



### **Pablo - Why I volunteer?**

During my first 28 years I grew up, was educated, and started my professional career in Guatemala. For work reasons, I moved to Panama. After a decade of living and forming a family in Panama, we came to Nashville in 2019 (again for work reasons).

Growing up in Guatemala I got a chance to see firsthand the struggles and needs that some families face. That is why I understand why some people make the hard

decision to leave everything behind and migrate to a new country: starting from zero, no family or friends, and without knowledge of the English language.

I can relate to all of this, except the fact that I had the privilege to be born into a family where studying was my #1 expectation until I graduated from college and to have supportive parents that made several sacrifices to put four kids through college. Just for perspective, according to the 2018 census only 4.5% of the population has a college degree in Guatemala.

I went to a Jesuit school that had a saying: “Hombres al servicio de los demás” (“Men to the service of others”), those words left a mark on me. Over the years I sporadically volunteered in one off events: painting schools, building playgrounds, or delivering Christmas gifts to kids from marginal areas of the city.

That is why about a year and a half ago, when a co-worker told me about the Begin Anew program, I jumped at the opportunity to be able to give back to my fellow Central Americans and teach them a lifelong tool that will help them thrive as they start their new life in the US.

I admire the courage, resilience, and drive that my students have, coming to class for two hours after a long day at work demonstrates those behaviors. I feel energized by them, regardless of how tiring or stressful my week has been. I love seeing their reactions when a concept sinks in, when at the end of each class I ask what they learned, and they start listing the different things that they will be able to start applying.

Being a Level 1 English teacher, I see my students evolve from being shy and feeling inferior to start forming conversations, creating friendships, and even asking me tough questions like the sounds of the long and short vowels. Even simple things like having students share excitedly that they were able to make a doctor’s appointment on the phone, shows me that they are becoming more confident and independent.

If you are thinking about volunteering, I highly recommend it. You have the chance to make a positive impact that will forever change the life of one person, a whole family, and the community. To be able to guide their journey into a new country and help them have more successful and meaningful lives is something you cannot take for granted.