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## Profiles of Success: Cindy and Pornchai

By Joanne Mason

Sitting down with tutor Cindy Pierce and Thai learner Pornchai Chaisenhan, one can immediately see the rapport and dedication they have developed in the two years they have been working together. I asked them to share some of the secrets of their success.

Their tutoring sessions follow formal and informal paths. They always start by meeting for breakfast, which gives them an easygoing way to practice conversation and discuss topics that come up during the week. Sometimes friends and relatives join them, adding to a fun and welcoming environment. From there, Cindy and Pornchai head to the Medford Public Library for the more formal segment of the tutoring session. First, they review homework, which is completed weekly. Next, they work through the lesson Cindy has planned. Then, homework is assigned and they discuss any other English issues that need attention. Often, they work out of Laubach materials and the Kaleidoscope reading series. "Pornchai loves to read," Cindy noted. Pornchai said that at first, book selections were difficult, but they have gotten easier over time. Other materials are included as well. For example, they formed a lesson around maps, as Pornchai was taking a trip to North Carolina. Cindy noted that flexibility is key and she is always open to letting the lesson take a different direction from what she has prepared.

Cindy and Pornchai also take opportunities to go out into the community for English practice. They have participated in American Christmas Eve and Thai New Year celebrations, each sharing the cultural customs inherent in those holidays. They have also gone to see a band perform in Boston. Such events can give language learning a broader scope.

I asked Cindy and Pornchai what advice they would give to new learners and tutors just starting with EMLC. Pornchai stressed the importance of communication. "Don't be shy about speaking," he said. "Tell your tutor what you need to learn." Pornchai also emphasized how constant practice with English builds confidence, especially in speaking. He said that learners should be encouraged to speak regardless of accent or accuracy – just using the language will help enormously.

Cindy felt it was especially helpful for a tutor to have some background in the learner's native language and culture. In her case, Pornchai has taught her a great deal about the Thai language. Unlike English, Thai does not mark its verbs for tense and nouns stay in the same form regardless of whether they are singular or plural. Knowing the differences and similarities between languages can help a tutor understand some of the learner's trouble spots.

Cindy and Pornchai's approach to tutoring has had much success. Pornchai has achieved many of his goals, including obtaining a library card, reading to his son and helping his son with homework. Currently, Pornchai is working on citizenship and getting a license to do carpentry and plumbing work.

Both Cindy and Pornchai considered themselves "lucky" to be working together in a pairing that allows them to learn so much from each other.

