



## Washtenaw Literacy

### TUTORING PAIR PROFILE: **Bob and Kaba**



ON A LATE summer afternoon at the Mallets Creek branch library, Washtenaw Literacy volunteer tutor Bob Heinold and his learner Kaba are hard at work. Bob's briefcase sits on the table, packed with books, worksheets and lesson plans. The two men methodically complete a vocabulary exercise together. Bob and Kaba's life experiences may be worlds apart, but as a tutoring pair they're a perfect match.

Kaba came to the U.S. from Ivory Coast in 2001. He intended to stay for only a few months. Plans changed as civil war raged in his homeland, making it unsafe to return. "Every time I call, I hear from friends: don't come back," he says.

Bob is from New York State, where he was an English teacher planning to retire at 70. Ten years ago a job opportunity for his wife brought the two of them to Ann Arbor and an early retirement for Bob. He has been volunteering with local nonprofits ever since.

Today's lesson is number 53 for the pair. Although he has mastered the rhythm of spoken English, Kaba has trouble producing particular sounds and understanding when native speakers blend words together. He is also learning to read and write in English, his sixth language.

When asked how much English he knew on his arrival in the U.S., Kaba laughs and answers, "Zero." He says his coworkers and others have been very helpful. "Bob help me more than everybody," he adds. Here Bob interjects, "The

fact that he's working in restaurants makes my job easier. He's immersed in English."

Kaba also immerses himself in study. Each week he spends three hours on homework materials Bob has prepared for him. Bob creates videos of workbook exercises with narration so Kaba can practice his listening skills. He also provides a script for reading practice. Kaba will watch the video several times in a day, then read the script and complete the exercises.

Bob's lessons have practical applications. Before he started working with Bob, Kaba couldn't use an ATM or fill out a job application. Now he can do both without difficulty. He recently started a second job, one the pair found together online. Kaba wants to learn to use a computer and to continue improving his life by strengthening his literacy skills.

When asked if his confidence is improving, Kaba says it's improving every day. Bob laughs and says, "This guy is just being polite. He's always confident!" Kaba laughs, too. It's clear the pair is enjoying their tutoring experience together. Says Bob, "This is a lot of fun."

Washtenaw Literacy  
5577 Whittaker Road  
Ypsilanti, MI 48197  
734-879-1320

[www.washtenawliteracy.org](http://www.washtenawliteracy.org)

