

# CONNECTING CULTURES

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**ENGLISH  
LANGUAGE PARTNERS  
NEW ZEALAND**

Working with Migrants and Refugees

[www.englishlanguage.org.nz](http://www.englishlanguage.org.nz)



Strategic role for Auckland  
*Page 5*



Teaching via skype  
*Page 11*



Tampa links to new life  
*Page 6*



# In this issue

- 4 **Auckland launch**  
Working with migrants and refugees in Aotearoa's largest city
- 5 **With Auckland's future in mind** *Patricia Thompson*  
A new role with an Auckland focus
- 6 **Tampa rescue links to a new life** *Patricia Thompson*  
Mohammad Amiri, Afghan community leader
- 9 **Volunteering in an earthquake zone** *Justine Storey*  
Rachel Sonius took on a unique role
- 11 **Skype me for English** *Patricia Thompson*  
New learning opportunities in one-to-one teaching
- 13 **Education: key to new life** *Richard Mays*  
Chuda Ghimirey: assisting the Lhotshampa community
- 14 **Surviving camp life** *Richard Mays*  
Life for Lhotshampa in a Nepali refugee camp
- 16 **Connecting to the workplace** *Patricia Thompson*  
Job Mentoring Service celebrates 10 successful years
- 18 **GUEST WORD: A future together** *Hon Tariana Turia, co-leader, Maori Party*

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New Zealand 2012  
PO Box 12-114, Wellington 6144  
Phone 04 471 2382  
Email [natoffice@englishlanguage.org.nz](mailto:natoffice@englishlanguage.org.nz)  
Web [www.englishlanguage.org.nz](http://www.englishlanguage.org.nz)

Editor Grace Bassett  
Email [grace.bassett@englishlanguage.org.nz](mailto:grace.bassett@englishlanguage.org.nz)

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Photo Antony Kitchener

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# Kia ora Welcome

In this *Connecting Cultures*, we feature the launch of *Investing in Auckland's Wellbeing*; a new resource to support our Auckland work. Developed for ethnic communities, like-minded organisations, businesses and for Auckland Council, it provides key information on the services we provide to 3,000 Auckland-based learners.

The city is the final destination for more than half the country's migrants and refugees. With nearly 40 per cent of 1.4 million Aucklanders born off-shore, and with English-language acquisition such a critical factor in successful settlement outcomes, our work there continues to grow.

We welcome Charles Hayward to the newly-created, Auckland-based role of Strategic Development Manager. With the recent changes in Auckland, Charles' work will support English Language Partners' developments in the Auckland region.



The Christchurch earthquakes created new volunteering experiences for Cantabrians. There are many amazing stories, and we've chosen to feature Rachel Sonius, a remarkable home tutor who readily admits that doing nothing is something she is "just no good at".

Also featured in this *Connecting Cultures* are the stories of two refugees, both strong advocates for their communities; Mohammad Amiri who, along with 437 other Afghans, was rescued by the cargo ship *Tampa*, and Chuda Ghimirey, a tower of strength in Manawatu's Lhotshampa community.

I would like to thank the Honourable Tariana Turia, co-leader of the Maori Party, for her 'Guest Word' in support of the work of our volunteers, and for her poignant words on the importance of migrants and refugees retaining their language and culture: "the very essence of who they are".

**Nicola Sutton**  
Chief Executive  
English Language Partners New Zealand

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## English Language Partners New Zealand

We are 280 staff and 3,000 volunteers working with 8,000 migrants and refugees in 23 New Zealand locations

We provide a range of English language programmes and settlement support via a unique blend of professional teachers and trained volunteers

Find us [www.englishlanguage.org.nz](http://www.englishlanguage.org.nz)

Join us! Train as a volunteer

# Auckland launch

*Investing in Auckland's Wellbeing* offers an overview of English Language Partners' people and programmes.

The new publication provides key information about the 3,000 learners accessing the organisation's services annually, their ethnicities, language levels and backgrounds.

It also highlights the 1,000 trained volunteers and 80 teaching staff who deliver services.

Charles Hayward, Strategic Development Manager, says, for those new to English, the service provides a crucial bridge to a new language and culture. "The work we do builds confidence in English, making it easier for people to pursue their aspirations, and to feel they really belong here."

He says the publication is a timely resource, providing practical information for ethnic communities, like-minded organisations and agencies, businesses and for Auckland Council.

"We deliver in the community, the home and the workplace. As collaboration is a key organisational strategy, it's important we get the message out about our partnership approach and the kinds of programmes we deliver.

"With Auckland's population fast approaching 1.4 million, and the recent amalgamation of the Auckland regions into a super city, it makes good sense

for us to look at Auckland as a whole."

Dr Camille Nakhid, chair of the Auckland Council's Ethnic Peoples Advisory Panel, launched *Investing in Auckland's Wellbeing* on 4 November. She spoke of the importance of engaging in the community to learn about Aotearoa, its peoples and its ways.

A migrant from Trinidad and Tobago, Dr Nakhid said one of the most heart-warming aspects of English Language Partners was the never-ending commitment of its volunteers. "We are especially grateful for providing our ethnic communities, not only with the English skills we need, but with the true Kiwi relationship and hospitality we have come to respect and enjoy.

"*Investing in Auckland's Wellbeing* is dedicated to Auckland's courageous new settlers who have come here, ready to brave not only the major task of learning how to be Rugby World Cup fanatics but how to be English-language learners, a task made easier by English Language Partners who truly believe, as we all do, that the diversity brought by migrants and refugees enriches New Zealand society." ✂

Contact [natoffice@englishlanguage.org.nz](mailto:natoffice@englishlanguage.org.nz) for a copy



## Adult Learners' Week celebration

The launch event was held during Adult Learners' Week, allowing English Language Partners' four Auckland centres to acknowledge outstanding learners and volunteers. Dr Jian Yang, a director at the NZ Asia Institute, Auckland University and newly-elected National Party MP, presented awards to eight English Language Partners' members for their achievements in 2011.

# With Auckland's *future in mind*

Charles Hayward, Strategic Development Manager for English Language Partners, brings extensive training and language teaching experience to the newly-created role. Patricia Thompson

However Charles, who's located in Auckland, says that he won't be making any assumptions based on his previous experience, and plans to spend time gaining a thorough understanding of the organisation.

"I'm also training to be a volunteer tutor with English Language Partners, something I started before this job came up," he says. "I thought I would be good at it because of my ESOL experience but I quickly found out that it is a whole new sector, and assumptions I had made about it were not true.

"So I think it's important to do lots of listening first before zoning in on a strategy. This is a new role with no blueprint to follow. I want to gain a thorough understanding of the Auckland environment, who the providers are, what they are delivering, where the niches are and how we can position English Language Partners to continue as a credible provider of services."

Charles began his working career in the Navy as a navigation specialist, before a two-year OE working his way around various countries, with jobs including working on a fishing boat on the Sea of Galilee.

Returning to Auckland he worked in corporate training and managed

a private training establishment for school leavers and unemployed people before heading to Japan where he helped set up an outward bound-based training company offering leadership and problem-solving training for business people.

When that three-year contract was completed he decided to stay on as a full-time English teacher, spending another five years in Japan. During this time he met and married his wife Kazumi, also a language teacher. ►

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Charles Hayward



PHOTOS: MARK SMITH



## “Auckland is full of opportunity with lots of scope.”

► He was among the team that pioneered new ways of teaching Japanese children English, and helped introduce ‘native speaker’-run classes in Japanese high schools.

Returning to New Zealand, he taught at an English language school in Auckland before joining the New Zealand Marine ITO (NZMITO) as Learning Development Manager.

He was responsible for literacy and numeracy, and revolutionised the way boatbuilding apprentices training is managed; introducing e-learning into what had been a purely text-book-based learning environment. This was very well received.

At the same time, Charles was pursuing his interest in ESOL; studying for an MA in adult literacy and numeracy education at Auckland University of Technology. He is now also studying for a diploma in TESOL through Trinity College Cambridge.

“I focused the MA a lot around ESOL. So much so that I went outside the scope of the coursework for my final major project; researching the difference between ESOL and literacy and how they should be treated differently for different groups.”

Having finished his MA, he decided to train as a volunteer tutor with English Language Partners North Shore.

“My mother, who’s a librarian in Auckland, was a volunteer tutor a number of years ago and told me about her Croatian learner,” he says.

“I thought it was a brilliant idea. It’s good for the learner, good for the economy of New Zealand, and good for the volunteer to be giving something back.

“I am very interested in settlement issues. I came to New Zealand from England when I was 12, and my wife is Japanese so I have seen her settlement experiences too. “Not long after I had started my training this position came up. My three-year contract with NZMITO was coming to an end and I could see that this role offered really exciting opportunities.”


Charles’ role includes creating new opportunities for English Language Partners in Auckland.

“Auckland is full of opportunity with lots of scope,” he says. “That is why it’s important to highlight English Language Partners as an organisation, the programmes they deliver, and their connections with the wider community.

English Language Partners’ Chief Executive Nicola Sutton says that the recent changes in Auckland, along with the large number of migrants making the city their home, means that now was the right time for the organisation to establish this role.

“Charles’ appointment heralds exciting possibilities for us. He brings amazing skills, knowledge and experience to the organisation.

“I can’t wait to see what we look like in the future.” ✂



**M**ohammad Ali Amiri, now living in Wellington, was one of those people. Their treatment by the then Australian government sparked a human rights controversy and generated headlines around the world.

In August, as former *Tampa* refugees marked the tenth anniversary, Mohammad was among a group invited to Australia to take part in the *SBS Insight* television show sharing their memories and stories of their lives since the Tampa rescue.

For Mohammad, who has become a leader of the Afghan community in New Zealand, a major part of his journey has been with the Allison



# Tampa rescue links to a new life

On 26 August 2001, the Norwegian cargo ship *Tampa* responded to a distress call issued by the Australian Rescue Coordination Centre, rescuing over 430 Afghan asylum seekers from their sinking boat. Patricia Thompson

family who have provided him with support and friendship, both through English Language Partners and Refugee Services.

During the 2001 rescue, the Australian government controversially refused permission for the *Tampa* to offload the asylum seekers, including children and pregnant women, at the nearest place of safety: Christmas Island.

Following a stand-off, during which Australian SAS Special Forces took control of the *Tampa*, they were eventually sent to the island country of Nauru, where they were detained for several years while their refugee status was processed.

For Mohammad, arriving in Wellington seven years ago, the welcome from volunteers assigned to help him – including Margaret Allison and her son Simon – was “a wonderful thing”.

“I met Margaret the day I arrived,” he recalls. “She was part of the group which helped me to get onto my feet, with all the day-to-day tasks from paperwork to shopping.

“It was very good. When you come to a country and you know no-one, and someone offers you help, it is the best ever thing that can happen.

“I could speak some English and the main challenge was to find a job. Margaret and her family helped so

much. Once she sat up until 3am writing my CV. I was prepared to do whatever it took, and I found a job working in a hotel kitchen.”

Once Margaret, who works as a science technician at Massey University, had taught Mohammad to drive, she also began helping him to improve his English.

“Mohammad would come to dinner every Saturday and we would do some English afterwards,” she says. “After a period I felt I needed more guidance so I went to English Language Partners and trained as a tutor. That gave me resources and support.” ▶



Margaret Allison

► Margaret continued to tutor Mohammad for several years as well as working with a second learner from Iraq.

Mohammad was almost 25 when he arrived in Wellington and had little formal education although he had worked as a tailor in Afghanistan.

“Education was very poor,” he says. “We lived in a rural area so the only education available was during the winter when it was too cold to go outside to work and we had a religious education in the mosque.

As well as working in the hotel, Mohammad took a second job in tailoring, enrolled in ESOL classes at Massey and then a one-year foundation course at Victoria University, working nights to fit around his studies.

In the meantime, his English lessons with Margaret had become firmly focussed on a very important element – his family.

When Mohammad escaped the dangerous situation in Afghanistan, he left behind an extended family, including his parents, Sadiqah and Mohammad Amir Amiri and younger siblings.

Unknown to him they had also fled, to Pakistan. However, by an incredible coincidence, another refugee Mohammad had befriended and helped on Nauru, moved to Karachi and one day he overheard an Afghan couple talking about how they did not know the whereabouts of their eldest son.

“When you come to a country and you know no-one, and someone offers you help, it is the best ever thing that can happen.”

He asked them his name, they said “Mohammad Ali Amiri” and he was able to hand them the home-made card, with their son’s e-mail address, which Mohammad had given to him before they left Nauru.

Determined to bring his family to New Zealand, many of his English lessons with Margaret over the ensuing years were spent completing the required paperwork.

“As soon as he became eligible to bring them here then that became a big part of the lessons,” says Margaret.

It was a long and arduous process, with setbacks, but, finally, in January this year, Mohammad’s parents and his six siblings, aged between 14 and 24, arrived. His two oldest brothers now work in a bakery and the others are attending school for the first time in their lives.

They are forging friendships, study ESOL classes with international students but are in mainstream groups for all other lessons and are thoroughly enjoying the learning experience.

So are Mohammad Amir and Sadiqah who are now learning English with Margaret too, and also attend a local ESOL class.

“I go over most evenings and we drink a lot of tea and do a little English, which is really good because that reinforces the learning,” says Margaret.

Mohammad Amir says that learning English is vital to settling well. “It is very important for everyday life,” he says. “For communication, shopping, transport, taking classes or going to the doctor. It is a challenge and we get nervous about using it but it is important to do it.”

Mohammad also works tirelessly to increase understanding of refugee issues – and his excellent English skills mean he is often asked to speak publically or be quoted in the media.

“Mohammad speaks very well publicly,” said Margaret. “When he speaks, he speaks from the heart. And everybody listens.” ✨

**SBS Insight programme <http://www.sbs.com.au/insight/episode/index/id/423/Tampa#watchonline>**





# Volunteering in *an earthquake zone*

Rachel Sonius likes to feel useful. And going that extra mile certainly isn't out of the ordinary for her.  
Justine Storey

As she says, you can decide how involved you want to be. After the devastating 22 February Christchurch earthquake, she found herself with plenty of time on her hands, and she didn't hesitate to try to help 60 English Language Partners' learners.

Rachel says she and husband Simon were lucky to have little damage to their home in the suburb of Mairehau. After they knew Simon's family were okay and had helped clean up their street, there was nothing much to do.

Without knowing when either would be back at work, Rachel said they didn't want to just sit around.

However, her involvement with English Language Partners began well before Christchurch and the aftermath of the earthquake. It was after finishing university in Wellington that Rachel trained as a volunteer.

"I love language and I love English. The origins of words fascinate me," she says. She says she's glad English is her first language as it's difficult to learn. "Just as you learn one rule, you learn something that goes against it! But reading and writing is vital. Without it how can you read street signs or fill in forms?"

Rachel initially had her doubts about whether she had the patience to teach but still went ahead, encouraged by a friend who had trained.

She first worked with a woman from India who lived around the corner. "I don't drive, so I asked for someone who lived close by.

When she moved to Christchurch, she took up the role of language tutor again. "I was new in Christchurch. I thought this would be a good way to get to know people in the neighbourhood."

She was paired with Goma Mishra, from Bhutan, who lived just two streets away.

"Life would be boring if I didn't do something a bit different. I have such a lucky life that it's good to do something for someone else."

Rachel visited Goma every week for three years. "I formed a close bond with the whole family and my visits were never just once a week. I helped with all sorts of things. Student loan applications, buying new glasses, baking sessions – all sorts of things!

"It makes me angry how 'left on their own' new people to New Zealand are. After that initial help to get here, families are left to work out so many things for themselves. ▶



Rachel and Simon Sonius

“I hated the idea of people in fear or trapped at home because they couldn’t understand what was going on or what to do.”

► “I don’t know what the family would have done if I hadn’t been there to help. It’s hard to ask for help anyway, let alone ask people to help with things like filling out applications and such.”

When Christchurch became a disaster area, Rachel and Simon were ready to help.

“Everyone had all this time, and some people I know spent it sitting around grumbling. When I got an email from Joanna Kuta, English Language Partners’ manager, asking how our learners were faring, I told her I had spoken with Goma, but also asked if was there anything else I could do.”

Rachel and Simon readily took a list of 60 learners located in surrounding suburbs, checked out as much information about food grants and other assistance as they could and set about visiting everyone.

“A lot of people had left the city, houses were empty and it was pretty scary going to some places. But I hated the idea of people in fear or trapped at home because they couldn’t understand what was going on or what to do.”

Rachel says that, fortunately, most they visited had power. However, there were five or six households who really needed help.

Rachel contacted her own family to say that if they wanted to give

money to help then they could give directly to her. She then took it upon herself to assist those they found in need.

“We couldn’t fix broken pipes, so we passed on information where we could. However, the one thing we could do was buy groceries for these families.

“One Afghani family we visited had eight children. Neither parent spoke English, and we talked with their 16-year-old son to find out what they needed.”

She also visited an elderly Egyptian couple. The husband was bed-ridden before the quake after a heart attack, and his wife was trying to keep their home clean with just tissues and water. Rachel bought cleaning products for them as well as bread, milk and fruit.

She remembers a large Eritrean family who were receiving food parcels. However, because the husband was diabetic, he couldn’t eat much from the parcels. Rachel and Simon spent a long time in the supermarket figuring out what he could eat, and took them a special box of food.

“There was lots we couldn’t do, but I’m proud to say we did what we could!”

Six months after the February earthquake they realised things were going to get worse before they got better, and Rachel and Simon took the chance to move back to Wellington.

“I became so close to Goma that I almost feel disloyal at the idea of taking on another learner! But I know that once we’re sure where we’re going to be living, I will want to help another family. The rewards are so great.

“It was sad to leave Christchurch but I know we will be back.” 🌱



Dianne Wilson  
skyping with Gilda

# *Skype me* for English

Dianne Wilson taught learner Guo Du Song, (Gilda), for three months before they met in person – thanks to Skype. Patricia Thompson

**G**ilda, from Blenheim, whose first language is Mandarin, was eager to improve her conversational English, but when a home tutor became available she was about to visit family in China.

Keen not to miss the opportunity, Gilda's daughter suggested she could begin learning with Dianne via Skype, the free software application that allows users to make voice calls over the internet and talk and see one another 'live' via their computer screens.

Dianne was happy to try, and the project has proved a great success. Now the option of Skype lessons has been opened up to many other tutors and learners in Blenheim.

Tracey Ellis, English Language Partners' Coordinator for Blenheim, says Skype provides a valuable additional tool and teaching method that gives tutors the option of working with more rural learners. It could also ensure lesson continuity if learners go home for long trips.

"Gilda had been on the waiting list for a while when Dianne kindly offered to take another learner," says Tracey.

"Gilda felt quite isolated and was keen to improve her conversational English so she could meet more people. But when we rang her daughter we found that Gilda was about to go to China for three months and was concerned that she might miss the opportunity. ▶

► “They asked whether Dianne would be willing to teach Gilda via Skype, if they could get Skype set up for Gilda in China and make all the calls. We had never done that before but I asked Dianne and she was happy to give it a try.”

Dianne, who has been a tutor for three years, already had Skype installed at home and knew what an effective teaching tool video conferencing can be. As a history teacher for the Westmount School, which has 15 campuses across New Zealand, she delivers most of her lessons in this way.

“We tossed around ideas about how we could do it and away we went,” says Dianne. “Gilda is highly educated and very well read. She reads complex novels in English but wanted to build her confidence with conversational English.”

For three months Dianne and Gilda had once-weekly Skype sessions of about 90 minutes.

Dianne would also email worksheets to Gilda who would complete and email them back so Dianne could check and correct them for her.

“We are the same age and it was rather like having a pen pal,” says Dianne. “During our lessons we would have very interesting conversations about life in China from fruit trees, gardening and jewellery to different ethnic groups.

“We would just play it by ear and go where the conversation took us. Gilda told me that she would also read my emails out loud to practice her pronunciation and I would tailor worksheets to her needs.

“It has been very good for Gilda and I. When we met in person it was like two old friends meeting and we chatted for a couple of hours. In many respects it broke down the barrier between teacher and learner because we began by just chatting for a couple of months and getting to know each other.”

## “Skype offers potential to work with people in more isolated rural areas where it might not be easy to get together with a tutor.”

Gilda, who returned to Blenheim at the beginning of November, and is now having more traditional one-to-one lessons with Dianne, says that she feels more confident speaking now.

“I can speak more naturally in simple sentences and I can start conversations with people. On the journey back I spoke to people on the plane,” she says.

“For a long time I wanted to speak English with other people, but I didn’t know how to open my mouth.

“Thank you Dianne and Tracey and English Language Partners for doing all these things for me. Via your effort I dare to speak to other people, although when I am speaking my brain is tense. I am so happy I do open my mouth. You do a great job.”

## Skype

Skype began in 2003 and has 663 million registered users, with 124 million people using Skype every month.

Skype is installed at most English Language Partners’ centres across New Zealand and staff use the technology on an everyday basis.

To install Skype on your computer you need an internet connection and a microphone. If you want to video Skype, you also need a web cam. There are also mobile phone apps for Skype.

[www.skype.com](http://www.skype.com)

Tracey says that, while face-to-face teaching remained the ideal approach, Skype opened up exciting new options.

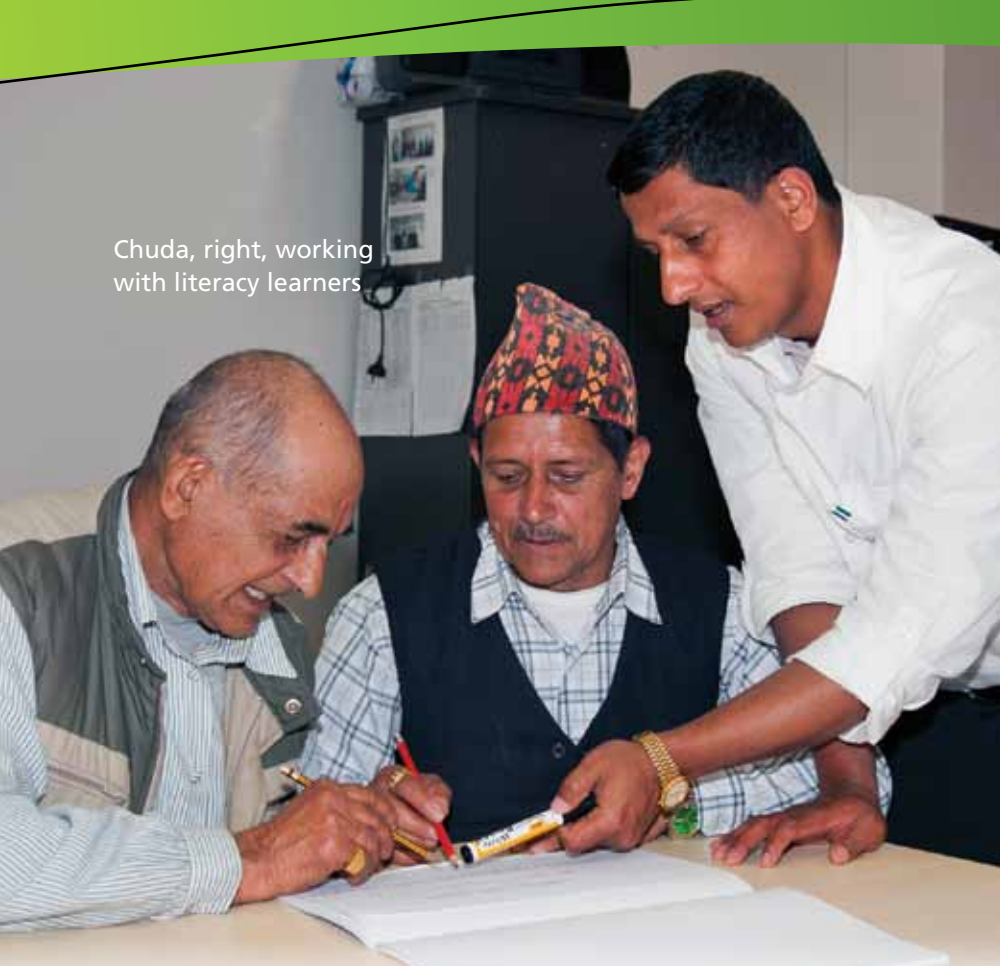
“Volunteer tutors who don’t have Skype at home have the option of teaching learners via Skype from the centre. It means we have the opportunity to respond to people’s needs in a different way, which is what we are all about.

“Skype offers potential to work with people in more isolated rural areas where it might not be easy to get together with a tutor. It also gives us a whole new range of options for group-based delivery.”

Tracey says that when learners go to their home countries for long visits they often don’t have anyone to speak English with and their language skills slip.

“We recently had a Brazilian learner who had worked very hard and made fantastic progress and then went home for three months to show her beautiful baby to her family,” said Tracey.

“When she came back she was quite upset at how much she had slipped. Skype lessons could also provide a way of ensuring the learner maintains their fluency and continues to progress.” ✨



Chuda, right, working with literacy learners

# Education *key to new life*

Imagine a camping holiday. After a week, you and your family can pack up the tent and head home, relaxed and ready for whatever life has in store. Richard Mays

Suppose, there is no home to go back to.

You now are stuck at your 'campsite'. Not just for a few weeks, but for years. And you're sharing the campsite on a windy dusty riverbank where temperatures range from near freezing to a baking 42 degrees, with some 1,700 other families.

That's no holiday, and in all probability you are not a holidaymaker – you're a refugee.

Chuda and Khina Ghimirey are all too familiar with this scenario. It's their story. From Bhutan, but of Nepalese descent, the couple and

their five-year-old son, Prabin, are part of a community numbering 300 now living in Palmerston North and nearby Feilding.

Chuda (pronounced Suda), is an English Language Partners' bilingual assistant and, with his command of English, acts as a liaison between this Lhotshampa (the name given to Bhutanese of Nepali descent) community, social agencies, and the people of the Manawatu region.

Notwithstanding cultural differences between New Zealand and the new arrivals, Chuda's main concern is that there is a high level of what he calls 'language disability'.

"Language disability is the main problem. I can understand, but the elderly who don't know English have a great problem. They want to participate, but can't due to their lack of language. I liken it to being deaf.

"They come from a traditional society, and are quite strict in the traditions, but that makes it hard."

As traditional farmers, the elders were illiterate in their own country, and learning to read and write in a strange language without having any literacy experience in their own, makes things doubly difficult.

"They didn't have the chance to go to school," Khina adds. "They were expected to help in the fields."

The older people especially, encounter problems with agencies like Work and Income, which build in few allowances for 'language disability' when making contact by mail.

"They are prepared to work," Chuda continues, "but they don't have the language skills, so what sort of job can they do? And they have spent the last 15-18 years in a camp, so they are dependent."

Still, when it comes to comparing their past life with the one they now enjoy, there are few points for comparison.

"There are no restrictions like back in Nepal, and here we have the chance to keep our culture and traditions, and that is most important."

The next big issue for his people is training.

"They have a strong agricultural background, and they have skills, but farming here is so different. In Bhutan we had ox ploughs; here it's all mechanised. We need to know how to handle mechanised farming."

The opportunities to make the most of life in a new country he says, all focus on education. ►



Chuda teaching with Catherine



# For a *better* future

Chuda Ghimirey was 11 when he and his farming parents were forced to leave Bhutan for India, and then deposited over the Nepalese border on the banks of the Kankai Mai river. Richard Mays

During the late 1980s, early 1990s, the Kingdom of Bhutan expelled up to a fifth of its population. Mainly Hindu Lhotshampa, the majority were descendants of those who had lived and worked in Bhutan since migrating to the Kingdom in the 19th century.

“Nepalese culture and language had been banned in school,” Chuda explains. “We are Hindu, the Bhutanese are Buddhist, but we were no longer free to practise our culture.”

Under a policy called ‘One Nation, One People’ aimed at preserving Bhutan’s Tibetan Mahayana Buddhist culture and identity, Nepali-speaking Lhotshampa were forced to adopt the customs, traditional clothing and the national language of Bhutan. Gathering protests against the policy resulted in the expulsion of this significant minority population from the tiny country.

Until the intervention of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Chuda says the

“They are prepared to work, but they don’t have the language skills, so what sort of job can they do?”

► His comments emphasise the important work being carried out by English Language Partners. Catherine Taylor, who teaches with Chuda, says he is a pleasure to work with. “He is a lot of fun! Chuda and I have a great working relationship.”

And so Chuda continues doing what he does best – teaching, and not just his own people, but new residents who hail from Cambodia, Burma, Congo and Vietnam.

Good teachers always learn from their learners, and he has picked up valuable skills in cross-cultural and communication.

“I have learned some basics in their language – like greetings. I speak slowly and clearly and use repetition and images.”

As well as instructing, Chuda liaises with Refugee Services and social services, provides community support, and campaigns as a regional representative on the UNHCR national network forum that passes recommendations and information on to government, social agencies and media.

“We are documenting our problems, and so we are learning what we can do better for any new arrivals settling in the different regions – and to solve the issues they have with education, employment, health and housing.”

It seems that refugee resettlement is still very much a work in progress. Thankfully, there are committed people like Chuda helping to work through quite complex cross-cultural concerns. ✨

original camp, now divided into seven, grew to over 90,000 people. There was no food, running water, clothing, hygiene, healthcare, shelter, infrastructure or education, while dozens died every day from disease.

Although Nepal had granted the refugees asylum, it did not allow them to work, or run businesses; even leaving the camp required a permit.

"The important thing is that I did get a little education in the camp," Chuda says, explaining that lessons were conducted in an 'open roof school'. Its only shelter was underneath the Kankai River bridge.

That 'little education' was to be his passport.

"I attained my School Leaving Certificate which made me eligible for study at Nepal's Tribhuvan University. You have to pay, and being a refugee, I didn't have money, but I was fortunate to get a scholarship for two years."

He had also been teaching at the refugee school since 1998, one of 80 applicants for just four teaching positions. The young teacher started his undergraduate year in 2001, studying economics and English; teaching school in the morning and studying in the afternoon. The university was 12 kilometres or a one-hour bike ride over sealed and unsealed roads.

In 2003, Chuda attended a number of seminars on how to teach and support children in the camp who had mental disabilities, visual and hearing impairments. It was also the year he married Khina, a teacher from another camp.

The following year, Chuda was able to leave the camp school to teach and be principal at a new outside private boarding school offering pre-primary, primary, secondary and higher secondary learning to 300 students. He used the extra money

to help support his parents, brothers and sisters.

Wanting a better future for his family beyond the camp boundaries, he began the lengthy Third Country Resettlement process in 2006, not knowing which country would accept him. In 2008, he was the first person to leave the camp for a new life in another country, New Zealand, arriving at the Mangere Refugee Centre on 14 March, 2008. At the beginning of that month, a fire had razed about two thirds of the camp's bamboo and thatch huts, and there had also been outbreaks of violence that resulted in some deaths.

"I hoped that if I left the camp, my family would follow. I also wanted to give my son a choice to be a citizen of a country and to have a good future."

Chuda's hopes are in the process of being realised. His parents now live next door, while three of his brothers also live in Palmerston North.

Khina is also fulfilling her dream of being a nurse – an impossibility as a refugee in Nepal – and is in her second year of study for a Bachelor of Nursing at UCOL (Universal College of Learning). ✿

## Network news

### Volunteer Connect Awards

Wellington's Mayor, Celia Wade-Brown, co-presented awards with Zlata Sosa, Manager for English Language Partners. The awards, organised by Volunteer Wellington and Settlement Wellington, celebrate migrants who have volunteered and become more connected to the community.



### Auckland Central on location

Group learners enjoyed a day trip, visiting cafes, beaches and walking along the city's waterfront. While out and about they volunteered as photographic subjects for English Language Partners' publications.



### MP joins Tauranga class

Local MP, Simon Bridges, visited a class in November, helping learners understand how the government and elections function in New Zealand.





Rose Desmond

## *Connecting to the workplace*

After 10 years, with 240 volunteers trained and 260 skilled jobseekers who have found meaningful employment, English Language Partners' Job Mentoring Service in Wellington has much to celebrate. Patricia Thompson

Most satisfyingly for Rose Desmond, Coordinator, some job seekers have found the experience so valuable they have gone on to train to be volunteer job mentors too.

"That is one of the more rewarding aspects of the work from my point of view," says Rose.

"Most recent was a German woman, with a Masters in Political Science, who came to us as a job seeker in June, was appointed to an advisory role with the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Authority and came back to train as a job mentor in October."

Rose, based in Wellington, has been joined by Alice Hodder.

"We focus on skilled migrants and refugees, usually tertiary qualified with experience," says Alice. "We've had a number with PhDs and many have masters degrees.

"They come from fields ranging from engineering to finance, architecture to ICT, social work to education. A recent success was the appointment of an Environmental Engineer to an energy research company in Westport.

Rose adds that most mentors are people with a strong interest in employment and the job-search process.

"They are people who have an empathy for those new to New Zealand and can offer encouragement and motivation when the going gets tough.

"They come from a whole range of skill backgrounds, sometimes with an employment focus like HR or career guidance and are often in senior or management roles."

Training focuses on the roles and responsibilities of being a mentor and a volunteer, cross-cultural awareness and how to deal with issues migrants and refugees may face looking for work in a new country, such as not having New Zealand qualifications or local work experience.



While the service focuses on the job application process, mentors often continue to provide support as people settle into their new job.

“Often they become friends,” says Rose. “Mentors are absolutely thrilled when the job seekers gain employment. Equally, they can find it hard when a job seeker takes a long time to achieve their goals.

Adiam Semere Weldekidan has been involved since 2008, working alongside her job mentor, Seini for 18 months and getting, one-to-one support with Alice. The service has been an invaluable resource in Adiam’s journey towards employment. She says: “You are doing a lot for people who are new here. You show you care. You show your interest in us and make us feel at home. You touch someone and give them a friend. My job mentor was like that for me. Anything I needed, she was ready to help me.”

Rose says that some job seekers come back a second time for support in moving higher in their field.

“One man from Bangladesh, who had a Masters of Commerce, was supported over two years to find employment as a Data Matching Officer. He came back three years later and was soon successful in being appointed to a permanent role as a Community Funding Advisor.”

The service now offers monthly network nights which bring mentors and job seekers together to share ideas and listen to speakers. The sessions regularly attract a core group who relish the extra support – and the pizza.

One recent successful job seeker said he finally felt he could settle in New Zealand.

“My success is your success. Thank you so much to all of you for being part of my journey. I am forever grateful. One day I will be able to pay it forward.” 🌱



Alice Hodder



Adiam Semere Weldekidan

“You touch someone and give them a friend. My job mentor was like that. Anything I needed, she was ready to help me.”

## Network news

### Whanganui celebrates

Hundreds flocked to ‘A Taste of Culture’. The festival featured entertainment and food from ethnic communities, including dances by a local Filipina group.



### Hutt wins award

Hutt centre won the 2011 Education and Child Youth Development Award at the Lower Hutt Community Awards. Christine Cook, Manager, was delighted with this recognition of more than 150 volunteers.



### North Shore moves premises

North Shore centre invited Jonathan Coleman, Immigration Minister, to open their new Anzac Street premises. The Minister also awarded ESOL Home Tutoring certificates to new volunteers.



## 10 years of changing lives

Launched as a pilot project in Wellington in 2001, the Job Mentoring Service has worked with 430 job seekers from over 60 different ethnic backgrounds.

Initially funded by Immigration New Zealand as a settlement project, then by the Department of Labour, it is now funded through the Ministry of Social Development.

Modelled on ESOL Home Tutoring, with a volunteer mentor providing one-to-one support, it's one of two programmes unique to English Language Partners.

The service sprang from the recognition that once sufficient language skills have been acquired, employment is the next key aspect of settlement – but that finding work in a new country can take time and skills and requires sound local and cultural knowledge.

It supports migrant and refugee-background job-seekers legally able to work in New Zealand, actively looking for skilled work and ready to move into the workforce or into higher skilled employment.

A former job seeker, Nisha Srivastava, sums up her experience: “I was involved with the service in 2009, unaware of how it was going to change my life. I landed a job that gave me the stability and security I badly needed. But even today, I am still getting help from the experience and learning. And it makes me feel how important this service is in the life of a newcomer to New Zealand.

“I so feel the importance of this service just as a blessing in my life. I hope it will be like a river that flows to no end and continues to make the difference in lives of new migrants.” ✂

# A future together

Hon Tariana Turia, co-leader, Maori Party

I have been reflecting on the fundamental connection between community and communication. After I lost my grandmother and aunt from Whangaehu, I moved to Putiki, where I was raised by my aunts and uncles. The importance of fitting into the world that we were to be a part of was instilled in me from an early age. I grew up with a strong sense of my place in the world, and the world around me. I knew who I was and where I belonged.

One of my tupuna, Mere Rikiriki, used to say, “*E ringa kaha, e ringa poto, kaore e whakahoa*”, which has the meaning of holding true to ourselves, being self-controlled without friend or favour. It was a message I have clung to all my life – to remember where you come from, the essence of your ancestral footprint. If we are strong in our cultural identity, confident in our unique heritage, and committed to our ongoing growth as a people, then we are more well-equipped to navigate new challenges that may come our way. It is about having the right foundation in place.

The foundation of Aotearoa New Zealand is Te Tiriti o Waitangi. This is our founding document as a nation. For us, Te Tiriti o Waitangi remains a covenant of utmost meaning. Only if

it is honoured will mana be restored, and whanau able to participate fully and willingly in the nation. We want to face our past with courage, so we can build our future together. A future for all of us, together.

I am continually impressed by the amazing courage and determination shown by migrants and refugees to New Zealand as they deal with so many fundamental changes in their lives. It takes enormous sacrifice, insight and commitment to make the decision to willingly enter another community, to prepare your family for the transition, and to continue to hold true to who you are while yet still embracing the new.

Government recognises how important it is to support migrants and refugees as they arrive in New Zealand, and assists the community to provide support in a number of ways.

I have the utmost respect for the work English Language Partners and its volunteers carry out in the heart of the community, helping migrants and refugees to learn English. Speaking English allows newcomers to participate in their new communities and gain employment. I have read the heart-warming stories in earlier issues of *Connecting Cultures* and



“I am continually impressed by the amazing courage and determination shown by migrants and refugees to New Zealand.”

this work, much of it done by volunteers, is an example of the community value of caring and serving at its best.

While it is important that people coming to live in New Zealand learn English, it is equally important that they are enabled to stay strong in their culture and language – the very essence of who they are.

Migrants and refugees do not enter Aotearoa with a blank slate. Each family that comes to these shores comes with a rich history; a distinctive set of values and philosophies which have shaped their lives and a language of their own.

I know at first hand how important language is to culture, and how one needs the other to survive. Today, more than ever, we understand that diversity and difference enhance our nation immeasurably. In that context, I hope migrants and refugees are encouraged to pay particular attention to the cultural heritage they pass on

to their children, and the pivotal role language plays in that heritage.

In broadening the language skills of our migrants and refugees, English Language Partners and their volunteers can also play a role in enabling people to hold on to their heritage, language and culture and pass it on to their children as they expand their worlds to include a rich and full life in New Zealand.

It is a challenge to maintain one's own language and function successfully in a society where few others speak that language. I can only imagine how difficult it must be for people who have moved far away from their home countries to motivate their New Zealand-born children to become fluent in the language they hear at home. But I think it is significant to know that a 2006 longitudinal study on transmission of immigrant languages in Canada notes that migrant children's academic success is associated with maintaining one's language and culture of origin.

The ability to speak one's home/ tribal language is crucial to a sense of wellbeing especially in this isolated part of the world. *Ko taku reo taku ohooho, ko taku reo taku mapihi mauria; my language is my awakening, my language is the window to my soul.*

*Connecting Cultures* is a wonderful opportunity to celebrate and commend the leadership of English Language Partners, while at the same time celebrating and commending the commitment of migrant and refugee communities to keep their cultures intact while also connecting to new communities in Aotearoa New Zealand. ✨

## Network news

### Celebrating Adult Learners' Week

Amina Mofassir talked about her experience home tutoring a Chinese learner at the Christchurch function acknowledging adult learners.



In Invercargill, Nina Mitlash taught Russian from a central street stall to passers-by.



Mayor Rick Cooper and MP Louise Upston attended Taupo's celebration, presenting awards to centre members. Bunyen Senarit received a Commendation for his work in 2011.



# Work with MIGRANTS & REFUGEES



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