

stories from



Our Lives

*Writings by the students at
Howard Area Community Center*

June 2017

realconditions





The Writers

Yolanda (Mexico)

Gaston (Democratic Republic of Congo)

Victorine (Republic of Congo)

Jessica (Republic of Congo)

Maria (Mexico)

Guadalupe (Mexico)

Maria (Mexico)

Irene (Mexico)

GASTON

Howard Area Community Center



What is Howard Area Community Center, and how I did I get information about this place? The Howard Area Community Center is a place for adult education, and also other activities like food pantry, garden school, looking for a job, computer class, and so on.

I got a lot of information on the flier around the Howard train station. Somebody distributed the fliers. I was looking for where to study English and I thought that it is good to try. When I came the first day, I met the staff and they said, "You need a test. After the test, we can know what to do for you." I said, "Okay." I took a test and they said, "Your test is good so you need to start beginning in ESL level 5 and you go up step by step." I said, "Okay."

The beginning of school was surprising for me because I met a lot of classmates, and I made a lot of friends who speak French. Nice teachers, nice classmates, nice staff, and a lot of opportunities because I got a garden. Amazing for me because I didn't think in America they can give you an area for free to plant a garden. I was very happy.

In the class, there are different activities like writing on Tuesdays, conversation with classmates, observations, describing the graph. Very nice activities to open the mind.

I am very happy with Howard Area Community Center. I wish the government would give money to continue our education, to attain our goal. Even if you are old, you have an opportunity to study more. Thank you to the government.

MARIA

What I Have Learned at Howard Area Community Center

My story is about the Howard Area Community Center (HACC) in Rogers Park. It is a very good place. Here we have many opportunities. I have my son in childcare at HACC. That is a big help for me. I learn English, and my son also learns. I come for two hours every day instead of four hours every day because I have to go to take my son to his school. But here in HACC it is a quiet and relaxing place. We have teachers who help us a lot, so that we learn English. And also there are many interesting programs for us, and everything is free. One of the other programs I take is family literacy. I also use the Food Pantry.

I am learning to read, write and speak English at Howard Area Community Center. When I came to HACC I didn't understand any English. Little by little, I'm learning English, and now I know more people from different countries. They are good people, and now I know how to find places where I need to go. I can ask people questions about things or places I need to know.

I like going downtown with my family, and my children like it too. I can speak English, so I can go with my children to very many places here in Chicago. I thank HACC for giving so many opportunities to us.

VICTORINE

My Life in the USA



When I came here, my friend referred me to the refugee shelter where I could get asylum as a refugee.

I went to Michigan to the Detroit Refugee Center. I met with the lawyers. We talked about my refugee status, and then the director of the center gave me one bedroom, bed clothes, lotions, deodorants, creams, etcetera.

I was very happy. All stress was gone. Every month we used to go to the doctors and psychologist for our checkups. I lived in Michigan for a year until the lawyers finished my refugee case.

I really thank the USA for granting me asylum to live in this country.

After I got my asylum, I came to Chicago. I started to learn English because I didn't understand anyone. I started at ESL Level One. I couldn't do shopping alone. It was very difficult for me.

But now my life is good. I can do everything: listening, watching TV, reading, applying for a job. I really thank again the USA.



MARIA

My First Time in Chicago

In June, 2000 I was married in Mexico, and then came to Chicago in October of the same year. I flew to Los Angeles to take the airplane to Chicago. When I saw the city of Chicago, I asked my husband, "What happened? Where are the people? I don't see them." My husband had lived in Chicago before for two years and he said to me, "Here it is too cold. The people are inside their homes." But the third day, I saw the sun was very clear, and my brother said to me, "Come, let's go to the store." I saw him put his warmest jacket on, and I thought, "Why did he put that jacket on? The sun is good outside. Maybe he didn't look outside." I smiled and I took my warm jacket. But when I was outside, it was very cold and I thought, "What happened here? The weather is not the same in my country." And then my brother explained to me about the weather in Chicago.

Now all the time, I need to see the temperature on my cell phone. But I like the seasons now in Chicago. I like the flowers in the Spring. I like the beach in the Summer. I like the pretty leaves in the Fall, and my son likes to jump in the piles of leaves. I like the snow in the Winter. The end.

YOLANDA

My Life in Mexico and the United States



When I came to the United States, I lived in California with my sister, but it was difficult for me because I didn't have friends. Only my sister. I missed my family, my friends, my country.

My sister helped me to find a job in the restaurant. When I was working, nobody showed me how to work. I felt very sad, but one day my sister told me, "You need to go to English class, it's good for you." I started to come to the English class. I liked to learn English and many things in this country.

Three years later I went to Mexico. In Mexico, it's difficult to find a job. I was looking for a job in my country, but I never found a job. One year later, I came back to the U.S., to Chicago with my brother. Now I can speak a little English and I'm proud of myself and all that I have learned in this country.



GUADALUPE

Remembering Where I Came From

My favorite place to live is my native country Mexico. Because there's all my family and all the people I grew up with. In my family there is my father, my brother, and my four sisters. My father is a school bus driver. He gets paid every two weeks, but it is a low salary, because only people who have a diploma from school can obtain a little more money. That's why my brother and I also work to contribute to the family.

My brother has built houses since he was 17 years old. He works very hard to help my mom to buy food or pay bills. I work as a waitress to get money to send them. I know that for me it is very important to remember where I came from and how I suffered to get here to the United States by walking six days in the desert. I wish all my family could be with me, but it is not possible. I hope one day I can go back to Mexico to be with my family.



JESSICA

My Favorite Place to Live

Between my country and here my favorite place to live is the USA, because in the United States we have a lot of opportunity. If you did not study in your country, you can study here, even if you are any age. Even if you do not have the money, you can learn more. If you need to go to university and you don't have money, you can take out a loan. They help everybody.

For me, I like to live in the big cities or states like California, Chicago, or Washington. Once I went to Nebraska. The rent is very cheap. But if I want to live in the big city, I need to work more, because the big city is very expensive, not easy.



Special thanks to Emma Rubin and Lisa Nieman of the the Howard Area Community Center and Wendy Yanow of DePaul University for co-facilitating the writing workshop with Janise Hurtig, Community Writing Project coordinator. Thanks also to Maxine Bailey, Howard Area Community Center tutoring coordinator, for organizing the workshop.



This writing workshop was a collaboration between the Howard Area Community Center (HACC) and the Community Writing Project.

HACC is a social service agency that provides affordable and free education, employment, and health assistance and programs for the greater Rogers Park area. Find more information at www.howardarea.org.

The Community Writing Project offers writing and publishing workshops to residents of poor and immigrant neighborhoods in Chicago and beyond. Visit the website at www.communitywritingworkshop.org.



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