

# ESL Conversation Cafés



Christine Campbell | Henrico County Public Library | VACo Conference--November 2014

# Need

- Changing demographics
- Children speaking for parents
- No opportunities to practice English skills in an informal, safe setting in Richmond area





# Solution

- Allow ESL citizens to practice in a low-pressure, comfortable environment
- Identified two libraries with the most diverse populations and set schedule
- Identified interested staff to facilitate
- Use of volunteers---critical!
- Flyers posted in libraries, local businesses and sent to ESL teachers and programs



# Outcomes

- Improved new citizens' English skills, making them more confident in all aspects of their lives
- Strengthened partnerships with local ESL programs and schools and other county agencies
- Opportunity to educate new citizens to the wonders of their "free" public library
- In 2013, there were 167 volunteer and ESL participants
- Since 2010, the ESL Cafés have had participants from over 40 countries—new friendships formed
- Many heartwarming anecdotes including finding jobs and sharing experiences – here are a few:



# Quotes & Anecdotes

- “Here, I feel it’s okay to make a mistake.”  
–Min Jiang, who speaks her native language, Mandarin, with co-workers VCU Medical Center
- Lawrence, a nurse from India, was scheduled to interview for a job. ESL volunteers and other participants asked mock interview questions to prepare him; he got the job!
- Three Peruvian sisters helped a young woman from Burundi get a catering job at a local hotel.
- Several of our participants have received their citizenship over the course of the program.





# Costs

- Very minimal \$\$ ☺
- ❖ Staff time
- ❖ Refreshments



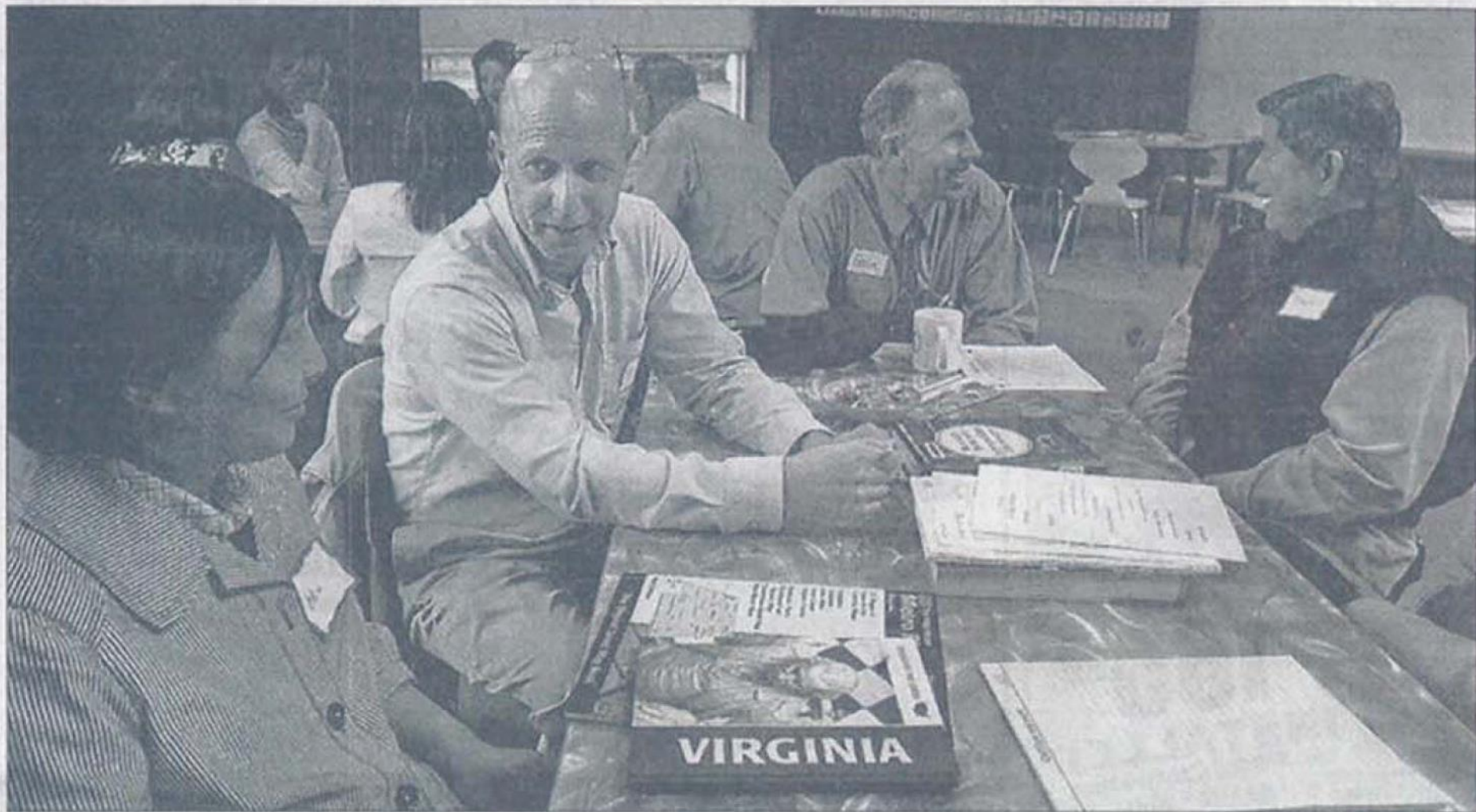
# Value

- Program shows what can be accomplished with cooperation and collaboration amongst county agencies to solve a shared challenge.
- Program is promoting the public library as a partner in the network of educational and social services supporting Henrico County's newest residents and citizens.
- Easily replicated in your county!

# Questions







P. KEVIN MORLEY/TIMES-DISPATCH

The Tuckahoe Library's ESL Conversation Café helps people practice speaking English. China native Min Jang (left) talks with volunteer Ed Crews, while Vietnam native Tram Huyuyn (right) chats with librarian Steven Carter-Lovejoy.

# Facilitating dialogue in Henrico

# ESL Conversation Café

**Practice English,**  
and enjoy a cup of coffee in  
a friendly setting



- You must speak some English.
- You must be 16 or older to attend.  
(We cannot provide child care.)
- No need to register, and you don't have to  
come to every café, just come when you can.
- This is a free program provided by the Henrico County  
Public Library.

## **Tuckahoe Library**

1901 Starling Drive  
Henrico, VA 23229  
290-9100 x5

***The 3rd Wednesday of each  
month at 7:00 pm***

## **Dumbarton Library**

6800 Staples Mill Road  
Henrico, VA 23228  
290-9400 x5

***The 4th Tuesday of each  
month at 7:00 pm***

This is a free program given by the Henrico County Public Library.  
No need to register, and you don't have to come to every café, just come when you can.

[www.henricolibrary.org](http://www.henricolibrary.org)





