

FAST LEARNER

ESL student and mother of twins proves to be exceptional student once childcare needs met

By Whip Villarreal

Ana Briceida Ortiz embarked on a transformative journey when she arrived in the United States from Mexico in January 2023. When she began living in the U.S., she did not have any ability to read, write or speak English on any level. She wanted to take classes to improve her language, but—as a stay-at-home mother of toddler-aged twins—her childcare needs seemed like an insurmountable barrier.

Ortiz learned that Poway Adult School offers an ESL program at Valley Elementary School, right in her neighborhood. The ESL classes at this site also provide childcare so parents who have children who are younger than school age can attend school while their older children attend school. This assistance enabled her to enroll in English as a second language classes, which she continues to attend.

“When I started classes, my level of English was the lowest, but that is not a barrier for me because I have been learning little by little,” says Ortiz. “I have observed the positive change in my understanding of English and have even seen significant changes in myself.”

Ortiz recognizes that mastering English is crucial for her career goals and personal life. She says that she hopes that learning English will open up more opportunities to continue the career as a special education teacher—which she began in her native Mexico—in the U.S. Other motivations she cites include supporting her children’s academic development; visiting the doctor without needing to request an interpreter; and being able to carry on conversations with her English-speaking friends, neighbors, and classmates.

“I would love to be able to communicate with my children’s teacher, without having to use Google Translate,” explains Ortiz. “I look forward to being able to communicate



Ana Ortiz is able to take ESL classes because Poway Adult School helped meet her childcare needs. Photo Courtesy of Ana Briceida Ortiz

with my teacher at Poway Adult School and to be able to talk about different topics with more fluid communication in English.”

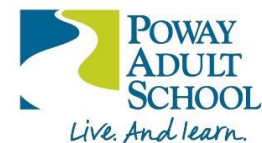
Her advice to those enrolled in ESL courses or struggling to learn the language is to attend classes daily, take class notes and listen carefully to the teacher. She emphasized the importance of class participation, reviewing lessons at home and practicing pronunciation and writing skills. Ortiz says that a helpful practice she found was to make study cards on important topics and ideas.

Ortiz’s ESL teacher, Lauryl Buckel, said that Ortiz is an exceptional student: “When Ana started in my class, she didn’t speak a word of English, but she’s always the first to show up and the last to leave. We had to start with the very basics, like the alphabet and simple phonetics, and it’s amazing how far she’s come so fast.”

Buckel said that within six months Ortiz was the only one in her class to score 100 percent on a citizenship test administered

in English. Now, roughly 18 months into studying the language, Buckel says Ortiz tests at a medium to high level and is well on her way to fluency.

“She is very bright, but what really stands out is just how hard she works,” Buckel said. “She’s a very dedicated student.”



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 or call (858) 668-4012.