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## **Literacy Changes Lives: A Profile in Success**

**GINGER CHAN and YVONNE YAW**

By Joanne Mason

The Eastern Massachusetts Literacy Council is pleased to announce the recipient of the first Inspiration Award, which honors a former EMLC learner for his or her long-term success. This year's recipient is Ginger Chan, who worked for several years with her tutor, current EMLC Board President Yvonne Yaw.

Ginger, from Hong Kong, is a native Chinese speaker. While she took English classes in Hong Kong, she did not have many opportunities to speak the language and found conversation difficult when she arrived in the United States. She also found sentence construction and slang phrases troublesome. When she saw an EMLC poster in Lexington, she decided to join a conversation group. Shortly after, she began working with Yvonne, an experienced EMLC tutor.

Together, Yvonne and Ginger designed a flexible, informal tutoring program that helped Ginger in many ways. They did not use formal books, but worked with materials that Ginger brought to the tutoring sessions, concentrating on issues that were important to her. "Her agenda was our agenda," Yvonne commented. One large area of focus was everyday business language that would help Ginger advance in her career. At that time, her English usage at work was minimal. Yvonne and Ginger worked on resumes, business letters, memos, interviewing and presentation skills. From these learner-centered tutoring sessions, Ginger's confidence in using English increased. Ginger emphasized the importance of the encouragement that Yvonne gave her. "Whenever I needed her help, she was always available," she said. Ginger now works as a tax accountant at the Boston publisher Houghton Mifflin and is much more comfortable with work situations. She uses English in a variety of ways, including client contact, extensive phone calls and written correspondence. She is a "very successful employee and very well-respected in her position," Yvonne remarked.

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Ginger's success goes beyond her career. Currently, she is in the process of having her "dream house" built. She drew the plans herself and now uses English to communicate with contractors and see her dream become a reality. The house should be finished in a few months.

When asked what recommendations she would make to new students starting with EMLC, Ginger noted two important points. First, she stressed that perseverance is crucial when learning English. "Never give up," she advised. "Continue to learn." She said that it takes time to improve, but students will see great results if they keep moving forward. Working hard can improve one's self-confidence, she added. Second, Ginger found the conversation group to be helpful, especially for students who do not have many chances to speak English. In a conversation group, Ginger said, students can express themselves. Everyone has a chance to participate in a friendly environment and can learn from each other at a manageable pace.

Both Ginger and Yvonne pointed out the effectiveness of one-on-one tutoring. Ginger said she couldn't get the same kind of detailed instruction at a formal class where there is little or no one-on-one contact. Yvonne agreed. One-on-one tutoring, she said, is a "tailor-made relationship."

EMLC congratulates Ginger on her impressive success and wishes her all the best for the future.