

Activities Undertaken

- Setting up and delivering ESOL classes to asylum seeker learners (beneficiaries).
- Delivering teacher training workshops to volunteer tutors.
- Assessing beneficiaries and completing registration forms.
- Recruiting, supporting and supervising volunteer tutors to teach classes.
- Recruiting, supporting and supervising volunteer language assistants for classes (including 2 beneficiaries).
- Producing ESOL teaching materials.

Context

Classes took place at Windows For Sudan Refugee Community Organisation from November 2003 – January 2004, at Arian Housing from November 2003-August 2004, and at City Road Emergency Accommodation from March 2004 to present. Registration for these classes was on a roll-on-roll-off basis as new learners arrived continuously and others were dispersed to other housing and no longer lived at the emergency accommodation centres. Each class was taught by two volunteer tutors, with the exception of some provision during November 2003 at Arian Housing which was on a one-to-one basis. At City Road we also utilised 3 language assistants, who helped learners within each class, as well as registering and assessing newcomers to the group. We also took a group of learners from City Road on a trip on 24th July 2004 to Aston Hall which formed part of their learning programme. Tutors have been developing materials as the classes have developed and student evaluations have been carried out. We have also fully supported the volunteers involved with these classes.

Outputs

We have trained 128 beneficiaries in total. 5 attended our teacher training sessions and 123 have been registered at the classes.

Outcomes

We have trained 52 indirect beneficiaries through our teacher training workshops.

One volunteer tutor attended training for new ESOL qualifications at LLU+. Another volunteer tutor attended a 2-day ESOL Core Curriculum training staged by NIACE.

Number of completers

8 beneficiaries

Number of non-completers

120 beneficiaries

Impact of the Classes

The classes have enabled learners to access ESOL provision in the centre where they are living. It has made access to English language easier, and for some it is the only provision they are accessing. From student evaluations, when asked what the impact of the lessons have been, students gave the following feedback:-

“start to understand English and writing a letters [sic.] and reading a newspapers.”

“Reading, conversation, verbs.”

“very good.”

“Different things which are important like type of sports, giving his own identity, reading, conversation, verbs etc....”

“I like the course and the teacher including his assistants.”

“Providing his identity, sports and conversation.”

“thinks [sic.] you for the teacher about the UK.”

“speaking, writing, reading.”

We found that conversational English, both formal and informal was the most requested skill to focus on, particularly in relation to speaking to a doctor, teacher, solicitor or hostel manager. Listening to formal conversation was more popular than informal conversation and reading and understanding formal letters was of the greatest importance to learners. They also felt that reading newspapers or emails was significantly important, but not as important as reading and understanding formal letters. Writing formal letters, CVs and emails were the most popular writing skill to focus on. We found that these needs reflected exactly our learners' current circumstances where many are dealing with immigration forms and letters and having to meet with solicitors, advisors, hostel managers and doctors to register themselves. No learner was learning for pleasure, but as a necessity since they have arrived in the UK. We therefore developed a scheme of work that took these needs into account, and so the learning that took place was very much English for survival.

One beneficiary, as a result of attending the class, began to volunteer as a language assistant to other learners, as well as being able to translate for his friends when dealing with housing authorities and landlords (see Appendix 1). Three beneficiaries began volunteering as research assistants, researching information on the internet to compile a Welcome to Birmingham pack. This involved registering at Birmingham Central Library in order to access the internet there, and selecting relevant information and translating it into their own words, in English, for the pack itself. One beneficiary has since put this information into a document to be available through the ASSET UK website. One beneficiary began volunteering with the Central Co-ordination Team for ASSET UK updating a database of contacts for the ASSET UK newsletter, assisting with filing in the main office and researching contacts for the newsletter using the internet. Three beneficiaries have attended internal and external showcasing events for ASSET UK, contributing to workshop discussions and giving presentations to partners within the ASSET UK project and to external delegates attending dissemination events for TES.

Equal Opportunities Impact

- We have provided classes to many learners who have difficulty accessing mainstream ESOL provision, namely women with young children and those who do not feel confident to register with a mainstream ESOL provider. These learners have still been able to access English language classes while they have been residing in Birmingham when they otherwise may not have received any ESOL provision at all.
- Providing day saver bus passes to enable beneficiary volunteer language assistants to attend classes and work with those learners needing extra help during lessons.
- Providing travel costs to enable volunteers to teach these classes.
- Delivering teacher training workshops to volunteer ESOL tutors in order to raise awareness of the needs of asylum seeker learners. This ensured that tutors had access to relevant training in order to support their volunteering. It also ensured that as volunteers, the tutors had access to a training opportunity that they otherwise may not have had.
- We ensured that a female tutor was available to teach at the emergency accommodation centre so that women students felt more comfortable attending.
- We tried to ensure we were aware of learners' additional learning needs by carrying out initial assessments and individual learning plans.
- We have ensured that beneficiaries have been involved at every training event we run, and that they have input into workshops and their own learning experience thus encouraging full involvement from beneficiaries and ensuring their needs are heard and acted upon, and that they are benefitting fully from ASSET UK by taking part in related events and training.

Lessons learnt

Learners gave us the following feedback on how we could improve our classes:-

"Would like to be provided with book for learning exercise if possible."

"To be talking whit [sic.] another student."

"To be given some books for reading exercises."

We acknowledge that we were unable to provide any books for learners to use outside of the lessons. It was very difficult for us to find resources, and many tutors were using the new Skills for Life ESOL materials that have been recently developed and which are not in text-book format, but are loose pages in a file that can be photocopied. Most of the materials we used were developed by the tutors as they taught, rather than using a set text-book. This actually worked well as many learners did not remain in the accommodation centres for very long, and therefore were unable to complete sometimes lengthy chapters in text books before feeling as though they had achieved anything. We did not regularly give out homework as many learners were not attending continuously, although this is something that we still could have and should have done more rigidly as it may have helped some of the learners re: the above comments about exercises to read. We did encourage learners to

speak with each other in English as much as possible outside of the lessons, particularly as they all lived together in the accommodation centre. We always found, however, that many spoke their own languages with others in the centres who spoke the same.

We needed to make our registration and initial assessment procedure more separate from the actual lessons. This is because sometimes there were so many new learners to register and assess that the lesson did not begin on time and thus other learners were not given the full two hours they should have received. We rectified this somewhat by having language assistants to register and assess new arrivals so the tutor could begin the lesson on time. With the nature of the learners and their circumstances, we have learnt not to try and implement a rigid registration and assessment process in the same two hours that the lesson takes place in. It is more beneficial we have found to ensure that no matter who arrives for a lesson, whether they are previous or new learners that week, that they receive a full two hour lesson and that we register them prior to or after the class. This is because we wanted to ensure that they were receiving as much English language as possible, as some only remained at the centre for two or three weeks before being dispersed. One suggestion from a tutor is that perhaps people's English language level could be assessed as soon as they arrive at an accommodation centre so that tutors are aware of what levels of English residents have before they join a class.

We learnt to create lessons which were self-contained and did not continue onto the following week, again as many learners only attended one or two classes. We felt it was important that they had some sense of achievement no matter how few lessons they attended, and this was addressed by ensuring a lesson was finished and nothing was carried over, unfinished, to the following week. We also gave out attendance certificates to learners so they had some evidence of their learning to take with them. This gesture was very popular with learners and many said that they felt as though they had achieved something with their English and were happy to have evidence of that in the form of a certificate.

We learnt to be flexible with learners and to take into account their current circumstances and the external pressures and needs they have. We also had to adapt very quickly to the number of learners who attended classes each week. Some groups consisted of twenty learners one week, and only five the next, and so tutors had to be prepared in terms of photocopying worksheets and materials, the level(s) that they may be teaching and the fact that some learners would be attending from previous weeks but there would nearly always be new learners in attendance as well. This meant that working relationships with individual learners were not as strong as among a group that had been working together for a longer period of time, but each tutor ensured that new learners were welcomed into the class. This is an additional reason for ensuring no lesson was carried over from the previous week, as any new learners would have to try to catch up with the rest of the group and may not feel as though they truly understood or were part of that particular lesson.

It was incredibly important, for learners' self-esteem, confidence, language skills and mental well-being to ensure they were able to participate in other activities outside of the ESOL classes. Those who did participate found it helped their confidence and language skills (see Appendix 1) and most importantly their mental well-being. It also gave them a greater understanding of ASSET UK and why we had established the classes in the first instance. Our beneficiary volunteers have expressed an interest in becoming involved in other projects that may be implemented after ASSET UK, as they have not only enjoyed, but understood the benefits it has had for them. We actually found that the classes acted as a gateway for learners to take part in other activities and events outside of the ESOL provision, mainly by having the tutor refer learners on if they expressed an interest in becoming more involved. We would like to stress that this has been one of the most important impacts of our ESOL classes in emergency accommodation, as well as enabling beneficiaries to improve their English language skills.

Appendix 1



LEARNING EXPERIENCE



My name is **CELESTIN OLINGOU**. I have been in the UK since May 2004. I'm an asylum seeker. I come from Congo Brazzaville. My qualification is Industrial Planning, I was teaching and working in the Humanitarian Association called Observatoire Congolais des Droits de l'Homme (OCDH). In English, the Human Rights Congolese Observatory in my free time.

When I arrived in this country I didn't speak or write in English, I couldn't understand English speakers. Swiftly, I made an application to learn English at City College and I joined an English class in the Hostel (Emergency Accommodation) with the ASSET-UK project, where I acquired some knowledge. At this time I can understand, speak and write more than before.

This experience gave me the opportunity to translate for some people's meetings in the Hostel, also in my new apartment when we received a visit from the authorities and the case workers, I can now explain everything that we need, I can make appointments anywhere especially for myself.

In this learning I'm involved in voluntary work with ASSET-UK, I was an assistant teacher and I received transport every week. Now I am collecting information to help asylum seekers to integrate in to British society.

I hope ASSET-UK will continue to assist asylum seekers to integrate in to UK society.

thanks

