.

The courses include Real Estate Principles, which reviews the basic concepts of real estate; and Real Estate Practice, which teaches students how to get started in the business, delving into topics such as agency, escrow, finance, contracts, marketing, listings, and working with buyers and sellers. A third class, Legal Aspects of Real Estate, examines the laws governing real estate.

Bitts says the adult school’s enrollment process proved easy, with staffers readily available to answer his questions, and that he liked the convenience of the night classes and the class instruction, which was offered in person.

“We had a dynamic teacher who made the courses interesting,” Bitts says. “The courses were based on what he had seen in the industry, rather than just going online and taking a course that is all text. You’re getting insight from a professional.”

He completed the three courses and passed the California Department of Real Estate exam in 2016. Then, with his real estate license in hand, he landed a job as a realtor with his former instructor, Gregg Watkins, who owns Watkins Realty Group and has taught for Poway Adult School for six years.

Bitts, who once spent three years as a Marine Corps recruiter, found success making sales within his first few months on the job, and especially enjoys helping other veterans find their next homes.

“I have a large military clientele,” says Bitts. “I look out for them, watch their money and negotiate some fantastic deals for them, and I’ve had repeat clients.”

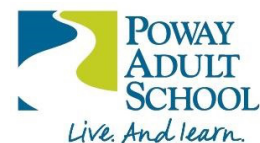
Bitts credits Poway Adult School for putting him on the path to his real estate career.

“It’s given me another avenue in something that I was very interested in and



Real estate agent and veteran Damon Bitts has found success through Poway Adult School’s real estate licensing courses and now helps clients, including fellow veterans, get into home ownership. Photo courtesy of Damon Bitts

given me the ability to learn what I needed to do to set me up for success—not just giving me a little bit of information and leaving me to figure it out on my own. The classes were very in-depth,” he says. “I can’t say enough about Poway Adult School. It gave me the start to be very successful.”



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# A TRUSTED EDUCATION

## Former Poway Adult School student knows he can depend on healthcare employees from alma mater

By Nicole Carr

Jan Ophof is well-qualified to speak about how important Poway Adult School is to the local area's workforce development. He attended the school himself, earning his Certified Nurse Assistant and Restorative Nurse Assistant licenses there; now he's an In-Home Care Coordinator managing nurses and caregivers at Casa de las Campanas, and knows he can depend on new healthcare employees from his alma mater.

Casa de las Campanas is a nonprofit organization providing a continuum of care for seniors, offering health and welfare support services. Casa has hired many Poway Adult School students who possess strong technical and interpersonal skills, making it easy for former students to be hired into Casa's entry-level jobs.

"Poway Adult School taught me and all CNA students basic nursing skills, so when Casa hires a Poway graduate, we know we have a qualified candidate that meets all the California Department of Public Health CNA skills and certifications," says Ophof.

The school's CNA Program provides instruction and training in key areas such as anatomy, physiology and medical terminology, equipping students with a practical understanding of basic nursing skills. Casa highly values Poway Adult School's training programs because they reduce the need for extensive on-boarding and supplementary training for new Casa hires.

And that relationship goes both ways: Casa provides valuable clinical opportunities for the adult school's CNA students who aspire to pursue healthcare careers in the public or private sector. Clinicals offer CNA students hands-on experience in a health care setting by enhancing their skills and serving as a Casa recruitment tool. And by observing these students in



Casa de las Campanas In-Home Care Coordinator Jan Ophof is one of many healthcare employees who found a new career through Poway Adult School's healthcare pathways. Photo by Charlie Neuman

action, Casa can better assess their potential for success within their facility.

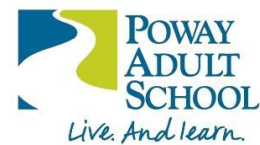
"Casa actively recruits at Poway Adult School because they know the students are highly trained and can easily integrate into entry-level CNA or caregiver positions," says Ophof.

Ophof says employers benefit from Poway Adult Education's technically trained CNA students, who generally possess strong clinical and customer service skills. He notes these students are also part of the local community, which enhances their awareness of and familiarity with local community health and welfare resources.

"I am a Poway Adult School graduate, and three of our best employees at Casa de las Campanas come from the Poway (Adult School) programs. I think all organizations should consider hiring Poway (Adult School) graduates," Ophof encouraged.

Poway Adult School, founded in 1965, is a prominent educational institution in north inland San Diego County, annually

servicing more than 10,000 students. Poway achieves this by offering a range of academic and personal enrichment programs for adults, including ESL, Career and Technical Education, GED/High School Diploma, and numerous training and personal development courses.



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# BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

## ESL teaching duo develop individualized study plans with goals and barriers in mind

By Nicole Carr

No two adult students are exactly alike: Each has their own unique life and career objectives and their own particular set of obstacles. At Poway Adult School, each individual's goals and barriers are taken into account to create a personalized pathway to success.

Jacquie Uriell and Ann Fisher are the co-lead English as a second language teachers at Poway Adult School, overseeing the school's Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education Program. Both also serve as student advisors. They and other staff at the school recognize that students who have a goal in mind—and can see a vision of themselves in the future—are far more likely to succeed.

Based on each student's goals and through building relationships with them, Uriell and Fisher tailor individualized development plans including career preparation, academic studies or training programs aimed at helping them reach their career and personal objectives. They also help identify the student's obstacles—like child-care or transportation needs—as well as ways to mitigate them.

"We employ an agile approach to provide wraparound services for building careers, addressing food and housing insecurities, and attaining personal and educational goals," says Fisher. "By being good listeners, we get to know the students, which makes mentoring easier and establishes personal connections that build trust and lasting relationships."

"The strength of Poway's ESL Program is building relationships, and a strong learning community helps students build confidence to reach goals, make friends and thrive in their daily lives," adds Uriell.

Uriell and Fisher have seen many success stories, including a recent student who was struggling with English fluency



As ESL instructors and student advisors, Jacquie Uriell (left) and Ann Fisher (right) tailor individualized development plans for Poway Adult School students. Photo by Charlie Neuman

as well as being unfamiliar with effective job-search techniques. Thanks to their strong connection with this student they were able to help them build essential career preparation and interviewing skills, ultimately leading to a promising job.

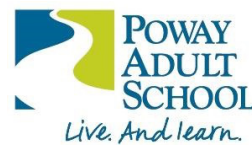
Many students use their new language skills to secure employment or assist family members with medical and appointments by serving as English language translators.

"Learning English has a direct application to day-to-day successes ... what students learn today, they can use tomorrow," Uriell says.

Fisher also has a positive impact on students through her role as school's Student Advisory Council Advisor. In this capacity, she collaborates with ESL, CTE, GED and Basic Skills students to develop leadership skills and improve common campus areas, such as the student lounge and picnic areas. These activities allow Fisher to forge bonds with students and implement strategies to further assist them in achieving their goals.

Uriell and Fisher both began their careers in K-12 schools and have been at Poway Adult School for 20 and 11 years, respectively. Both say they love teaching in adult education and can't imagine going back.

"I am deeply connected to this work and the students I serve," says Fisher. "Helping non-native learners in the Poway community learn English so they can help their own children in school and function in society is a daily accomplishment that brings me incredible job satisfaction."



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