

Skype Coaching Project, Lakeville Area Learning Center, Anne Glassman,
Anne.Glassman@isd194.org

This project pairs adult English language learners with volunteer language Coaches, who work with the learners 1-to-1 via Skype, an Internet-based video calling service. The purpose of the project is to provide opportunities for language learners to practice speaking and listening and build confidence in their ability to use English in real-life contexts.

The project began with one learner who had started attending nursing school after studying in ABE. Unfortunately, she was informed that she could not continue in her nursing program because her spoken English was too poor. She needed a tutor to improve her speaking and listening skills. Angie, a volunteer in the ABE program, offered to work with her, but could not meet in person. So she suggested meeting remotely via Skype. They began working on workplace dialogues, such as describing a problem or asking for time off. Soon, the learner's English improved enough for her to return to her nursing program. Angie and Anne saw the potential to expand this service to more English learners, and the Skype Coaching program was born.

The program leverages the time and talents of community volunteers and university service learning students. The software, Skype, is free to install and use, and volunteers and learners use their own devices (computers or tablets), and as a result the ABE program can offer this service for very low cost. Since state Distance Learning policy now allows programs to count contact hours for time that trained volunteers spend meeting in-person on Skype with learners, the Skype Coaching project also generates revenue for the learning center.

The key is that both volunteers and learners can work from the comfort of their own homes. No one needs to worry about meeting in an unfamiliar place, or feeling uncomfortable going into a stranger's home. They don't need to drive at night or in bad weather. If a learner cannot make an appointment, the volunteer has invested little of their time, and can simply file their weekly report and return to their home life, seamlessly.

This project adds additional hours of English instruction to each participating learner's schedule, and furthermore this instruction is personalized and tailored to the learner's specific needs. Additionally, meeting online allows learners to build digital literacy skills in a real-life, meaningful context.