

AGENTS OF CHANGE

Escondido Adult School educators bring passion, empathy and joy to classrooms

By Anne Stokes

When her students struggle balancing school, work and family, Maricxa Zendejas knows exactly what they're going through. Today, she's an instructor at Escondido Adult School with 25 years of experience in the medical field, but starting out she was an 18-year-old single mother in need of a career—fast.

“A lot of these students are young parents, single parents, or they've raised a family and they're older. They know I can empathize with them and understand them,” she says. “Things get challenging, things get tough. It's easier for them to open up because I've been there.”

Polina Trask's English as a Second Language students can also find a kindred spirit in their teacher.

“I always tell my students when I meet them that English is not my native language, that I have first-hand experience learning English as a Second Language and that I'm still learning every day of my life,” she says. “I've been here for 17 years, it's been a long time, but I still remember when I first came here. I was acclimating and adapting to a new environment. It took time and patience and an open mind.”

Both Zendejas and Trask bring a wealth of lived experience to their classrooms, something invaluable that's hard to find in textbooks. They both also found meaningful teaching careers at Escondido Adult School after not finding the right fit elsewhere. Trask, who was burned out working full-time and wearing several hats at a middle school, says she found it easier to balance life and work with a part-time adult school teaching schedule. Zendejas found adult school to be a more supportive environment for students than the private institution she was teaching at, a priority that better aligned with her own.



Teacher Polina Trask teaches her ESL class as one of Escondido's adult school educators.

“I love seeing the transformation of students. I love seeing how they come in—just like I was at one time—and I love being able to relate to them because I was in their shoes many, many years ago,” she says. “I love seeing the transformation, I love seeing their self-esteem build up, learn new skills and then go off to their externships, their jobs, and moving forward.”

Another thing both Trask and Zendejas agree on is how enjoyable they find their job, particularly working with their students.

“I love my job for many reasons, but the most enjoyable aspect is probably my students,” Trask says. “You have wonderful students who know they want to be here, and they're really committed, they're really grateful, and they're very, very kind. My students honestly take out the ‘begrudgingly getting out of bed in the morning to go to work’ element out of my day because I look forward to seeing my students every day.”



Escondido Adult School teacher Maricxa Zendejas at her evening medical assistant class at Del Lago Academy high school. Photos by Charlie Neuman

Zendejas agrees, noting that students who want to be in the classroom make a world of difference for teachers and for themselves.

“They're looking for that change, they're looking for a fast career, they're looking to get their foot in the door at something,” Zendejas says. “If anybody is looking into adult education, these adults want to be there, they want to make the change. ... It's really rewarding for me.”



To find out more about the opportunities waiting for you at Escondido Adult School, visit www.escondidoadultschool.org or call 760-737-8000 for more information.