

## December Spotlight - Avi Leibovici

Laughter drifts out of OSEC's Activity Room on a Wednesday afternoon as members give their undivided attention to their Beginner Spanish teacher, Avi Leibovici, a multilingual educator, longtime social worker, volunteer, and self-described comedian. Avi has been volunteering at OSEC for about five months, and he is already a beloved teacher and member of the ONEgeneration community. He seamlessly blends humor with language education, making his classroom a lively environment for everyone who attends. Avi describes having a profound respect for people who want to feel closer to all cultures, to immigrants, to the history of California.

Avi's path to teaching Spanish at ONEgeneration is anything but ordinary. Avi's parents were survivors of the Holocaust. When his parents escaped, they moved to South America where they rebuilt their lives. Avi was born in Bolivia and moved to Uruguay at the age of two. His parents inspired him to make a difference in this world, a sentiment very close to his heart. Avi has a passion for learning new languages. In fact, he speaks four languages fluently and is currently learning a fifth! Spanish is his native language, but he also speaks Romanian, Hebrew, English, and is currently studying Italian.

Avi has worn many hats throughout his life, all of which focus on helping others. He received his master's degree in social work from UCLA and is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW). He was the CEO of VISTAS for over 30 years, a non-profit agency that provides day programs for adults with developmental disabilities and mental health conditions. He has also volunteered at several elementary schools in the Sherman Oaks and Van Nuys areas, mentoring and tutoring children, especially those struggling with language, and has facilitated Spanish-speaking parenting groups to help families build stronger skills at home.

Across all of these experiences runs a common thread: his belief that everyone is born with a gift. In Japan, he explains that this concept is known as "ikigai." "In my case, that has to do with working with people. Teaching, being a therapist, being a social worker—they all fit with what I am supposed to be doing," Avi said. Then, with a smile, he added, "Part of my ikigai is to be a comedian."

What Avi loves most about teaching is the opportunity to provide his students with knowledge. "Knowledge is power. That's why I teach," he said. Thanks to Avi, his students leave each class feeling more confident, empowered, and connected with the Spanish language.

Outside of volunteering at OSEC, Avi loves spending time with his grandchildren—two who live nearby, ages 3 ½ and 1 ½, and two who live in the Bay Area, ages 12 and 14. He also enjoys spending time with his wife and two daughters, all of whom are also in helping and healing professions. His wife is a nurse and volunteers as a certified nail-care specialist for individuals who are unable to do it themselves, one

daughter is a nurse at UCLA, and his other daughter has a doctorate in physical therapy.

When asked what Avi is grateful for, he said that he is grateful for his parents. "They always emphasized that I wasn't even supposed to be born," he said. "If I am alive, I want to make a difference." Avi believes deeply in the importance of living a meaningful life, one rooted not just in physical needs but also in purpose. "We all need to make a difference," he said. For him, one of the simplest and most powerful ways to make a difference is to be kind. His favorite expression captures this idea beautifully: "We are free to be kind." As Avi gently puts it, "Kindness makes you beautiful."

Join Avi's Beginner Spanish Class on Wednesdays at 12:30pm in OSEC's Activity Room.