



# NEXT STEP LEARNING CENTER

WHERE EDUCATION TRANSFORMS LIVES



## NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2025



NEXT STEP  
LEARNING  
CENTER

2222 Curtis Street  
Oakland, CA. 94607

Next Step Learning Center believes in the resilience of the human spirit  
and in each person's ability to learn and grow.

# what students do AT NEXT STEP LEARNING CENTER

BUILD BASIC LITERACY

EARN A HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA OR GED

GAIN JOB SKILLS

SUCCEED IN COLLEGE

EMBARK ON SUSTAINING CAREERS



## California faces great challenges in our education system.

According to the 2022-23 California Adult Education Annual Performance Report, 28% of the state's population (ages 16-74) is at or below Level 1 Literacy and 36% is at or below Level 1 Numeracy. This means almost a third of California's adult population has only very basic reading skills and the ability to perform only basic mathematical calculations. They have limited vocabulary, difficulty understanding more than very basic text, and struggle to complete mathematical tasks that require multiple steps.

The report further projects, "California's economy shows a trajectory of steadily increasing demand for a highly educated workforce," and yet approximately six million California adults do not have a high school diploma or its equivalent. This gap in education contributes to unemployment in California at a rate of 4.8% in 2023, which was higher than the national average of 3.9%.

Although there is no easy solution to this problem, Next Step believes that offering students a chance to re-engage in education is a place to start. One-on-one tutoring has been shown to help students increase their skill levels, build confidence, and come to school more regularly. With the support of caring staff, dedicated tutors and stimulating curriculum, Next Step students find their pathway to success.

## Many people have walked by our building and wondered, "What happens behind that Red Door? "

What happens behind that Red Door that opens into Next Step Learning Center?  
**LOVE HAPPENS.**

And when I open the Red Door for our wonderful, caring tutors, **LEARNING HAPPENS** — through dedication, commitment, and support.

For many years, I have had the privilege of opening the Red Door and saying "hello" or "good morning" to our tutors. They enter, find their favorite seat, settle in, and prepare for their student. They come to Next Step, rain or shine, ready to tutor their regular student—or another student if needed. They never hesitate when I ask them to make adjustments. They are always ready to step in and do whatever it takes to help someone. Their flexibility and attention to each student's academic journey never goes unnoticed, and their dedication to NSLC is priceless.

Tutors, your commitment is unparalleled. Some of you have been with us since the very beginning—30 years and counting. That is truly amazing! Some of you took a break due to COVID and are now returning, which is so very welcomed. Others have faced personal or health challenges and have come back after recovery. Your return is a testament to your ongoing dedication. Your presence fills our center with warmth, laughter, and a sense of belonging. Many of you invite your friends to tutor, and because of that, we continue to grow. Few nonprofits have remained in existence for as long as NSLC and even fewer have volunteers as constant as you. You make Next Step the special place that it is.

Tutors, your support and encouragement make NSLC a true gem. You give the gift of knowledge — a gift that transforms lives forever. The hours you volunteer, your educational skills, and your expertise are essential to our mission. You enrich the lives of countless students by strengthening their education. You give them opportunities they might not otherwise have, and you contribute to the overall well-being of the community.

I know you notice the apprehension on students' faces when they first join the program. However, as you and your student meet regularly, that nervousness melts away, replaced by smiles and enthusiasm. This leads to shared victories, like when a student suddenly "gets it" and understands a math concept or when a student confidently pronounces a word they never thought they could say. Your encouragement and support keeps them coming back, even when they face obstacles at school or in their personal lives.

Regardless of what happens outside that Red Door—whether political, personal, or emotional—inside, there is respect, compassion, and positive student-tutor relationships, and to me, that is love of humanity and community. At NSLC, we are a community.

Tutors, this Spring Newsletter is dedicated to you. Thank you for your continuous and tireless efforts. Thank you for your willingness to give back and pay it forward. You motivate us as staff to continue the mission that Sr. Cynthia and Sr. Rosemary began. Every day I feel so blessed to work at Next Step, and I get to see some of the most caring and generous people around.

**THANK YOU, TUTORS, FOR YOUR GIFT OF LOVE AND LEARNING!**



*Peggy Presley*  
Peggy Presley, Program Director

## Daniel's Experience at Next Step

When I first learned about Next Step, I knew it was the perfect fit for me. As a former special education teacher, I love working one-on-one with students—helping them realize their strengths and build confidence. Next Step's tutoring model and its mission to serve low-income adults drew me in immediately. I was excited to be in front of students once again, especially those re-engaging with education.

One of the biggest lessons I've learned while working in education is that the most important thing isn't just teaching academic skills—it's helping people believe they can do it. Many people have had negative experiences in school, often feeling like they weren't capable because they never received the support they needed. That's why I love witnessing those small but powerful moments of realization. For example, writing an essay can feel like an overwhelming task for someone who hasn't written one in years, or even decades. But after working through it together, I ask them to step back and just look at what they've written—not to analyze the content, but simply to see the paragraphs and pages filled with their own words and ideas. That moment of recognition, when they smile and see what they've accomplished, is one of my favorite parts of tutoring.

Beyond academics, I get to accompany students on their journey—not just toward a diploma, but toward a future they are building for themselves. The walls at Next Step are lined with pictures of recent graduates in their caps and gowns, and I recently overheard two students excitedly telling a teacher how they couldn't wait to see their own pictures up there someday. Seeing students light up as they recognize their own potential is what keeps me motivated.

“ At Next Step, students don't leave with just a diploma, but with a belief in themselves that they can do what they want to do, and be who they want to be. ”

*Daniel S., Volunteer Tutor*



## Tutor Appreciation



On a dark and rainy day in November, we invited our amazing tutors to a Thank You Luncheon. It was the day after the election and, as many in our community were reeling from the election results, Next Step became, as it has many times before, a beacon of hope. Staff and tutors mingled over lunch and shared stories of student successes and moments of pride. We talked about the future and how we, as stewards in our Oakland community, can have an impact in small ways.

Even on this dreary day, laughter filled our building, as tutors exchanged experiences, found common ground, and spoke of ways that Next Step can continue to be a light in the darkness, showing respect for all humans, helping them to become their best selves.

We look forward to this becoming an annual event. It's just one way we can show our gratitude for those who help us do this work.



**Next Step has approximately 50 volunteer tutors who have collectively logged 1400 hours with students since July 2024.**



# Marta's Experience at Next Step

Marta came to Next Step in 2023 with a goal to earn her high school diploma. She was committed to the work and came to the center every week without fail. Along the way, Marta met one-on-one with a number of tutors. Here, Marta shares her experience with us, and we also hear from her teacher and one of her tutors. This February, Marta completed her required credits and officially graduated with her high school diploma. Way to go, Marta!

“

Working with the tutors is very helpful because they help students with any questions. This way, students make better progress in their subjects. At first, I learned more English to understand the subjects, because English is my third language. My tutors explained how to write a paragraph. They taught me the steps to solve math problems. I experienced success at my own pace and increased my confidence. The tutors are always so kind and motivate the students.

*Marta, Student*

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Marta and I met twice a week for a year to work on her English and Social Studies credits. Being with her at Next Step was the highlight of my week! With each new unit, Marta's enthusiasm and curiosity were ever-present and her love of learning was contagious. I think we both especially enjoyed her native country project where she shared stories of her culture, heritage and customs. I feel very lucky to have been on this journey with Marta toward her high school diploma. I learned so much from her, and I am so happy that she reached her goal. I am really going to miss our time together.

*Tracey, Volunteer Tutor*

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I am so grateful for the invaluable support tutors provide Next Step students and me, a fellow educator. The dedication, expertise and commitment to each student's academic growth and well-being has made a noticeable difference in their learning journeys.

The time and effort that tutors invest each week helps students improve their knowledge and skills, and build confidence. Our tutors have an ability to make complex concepts understandable and show such patience in ensuring each student grasps the material.

I am also grateful for the positive attitudes of our tutors and their willingness to collaborate. We share academic resources, helpful teaching strategies, and the daily successes and challenges faced serving our students. In these conversations and relationships, a more supportive learning environment for students has emerged.

Thank you to all our tutors for their unwavering dedication and hard work. The tutors are truly making a positive difference in the lives of students and their efforts do not go unnoticed!

*Nicole, Teacher*

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## what Next Step tutors say

Tutoring at Next Step is the most fun I have all week. The students all want to be engaged and to learn. The staff and other tutors are welcoming and simply great folk to know. This is an outstanding experience.

- Ernest

I am grateful to the students and staff at Next Step Learning Center for the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of the students.

- Sue

I really admire everyone who comes to Next Step to complete a high school diploma! It's fun--and meaningful--to work with students who are so clearly motivated.

- Beverley

The progress each person makes on this road is due to their own initiative and hard work. As a tutor I get to be an enabler along that path - helping to get through bumpy stretches of a math or science unit or providing encouragement to keep going.

What I mostly feel is privileged - to share time each week in a supportive, homey environment with people who are courageously pursuing their dreams.

- Rob



## become a tutor!



There is no experience needed to become a tutor!



We only ask that you be willing to commit at least two hours a week to helping our students work through their assignments.



Please give Peggy or Erin a call to learn more about joining our community of amazing volunteers.

Next Step Learning Center  
(510) 251-1731



# next step updates

Much like the seasons, organizations move through life cycles. With a leadership change earlier this year, the Board of Next Step Learning Center decided to appoint an interim director in order to move thoughtfully through a search process and set up the new leadership for sustained improvement and impact. In January, we welcomed Philip Arca to Next Step. Philip is serving as Interim Executive Director and helping to lead the search for our long term solution. Philip comes to us with extensive experience in nonprofit management and organizational transitions. He has also brought a new energy, all while maintaining a dedication to Next Step's mission. In late summer/early autumn, new long term leadership should be settled in and moving forward. We look forward to updating you with our search!

## Next Step Learning Center Staff

Philip Arca, Interim Executive Director  
Peggy Presley, Program Director  
Monica Berson, Bookkeeper  
Jennie Emard, College Coordinator  
Karen Matza, Literacy Instructor  
Erin Ubaldo, Executive Associate  
Nicole Crosby, Opportunity Academy Teacher\*  
Monique Guerrero, Opportunity Academy Instructional Assistant\*  
Lisa McCarty, Opportunity Academy Teacher\*

\* Leveraged positions through our partnership with Alameda County Office of Education

## Board of Directors

Sumana Lahiry, Board Chair  
Ryan Falvey, Treasurer  
Peter Boero  
Eugene Brown  
Joan Doyle, SNJM  
Linda Orrick, SNJM  
David Pereda  
Stephen Sanger  
Greg Schopf  
Maureen Viani, SNJM



# your support matters

Please consider making a donation, designating Next Step as your corporate/workplace match, or including Next Step Learning Center in your will or estate.

For more information, scan the QR code or contact Philip or Erin



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At **Next Step Learning Center**, we envision a Bay Area where everyone has free access to education, a second chance to complete high school, opportunities for college success, and the ability to succeed in meaningful careers. We strive to create educational pathways out of poverty and reduce educational disparities due to race, poverty, and disability status. **Join us!**