



TIDINGS



Durango & Cortez Adult Education Center Fall 2023 Newsletter

Counting on an Angel

How Far Will One Father Go to Reunite His Family?

One, Two, Three, Four, Five...

As the sun dipped below the horizon, Angel added more wood on his fire.

The Peruvian had been in the United States for several years, first working on a sheep ranch in California. Now, he repaired the fences surrounding a huge ranch near Montrose, Colorado.

"My friends were coyotes. No people," he recalls.

Every two weeks, he'd meet a ranch hand at a designated rendezvous-point to receive a fresh box of food and water. Angel would pack up those supplies and set off into the mountains alone. If he ran out of provisions before the two weeks was up, too bad. This was Angel's whole life for the next five years.

Saturday, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday

Two years ago, Angel traded his job at the ranch for work at a local restaurant in Durango.

"My new boss say: *Angelo, I need a spoon.* I think: *What is a spoon?*" Seeing the perplexed look on Angel's face, his boss opened the industrial dishwasher and retrieved a spoon. He displayed it and then showed two more objects: a knife and a fork.

Angel knew he had a lot to learn. When he discovered the free English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) classes at the Durango Adult Education Center (DAEC) he immediately registered. He notes, "The teachers here are very good. I say I need help, they say no problem!" He recalls how his ESL teacher was so kind. "Every day, she practice with me. I am. You are. He is. She is." For Angel, each day in class came with a tidal wave of new words for familiar objects: eggs, door, book, pants, telephone.

Because Angel does nothing half-way or half-heartedly, he made significant strides to learn a difficult foreign language. "Here is the difference [in my English] after one year," he says and then demonstrates his initial, halting and hesitant language skills. "*Excuse me...uh, I need to work.... My name is Angelo. I am from Peru.* Versus today I say: *Excuse me. Good morning. I need to work, please.*" The words roll out fast and smooth. Angel plays out both sides of a hypothetical conversation. "*Okay, no problem. What's your name? My name is Angelo. I am from Peru.*"

February, March, April, May...

When Angel is not working at the restaurant, he takes on odd jobs as a crackerjack handyman. Electrician, plumber, general construction—Angel will take on any role. Painting? *Okay, no problem.* Landscaping? *You got it.* To Angel, the job doesn't matter. All he needs are the right tools and a good set of gloves.

While he works, he practices his English, even if all he does is practice counting. He explains, "Everyday,

practice! One, two, three, four, five. *Uno, dos, tres, quarto, cinco.* One, two, three, four, five."

His wife, daughter, and two sons live in Peru. His wife runs the household while his daughter studies obstetrics at university. His oldest son works at a restaurant and is saving to attend college in the U.S. Angel chuckles when describing his youngest son, who is 12. "He is [either] eating, sleeping, or plays video games."



Angel works hard with the support of his ESL teacher, Jessica Wood.

The family relies on Angel's wages to sustain them. Clothing. School supplies. Food. Tuition. It all adds up. Angel also supports his extended family. He helps his siblings and their many children.

Angel strives each month to send a couple hundred dollars home. He also squirrels away money so that he can send at least \$1,000 home at Christmas.

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From the Director

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

Many of our supporters and friends came together on September 26th for our annual “Literacy Luncheon”. This is the first time we have held this event since the COVID restrictions and it was lovely to be together again to celebrate students, staff, board, and donors.



*Susan Hakanson,
Executive Director*

We heard from past and current students and were reminded in such a lovely and heartfelt way of the important work that our Adult Education Center does, and the incredible magnitude of every community member who has helped us to do this work for the past 36 years.

Your generosity has created an unduplicated educational safety net for individuals, which empowers them to improve their lives. We could not do this without you. Together we are creating a stronger community and a better world.

Sincerely,
Susan Hakanson

Angel Continued...

But Angel’s financial burdens do not stop there. He wants to bring his family to the U.S. The process is expensive. Every document that needs filed comes with a fee. “My son, everyday, he say: Dad, please, America. But is not possible yet,” Angel frowns.

100, 200, 300, 400...

Angel came to the U.S. specifically to earn more money for his family. In Peru, Angel literally worked around the clock. He labored on a construction site from 6:00am until 8:00pm. He’d head home for dinner and a couple hours’ sleep. He then worked a night job until 3:00 am. After a short nap, he’d set off again for the construction site. But the wages always fell short of what the family needed every month.

In the nine years since Angel came to the U.S., he has not been able to see his family in person. He has not been able to kiss his wife or hug his children.

When he first worked in California, he was approached by some men who asked him many questions. Angel could not understand them and had no way to answer their questions. The men turned out to be police. They arrested Angel, assuming he was an illegal migrant. Before he could vindicate his case, the arrest rendered his passport invalid. The road home was forever blocked.

1000, 2000, 3000...

As days drop off the calendar, Angel works, studies English, and sleeps; works, studies English, and sleeps.

He is paying an organization in Denver to secure his family’s legal pathway to the U.S. They estimate another six months of paperwork. Maybe another year.

For Angel, what is another 365 days compared to the 3,285 days they have been separated?

Angel hopes by improving his English skills, he can secure a better-paying job. He found an ideal opportunity to work mornings at Home Depot, after which he could work the remainder of the day at the restaurant. The combined wages from those two jobs are enough to eliminate many of his side-hustles. But working at a retail store requires excellent English communication skills. Angel must first pass an English language competency test before his job application will be considered.

“Maybe one day, I can stop. I can relax [in the mountains] or go see New York with my son. Just stop,” he says releasing a big exhale.

Once his family finally arrives, Angel can stop counting off the days. He can stop counting up the dollars and cents. He can stop counting all those new English words to memorize. But for now, he must keep going. Too many people are counting on him.



Let's Welcome Our New Staff!

Bruce Weinberg - Math & Science Teacher, Durango



Bruce is looking forward to sharing many interesting conversations with students at the Adult Education Center, as well as coaching them toward their goals of completion and moving ahead in life! After two years of retirement from teaching math and science, Bruce has discovered that helping people learn is not just a job but a passion, and he looks forward to getting back to that! In his spare time Bruce likes to do all the outdoor sports. In fact, he just rowed the Grand Canyon, which was an excellent adventure! Bruce looks forward to some adventurous learning with everyone at DAEC.

Leslie Sierra - Student Services Specialist, Cortez



Leslie was born and raised in Farmington, New Mexico and moved to Cortez seven years ago. If her name sounds familiar, that's because she was a GED student in Cortez, having graduated with CAEC in the Spring!

Leslie is thankful to have this position because she loved the supportive encouragement she received as a student and how everyone made her feel welcomed and safe. "It is a pleasure to be working alongside all of these amazing people!"

Dr. David Thornton - Math & Science Teacher, Cortez



Dr. David Thornton joins us at our Cortez campus with over 34 years of experience in education. His experience includes teaching all levels of learners from kindergarten through graduate students, with most of his teaching in the sciences and research. Dr. Thornton enjoys being in nature and off-trail hiking. He has a second-degree black belt in judo. Currently, he lives near Cortez with his wife and 91-year-old father.

Megan Olsen - Humanities Teacher, Durango



Megan (Megs) has been a college English professor for sixteen years and has worked in education for twenty years. Besides teaching, she is

an avid hiker, skier, novelist, and screenwriter. Megs is currently working on a memoir about her time teaching at a boarding school for at-risk youth during the COVID-19 pandemic. She is excited to be joining the Adult Education Center team!

Carlos Somers - ESL Teacher, Cortez



Carlos has a Master's degree in Latin American studies and a Bachelor's degree in Spanish & Psychology. For the past twenty years, Carlos has taught throughout Telluride, Pagosa Springs, Dolores, and Durango. He loves hiking, snowboarding, and mountain biking, as well as spending time with his four cats and Collie dog.

McKenzie Marciante - Humanities Teacher, Durango



McKenzie (Kenzie) is originally from Durango. Prior to joining DAEC she worked remotely as a copywriter, and before that, she was a middle school English teacher and ESL specialist in Dallas. Kenzie has a BA in writing

New Staff Continues on Page 4...



Adult Education Center

Serving Southwest Colorado

701 Camino del Rio, Ste. 301
Durango, CO 81301

Fall Open House *Donor Appreciation Night*

Monday, October 30th
5:00 - 7:00 PM



- Tour our classrooms
- Meet our staff and board
- Enjoy Halloween goodies and games!
- Costumes are encouraged!
- Email shakanson@durangoadulted.org

Upcoming Events

Colorado Gives Day

Tuesday, December 5th

Early giving begins November 1st

An online giving event for Colorado non-profits!

Spellebration

Our annual not-so-serious spelling bee event is coming during Snowdown 2024! Date TBD. Contact us to participate!

GED Graduation

Durango and Cortez locations

December 14th and 15th

Details to come!

Literacy Luncheon was a Success!

Our 9th annual fundraiser, held on September 26th, was a wonderful time of connecting with our donor family! Thank you to all who supported and attended this event!

Missed Literacy Luncheon?
You can still donate!
Scan code at right:



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with a focus on design and editing as well as minors in anthropology and Italian from Texas Christian University in Fort Worth.

Kenzie enjoys traveling, cooking and eating great food, fitness, and coaching track & field at DHS — last season she worked with the sprint team and coached the pole vaulters. She also enjoys the mountains with her Bernese mountain dog puppy. Fun Fact: Kenzie's mom got her GED with DAEC over twenty years ago!



Our Mission

The Durango Adult Education Center, a caring learning community, fills educational gaps by providing the skills and knowledge necessary for livable wage careers, post-secondary education, and social and economic mobility.