

Family Support Through Teaching English Program

Many asylum seekers now living in our community speak little English, though they may have attended some basic English classes in detention. Unfortunately, once they are living independently in the community, they are not eligible for the free English language teaching available to other refugees and migrant families. They often live in Melbourne's outer suburbs and have few, if any, funds available to pay for English classes and the travel to and from them. Some asylum seeker families have young children and therefore are unable to leave home for extended periods to be taught in a classroom situation.



Limited English skills put them at a distinct disadvantage in their ability to access the resources and services necessary for daily survival in Australia.

Added to these difficulties is the isolation experienced by many asylum seekers. They may have little knowledge of their local area and Australian customs, culture, and ways of doing things. They may have few, if any family or trusted friends to give them sound advice and moral support.

Conversational English language skills and the support of trusted friends are fundamentally important to enable asylum seekers to start to rebuild their lives and integrate successfully into our community.

The Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project is running a Family Support Through Teaching English Program to try and address some of these needs.

Why volunteer?

The work is very rewarding. It can be a lot of fun! Of course, it can also be difficult at times.

These are comments by some of our volunteers:

Christine: *"After each lesson we drive off feeling we have been with friends and that we have made a small but real contribution to their lives and hopes."*

Phil: *"I really enjoy teaching my family group, which consists of three young men from Iran. They are enthusiastic, really grateful to us and always do their homework! They make us very welcome each week. They are fun to teach and have a good sense of humour."*

Jenny: *"I believe that people deserve a fair go no matter where they come from. The ability to converse in English is essential to assist them in feeling less isolated."*

Some Key Questions & Answers about the Program

<p>How does it work?</p>	<p>Our volunteers work in pairs, providing support to each other and the ability to be flexible with holidays and other priorities. Each volunteer pair visits their asylum seeker family once a week and spends about an hour teaching conversational English. The day and time of each visit is agreed between the family and the volunteers and may be varied as necessary. Developing friendship and trust between our volunteer teachers and their asylum seeker family is an important element of the program. Each visit provides an opportunity for the family members and the volunteers to get to know each other a little better. Some of our volunteers choose to undertake other activities with their family such as visits to shopping centres, libraries, op shops, places of interest, etc.</p>
<p>Where are asylum seekers based?</p>	<p>The families tend to live in areas North, West and Southeast of Melbourne where rent is more affordable.</p> <p>Current volunteers visit suburbs including Sunshine, Epping, Dandenong, Broadmeadows, Glenroy, Werribee and Lalor.</p>
<p>Is there any support for lesson ideas?</p>	<p>We have an active curriculum committee that provides ideas, curriculum, teaching materials and samples of lessons that can be used by our volunteers. Often our volunteers tailor their teaching to the specific needs of each family.</p> <p>We provide picture dictionaries for each family in their language and English and notebooks and pencils.</p>
<p>Who may volunteer?</p>	<p>Many of our volunteers have experience as teachers and some have experience in teaching English as a Second Language (ESL). However, our volunteers need not have any teaching experience. Where a volunteer has no teaching experience, they will generally be paired with an experienced teacher where possible.</p> <p>Although our teachers generally work with adults, all volunteers must hold a Working With Children Check before participating in the program.</p>
<p>What if the family needs other help?</p>	<p>We have developed a resource list to assist the Asylum Seekers with their needs. This is constantly being updated. Our volunteers are often able to assist families by referring them to other agencies.</p>

Do you think you can help? Please contact us for more information:

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