



League of Women Voters of Schenectady County

PO Box 9135, Schenectady, New York 12309

my.lww.org/new-york/schenectady-county

Summary: The Citizenship Mentoring Group, Schenectady, NY

The Citizenship Mentoring Group was formed by members of the League of Women Voters of Schenectady County in the Spring of 2017. Our League had already shown an interest in immigration issues, and we chose this project as a way to celebrate the anniversary of Voting Rights for Women. We formed a small committee, met with the local field office director of the US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, the program coordinator of the Office for New Americans (a NYS program that assists those applying for citizenship), spoke with immigration officers at USCIS (Department of Homeland Security – Immigration Services). We received an enormous amount of advice and information from these people, and USCIS continues to provide us with a multitude of free citizenship preparation materials. We also began researching citizenship preparation, how to work with adult learners and best practices for this type of instruction.

Although Schenectady has a large immigrant community, there were no specific programs to assist this group as they prepared for US citizenship. Our program operates year-round and includes four eight-week sessions of two-hour, once-a-week classes; and/or one-on-one tutoring. A separate conversation group to build confidence in speaking and listening to English is also offered when there is interest.

The program is free and open to the public with prior registration. The students each receive two citizenship preparation books, including *Preparing for the Naturalization Test*, a USCIS (US Citizenship and Immigration Services) publication, *Citizenship-Passing the Test-Civics and Literacy* by Lynne Weintraub, as well as a variety of printed materials at no cost. So far, the program has served a very diverse group of students from Afghanistan, Bulgaria, China, Colombia, Republic of Congo, Egypt, Guatemala, Guyana, Singapore, St. Lucia, Turkey, Peru, Dominican Republic, Trinidad & Tobago, Tunisia and Viet Nam. At least twenty-two of our students have already obtained their US Citizenship, and several more are now in the application process.

The Citizenship Mentoring Group has ten volunteers who received a two-hour training in the naturalization process, the citizenship interview and exam, and how to prepare students for this important step. They are provided with the citizenship preparation book from USCIS and specific teaching materials. Volunteering in this program is not limited to members of the League of Women Voters, but is also open to interested members of the community. Volunteers are kept updated with new teaching ideas and other information. Classroom teachers have been Cheryl Nechamen, former League President, and currently, Ann Hatke, Program Coordinator and League President.

The weekly classes are held at a local branch of the Schenectady County Library system, the Phyllis Bornt Library and Literacy Center that is located in a neighborhood that has a large immigrant community. The library is also on the bus line that is helpful for many of our students.

For additional information about this program, please contact:

Ann Hatke at lwvcitizen@gmail.com

5/2020