

Volunteer Spotlight

LESLIE AND GEORGE

In the Adult Education program at Sacramento Food Bank & Family Services (SFBFS), volunteers sit side by side with the clients often developing rapport and trust with one another. Volunteers are essential in creating a welcoming, nonjudgmental learning environment. Two of the friendly volunteers one may encounter in the Adult Education program at SFBFS' main facility in Oak Park are Leslie Marria and George Langley. This dynamic duo has been carpooling from Folsom to Oak Park for the last two years to volunteer. But don't call them tutors. "I don't consider myself a tutor," says Leslie. "We're doing a lot of mentoring." George agrees. **"We don't teach people, we help them learn,"** he says. Their unique approach helps clients feel empowered about their learning abilities. Both George and Leslie's backgrounds and life experiences are a huge asset to the students.

After retiring from 32 years of teaching special education and Spanish, Leslie met Emmy, a longtime SFBFS volunteer, who convinced Leslie that her skills were needed in Adult Education. "It took me about three years until I finally came down, and I've been here ever since," says Leslie. With her education background, Leslie often helps the Adult Education program manager identify learning disabilities in the adult students. Leslie had been volunteering for about a year when she did a little volunteer recruiting of her own. "George is my wonderful neighbor who was always doing little repairs around my house for me," explains Leslie. "When I finally ran out of things that needed fixing, George asked what else he could do.

I told him to come to volunteer with me!"

"Once I got in the car, I was stuck!" laughs George. He has been volunteering for just over a year and enjoying every day of it. George, who has a background in engineering, worked in the private sector for 40 years before returning to UC Berkeley to earn his degree in education. He then taught auto mechanics to high school students for 23 years. He enjoys working with individuals of diverse backgrounds and helping them in subjects varying from English and math to car maintenance and parenting advice. **"It's thrilling to see the students begin to blossom as they grow,"** he says. Both George and Leslie use their unique style to teach the students basic life skills. Leslie recently started bringing in casseroles and other dishes to share with the students. She started offering basic cooking tips and healthy, easy recipes. George brought in solar-powered calculators and showed students the benefits of never having to replace the

battery, as well as how to use the calculator to find good deals at the grocery store. **"We help individuals see the importance of teaching themselves,"** says George. To sum up her teaching philosophy which she shares with her students, Leslie quotes Henry Ford: **"If you believe you can, you're right," she says. "If you believe you're wrong, you're right. You decide."**

The students that George and Leslie work with often come to them for academic guidance, but leave with much more. George, who is turning 99 in August, just completed his second novel which relates to his rich life experiences. "You're only as old as you think you are," he says. Leslie calls George "St. George the dragon slayer" for his always positive, can-do attitude. Both volunteers are incredibly talented and inspirational individuals with much to share. They are an amazing part of the volunteer team at SFBFS.

Interested in volunteering? Please visit www.sacramentofoodbank.org.

Leslie Marria and George Langley

