



Washtenaw Literacy

LEARNER PROFILE: Kenny Vladaj



KENNY VLADAJ was fleeing for his life when he arrived in the United States from Kosovo. By 1999, the region of Serbia had dissolved into civil war. The economy was in shambles and nearly three-quarters of the houses in Kenny's war-torn neighborhood were destroyed.

Once peaceful neighbors had become enemies. Political grudges became violent. The chief of police wanted Kenny dead. Terrified for his life and the lives of his family, Kenny felt the best way to protect them was to flee. He made a narrow escape and found his way to Ann Arbor.

Kenny struggled to find a home, land a job and build a life in Ann Arbor. One of his biggest challenges was learning a new language so he could accomplish the most basic tasks in his new country.

Fortunately, there was help in his corner. Washtenaw Literacy and his new employer, Malloy, Inc., had just started an English as a second language tutoring program. Kenny jumped at the chance to receive tutoring right at his workplace.

Kenny and his tutor, coworker Lois Thompson, worked every week to build the English skills he needed on the job and at home. Kenny progressed rapidly and practiced his new skills at every opportunity. Kenny has come a long way since he first arrived as a refugee. He has reunited

his family, a wife and four children, in Ann Arbor. He is studying computers. Things are going well at work.

Still, one major goal looms ahead — U.S. citizenship. The process is slow, but Kenny is determined.

Kenny, who was nearly killed by a policeman in Kosovo, recalls a brush with the Ann Arbor force. While driving, he accidentally ran a stop sign and was pulled over by a police officer. It was a small thing. But his daughter, who had just arrived in this country, was terrified.

The officer let Kenny go with a warning. Kenny used the experience to teach his daughter that the police in this country are not like those in Kosovo. Here, they are sworn to protect residents.

Kenny believes deeply in this country's commitment to protect its people at home and abroad and in the liberty of its citizens. Those freedoms are framed forever in the Constitution. And Kenny is proud that soon he will be swearing his allegiance to the document — which he will be able to read in its original language.

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

www.washtenawliteracy.org

