

# GETTING BACK IN FOCUS

## Improved language skills help photographer and Poway Adult School ESL student continue career in her new country

By Whip Villarreal

When Elizabeth Wheeler immigrated from Tijuana, Mexico, to the United States, her English was extremely limited. It was impossible for her to carry a meaningful conversation in English. Even going to the grocery store or ordering food was a stressful task. Limitations she faced from the language barrier—and the desire to further the career she started in her native country—proved to be her motivating factors to improve her language skills. Determined to start learning, she discovered English as a second language classes offered in her community at Poway Adult School, and quickly enrolled.

**“I went to Poway Adult School to continue my career and not settle for a job I didn’t want.”**

**Elizabeth Wheeler, Poway Adult School student and professional photographer**

Wheeler says she received a college degree in photography and operated her own photography business in Mexico. She had aspirations of becoming a corporate photographer when she arrived in the U.S. and realized that understanding and communicating in English was essential for a successful career.

To help ensure her proficiency in English, Wheeler also attended professional communication certification classes. All of her courses spanned six months to complete when she attended in 2021.

“When I came to the U.S., I wanted to have something like I had before in Mexico,”

Wheeler says. “I was not only doing photography, I was working in marketing, creating brands and content for clients, and even offered website development. That’s why I went to Poway Adult School ... to continue my career and not settle for a job that I didn’t want.”

Even as she embraced the challenge of learning English, lockdowns from the COVID-19 pandemic forced her to attend classes remotely through online instruction. This presented to be a more difficult obstacle than she initially expected. Despite the challenges she faced, she persevered and even expanded her English vocabulary faster than she anticipated. She credits a bulk of her success to her teacher, Ms. Jacquie.

“When I was learning English, I had great help from my teacher, Ms. Jacquie [Jacquie Uriell, co-lead ESL teacher at Poway Adult School]. She’s the best teacher I have ever had,” Wheeler says. “I had previously taken English courses during my college career in Mexico and never really learned it well. Thanks to Ms. Jacquie, I learned so much and it allowed me to have the job that I have now. She also helped me with my interview skills and we practiced together. I will never forget that.”

After completing her courses at PAS, she was hired as photographer for a high-end medical spa in La Jolla. Wheeler has been working there for more than two years. Although she has completed her studies, she still occasionally returns to the campus to photograph school events as a way to help give back.

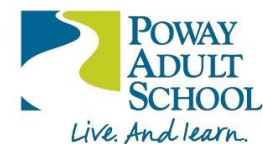
She attributes the opportunities she received to the education she pursued at PAS. Her advice for those who want to become fluent in English or to create more job opportunities for themselves is to not let doubt interfere with pursuing those goals.

“Don’t waste your time and don’t be afraid ... it’s not too hard if you have the



Improved language skills help photographer and Poway Adult School ESL student Elizabeth Wheeler continue career in her new country. Photo courtesy of Elizabeth Wheeler

right support system and teachers, like at Poway Adult School,” Wheeler says. “They are going to help guide you through your studies. It happened to me and I am so happy that I was able to find this place.”



Poway Adult School is one of almost 300 adult schools in California that are operated by K-12 school districts. California Adult Schools provide education, training, and support services to ensure that adult learners reach their education and workforce goals. For more information, visit [powayadultschool.powayusd.com](http://powayadultschool.powayusd.com) or call (858) 668-4012.