

CONNECTING CULTURES

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ENGLISH
LANGUAGE PARTNERS
NEW ZEALAND

Working with Refugees and Migrants

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Vision

That refugees and migrants have the opportunity to learn English, to pursue aspirations for themselves and their families, and to participate in all aspects of life in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Mission

To provide English language skills and social support for the effective resettlement of adult refugees and migrants in Aotearoa New Zealand.

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New Zealand 2013
PO Box 12-114, Wellington 6144
Phone 04 471 2382
Email natoffice@englishlanguage.org.nz
Web www.englishlanguage.org.nz

Editor Grace Bassett
Email grace.bassett@englishlanguage.org.nz

Design and production Paradigm

Cover Ada Nally and friends
Photo Antony Kitchener

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Kia ora Welcome

Over 2,500 volunteers teach English to help refugees and migrants settle in. Many also have other special skills, and would love the chance to share these.

Learners also have unique skills they may wish to share as a way of giving back to English Language Partners.

'Volunteering in diverse ways' is a feature of this *Connecting Cultures*, with two inspiring stories of 'skill sharing' to help others succeed.

Venessa Setiawan and her Japanese learner are swapping languages in a new language-exchange trial on Auckland's North Shore. Aline Parrone-Halpin, a trained ESOL home tutor, volunteers as a childcare worker in central Auckland, allowing mothers to attend English classes.

We all encounter major life changes, irrespective of whether our families have lived here for generations, or whether we are more recent immigrants.

Ruchika Jayatilaka, Ada Nally and Gurbrinder Aulakh are three people who have overcome tremendous challenges in moving to a new country, culture and life. They have made New Zealand home, and our country now benefits from their skills tremendously. We can all identify with their courage and determination.



Their stories now form part of this country's migrant journey, joining those of other Kiwi families who arrived before them.

Nicola Sutton
Chief Executive

English Language Partners New Zealand

We are 280 staff and 2,500 volunteers working with over 6,500 refugees and migrants 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

Join us! Train as a volunteer



Language swap a *life changer*

Only 21, but Venessa Setiawan is no stranger to life changes. Mary Atkinson

On the brink of major life change, Venessa's found a novel way to prepare.

Venessa is one of English Language Partners' first language-exchange tutors.

When she was 11, her family moved from Indonesia to Auckland. Venessa enrolled in Year Nine at Northcote College. Not only was she two years younger than most classmates, but also had to communicate in English for the first time.

"I was probably intermediate level in writing and reading," she says, "but not in speaking.

"Maths was easy, but other subjects were hard. There were lots of new words, and I didn't understand Kiwi slang.

"I was shy and quiet," she adds. "It took about two years before I was able to speak up."

After moving to Rangitoto College, Venessa became good friends with a group of students. Her fluency developed rapidly, and by Year 11 life was much easier. She was doing well academically.

About this time, her mother enrolled as a learner with English Language Partners. Venessa saw how much her mother gained and, with her mother's encouragement, she decided to train as a tutor.

Remembering how hard it had been when she first arrived, Venessa was keen to make the transition to a new country easier for others.

She enrolled at the University of Auckland to study psychology and Japanese. At the end of her first year, however, she felt unsure of where her studies were taking her. A friend urged her to consider what she liked doing most, and this led to the realisation that she would love to teach.

At the start of 2012, she enrolled in a TESOL course and in English Language Partners' training course. By mid-year 2012, Venessa had two learners.

"I clicked very well with my Korean learner, Yun Mi," she says. "We had so much in common – culture, upbringing and sense of humour. We became good friends very fast." ▶

Venessa Setiawan

PHOTOS: JAE AHN



“I would recommend swapping one hundred per cent.”

Venessa also got on well with her Japanese learner Naoko; however their lessons took a different form.

“I told English Language Partners I was thinking of moving to Japan,” she says. “And they suggested I swap lessons with Naoko.”

Venessa was invited to become a language-exchange tutor, as part of a trial which involved learners and tutors swapping roles. After learning English with their tutor, the learner then teaches their language.

“We started it last year, and thought it worked really well,” explains Anastasia Kariukin, North Shore centre’s co-ordinator.

The process involves finding out if tutors wish to learn a particular language and then, if possible, pairing them with a learner who speaks that language and is able and keen to teach it. So far, as well as Venessa’s Japanese lessons, other tutors have learned Spanish and Mandarin.

“I’m a guinea pig – a successful guinea pig,” Venessa says with a laugh. “I would recommend swapping one hundred per cent.”

Venessa had experienced some of the same problems learning Japanese at university as she had experienced learning English in New Zealand.

“I could read easily, but needed more vocab. Since I didn’t speak up, I was losing interest in the language, although I still enjoyed learning about the culture and traditions.

“Naoko has built up my confidence. She started teaching by slowly introducing new things. It was a less scary environment than university. It was okay to make mistakes.”

Venessa and Naoko’s sessions take two hours, with each tutoring for about an hour. Venessa explains that it’s very flexible, with one or the other tutoring for longer whenever they feel it is necessary.

Venessa tutors Naoko in the style taught by English Language Partners. Naoko teaches Venessa in a style similar to that she uses to teach Japanese to New Zealand children. Venessa laughs as she explains that Naoko uses many simple children’s books and games and that she loves working with these tools.

“I see her as my friend. We help each other to be better than we were,” she says.

Venessa is currently waiting on her visa application to come through. If all goes well, she will be moving to Japan within a few weeks. She plans to study Japanese intensively and also to teach English. Although she has visited the country as a tourist, she knows that moving there will be quite different – another major change.

Venessa is thankful Naoko is helping prepare her to speak up in class and to manage everyday life in another new country. ✂



Seeking a safe haven

Ruchika Jayatilaka, recently appointed Fundraising and Marketing Manager for English Language Partners, grew up in Sri Lanka as it was in the grip of civil war. Patricia Thompson

PHOTOS: IAN LINNING

When Ruchika's son began covering his ears at the sounds of planes, she knew she had to find a way of ensuring he had a peaceful childhood.

"I was educated in Colombo, and our schooling would often be disrupted by bombing," recalls Ruchika. "One day the force from a bomb shattered the windows of our school.

"I went with my mother to visit my brother who was studying in America, and ended up staying for six years and studying for a degree in International Business Administration (BBA) at Temple University in Philadelphia.

"It would have been hard for me to attend university in Sri Lanka. The universities were disrupted by the war and there were huge waiting lists.

"Also, it was unusual for women in my family to study at university, but my mother, although from a rural background, recognised how important it was. I was the first woman in our family, on either side, to gain a degree."

Following her studies, Ruchika returned to Colombo to work in her family's transport and distribution agency. Her achievements included becoming distributor for iconic New Zealand *Anchor* dairy products.

"When I made that connection with New Zealand it never occurred it would be our home one day.

"My husband Arjuna and I felt strongly that we did not want our son to grow up with the war. So we had to expand our options. I applied to universities all over the world to do

Above: Ruchika Jayatilaka, centre, with two learners from Porirua

a Master of Business Administration (MBA) and, in 1995, was accepted by Massey University."

That meant leaving her husband and nine-month baby Hasitha behind for 15 months.

"It was hard, but I knew I was doing the best for him. My mother looked after Hasitha. She knew the way forward for me was to study and that it would give me the courage and the strength to achieve beyond the normal expectations of women in our country."

Having achieved her MBA, Ruchika returned to the family business, but the troubles flared up again and, when Hasitha started school, they lived in constant fear. ▶

Ruchika with a
Porirua learner



"You would hear a bomb and could see smoke rising and you didn't know if it was your child's school, but the roads were closed and you couldn't get there.

"Hasitha became so afraid of the sound of planes and helicopters that he would cower and cover his ears when they flew over.

"We knew we had to do something, so we applied to New Zealand as skilled migrants. Being accepted was the best day ever, because I finally had the chance for our son to have a normal childhood."

However, the transition wasn't easy. They arrived in 2002, with six bags, and found it difficult to find rental accommodation.

"We knew no one and had no references to give to landlords – who were wary of renting to us. We were living in a motel, and without a residential address we could not enrol our son in school.

"I vividly remember going to the library to get books for Hasitha and I couldn't even get a library card without referees. We had no car and would get lost all the time. I remember asking a bus driver whether the bus was going to the place we needed to go, and he told me to look at the destination on the front. Everything was a challenge."

Finally, they did find a rental property, but finding work was equally difficult, despite their extensive qualifications and experience.

"Neither of us could find work at first. We had bills to pay, food to buy. Our son was the only thing that gave us the courage to keep going.

"But today I look at my son, who is now 19, and it has all been worthwhile. He is a contented young man, studying at Otago University, and he likes planes so much he recently had a flying lesson." ✂

Mission inspires skilled fundraiser

To gain New Zealand work experience, Ruchika contacted Volunteer Wellington who found voluntary roles including at Women's Refuge and with Wesley Community Action.

"It was through Volunteer Wellington that I first came across English Language Partners because they provided English classes for refugees at one of the sites I worked at. I would chat to the learners and could see how much the classes helped them."

Ultimately, Ruchika was offered a paid receptionist role at Women's Refuge and then, when a vacancy arose as National Fundraising Co-ordinator, she was invited to apply.

"I didn't have a grant background, but had been doing grant application work for the organisation," she says. "It was a great experience. I learnt to really listen to people's needs, built programmes and relationships, including with funders and grant makers, and I gained real satisfaction in seeing the results."

Ruchika's fundraising career progressed with roles in Arthritis New Zealand – where she was moved by the significant impact the fundraising

had on the lives of people living with the disease – and then to Forest and Bird, where she supported 50 branches to raise funds.

Most recently, she spent three years with the World Wildlife Fund New Zealand as National Fundraising Manager – supporter relations, but was inspired to apply for the new role with English Language Partners because she relates to the work the organisation is doing with refugees and migrants.

"It is my community and I feel passionately about helping," she says. "I know what it is to live in a dangerous situation and to come here knowing no one, leaving loved ones behind.

"Every day is special, and I want to use the experience I have gained over the last ten years to help English Language Partners continue their services and to establish new ones.

"I'm looking forward to working collaboratively with people across the entire organisation." ✂

Landing a better job *with English*

For stevedores working in the fast-paced and potentially hazardous environment of Ports of Auckland, the ability to communicate clearly in English is critical.

James Fyfe

However, for many stevedores – or ‘lashers’ as they are known – English is their second language, and understanding the complex and unique vocabulary of the port often requires a helping hand.

Ports of Auckland performance and training specialist Paul White says the decision to invest in language training for its workers is an easy one.

The port has offered English classes for three years now, working with a variety of agencies. The current 12-week course by English Language Partners is the second time the not-for-profit organisation has been involved.

Paul says it is important not only for safety reasons, but also to provide

workers with the tools to progress further.

“Building rapport is an essential part of this job. It’s not just the teacher who knows everything.”

– Val Scott

“The statistics tell us that, in the three years that we’ve been using this programme, the likelihood of advancing their careers is enhanced by attending these courses.

“I know for a fact, that without it they would be passed over for advancement,” says Paul.

Teacher Val Scott says there are currently two *English for Employees* classes – one for beginners and one for intermediate speakers.

Both focus on work-related vocabulary, particularly in relation to communication around health and safety, but Val says it’s more than just learning new words.

“They’re gradually gaining confidence, which I think is crucial, because we can’t cover all skill areas, but the confidence to ask questions, and to try and explain things can make ▶

PHOTOS: JAMES FYFE



From left: Seone Toangutu, Paul White, Val Scott, Motumua and Elijah Powell



From left: Motumua Motumua, Val Scott and Seone Toangutu

“The fun part ... asking the boys how their week was, meeting up with the boys, having that open talk with the tutor.” – Elijah Powell

a big improvement, both at work and home.

“It means they communicate more effectively. As confidence grows they try more, stretch, sometimes people are more aware of their rights and responsibilities towards each other.”

Classes, held once a week in two-hour instalments, are free, and workers are still paid for their time in class as if they were working.

With no tests or grades, the course aims to get workers moving more comfortably within their adopted language.

“We do an initial self-assessment – how comfortable they feel with their English,” says Val. “Towards the end of the course, we talk about what they feel they can do better, and hopefully, students can give some examples, and that becomes the outcome.”

Both Val and the students agree, one of the most practical aspects of the course is working on em-

ployees’ pronunciation, but before that can happen, Val says it’s often necessary for students to come out of their skins.

“They’re quite shy, like many people from the Pacific [it’s important to] get trust first ... like many people speaking English as a second language, they’re frightened of making mistakes.”

Val says the trust is based on the belief that learning is not just a one-way street.

“Building rapport is an essential part of this job. It’s not just the teacher who knows everything; it’s that we’ve all got something to learn from each other.”

Most students are employed as casual workers, and need a step up in their English ability to become fulltime employees, something the company is keen to encourage.

“What we’ve done is said, ‘Right, we’re looking for potential candidates to promote – who might benefit from this training?’” says Paul. “We’ve asked the trainers to keep an eye out

and identify people who might have difficulty with English, so we’re trying to catch them as they filter in.”

Elijah Powell hopes improved English might one day lead to his dream job of being a crane driver or, in the meantime, open up a position in human resources or the control tower.

Juggling his native Fijian with English can get confusing, and Elijah says the lessons offer him a chance to formalise his language skills.

“It’s been good doing the English class, learning the vocab and organisation of words,” says Elijah, who speaks Fijian with his parents and English with his wife and children.

“You go to one house you speak Fijian, you go to another house you speak English. Sometimes there are words that I find a bit hard to pronounce.”

“The fun part [of the lessons] is taking the learning and understanding of English to another level. Not just the basic, but learning new words, asking the boys how their week was, meeting up with the boys, having that open talk with the tutor.”

Tongan worker Seone Toangutu too says improved English would help him land the job of a straddle driver, while Motumua Motumua from Tuvalu says just speaking English regularly in the classroom environment is a powerful tool: helping him to achieve his long-term goal of speaking English fluently.

“What we’ve created is a culture where people are able to identify their strengths and their weaknesses, and they’re supported in developing the areas they need for improvement,” says Paul.

With this new awareness and confidence, both the port and the students are looking forward to seeing where their English will take them in the future. ✂



PHOTOS: ANTONY KITCHENER

Ada Nally

A passion for *migrant-friendly* libraries

Pinned above Ada Nally's desk is a photograph of Koos, the Somalian refugee she tutored to support her in achieving an early childhood qualification.

Patricia Thompson

Ada, who came from the Netherlands in 1985, has combined a demanding, and hugely fulfilling job as Multicultural Community Customer Specialist for Wellington City Libraries with voluntary roles with English Language Partners – and she’s just begun presenting a radio show too.

Her skills owe much to her experiences; coming to Wellington as a newlywed, and, despite falling in love with the country, still facing the challenges of isolation and of being a speaker of English as a second language.

“At first it is very exciting,” says Ada. “But after a while, especially when I was pregnant with my first child, I found myself feeling increasingly isolated and homesick. That is an experience shared by many new settlers.”

At one point she used to go to the Dutch embassy, just so she could read out-of-date Dutch newspapers and magazines.

Ada’s ‘school English’ was already good. In Holland she had worked as a telex operator for an oil company, so was used to communicating with people around the world. In fact, she first ‘met’ her Kiwi husband, a radio officer on oil rigs, via telex.

However, finding a job was not easy and she temped in administrative roles for a while.

“After a few weeks of temping and often correcting people’s English spelling, I would be offered a permanent job, but at a minimum wage because I was ‘a second language speaker’,” she recalls.

Then she saw a teacher aide job advertised at St Catherine’s College.

“It was working with Assyrian and Pacific Islands students. When I applied I said I was a second language speaker and they thought that was an advantage. I eventually became international student coordinator.”



Her next role in customer services at Wellington’s Kilbirnie library included hosting sessions for learners of English.

It was a job that became a passion, developing into her current role and resonating with her memories of early days in New Zealand. Her manager encouraged her to get out into the community – and that was her introduction to English Language Partners.

“I went to the local mosque, visited community and women’s groups and liaised with agencies that work with new migrants to get to people as soon as they arrived in Wellington,” says Ada.

“English Language Partners were running ESOL classes and I got in touch to see how I could wave the flag for our services.

“Maddy Harper, their Tutor Support Coordinator, arranged a spot in their newsletter and I talked to volunteer tutors to raise awareness about our ‘learning English’ collection, foreign language books, newspapers and magazines. I also visited English Language Partners’ classes all round Wellington.”

Ada gathers feedback on what the community wants from the library service and its collections.



Ada taking a break with friends

“What I love about English Language Partners is that it is all about people.”

Early on, the Islamic Centre’s women’s group told her that much of the collection, with regard to Islam or Arabic nations, was very much from a Western slant.

“There were books about religion, about Osama Bin Laden or the history of the Middle East from a Western point of view. They said: ‘Why not books on our architecture or our progress in astronomy?’ So we bought books that brought a more balanced approach to these topics.”

One customer had been struggling with depression for some time. When books on mental health were intro-

duced to the Wellington Libraries’ Arabic collection he felt able to research what he was experiencing and, with a greater understanding of his condition, decided to seek help.

The libraries service runs many events, in the library and the community. These have ranged from an Islamic fashion show to a celebration of different international tea traditions.

Ada has also started presenting a show on Wellington’s Access Radio station to promote the library to the migrant community – and she gets to play great world music.

On top of her library commitments, Ada has been a member of English Language Partners’ committee, enjoyed taking part in fundraising events, and trained as a home tutor. Koos, who she tutored in 2012, was her first student.

“What I love about English Language Partners is that it is all about people,” she says.

“Every single person is made to feel welcome and supported.” ✨



Te Awamutu learners
with teacher April Bent



Cultivating our *rural potential*

New Zealand's larger cities are well-equipped to provide services for migrants, but new residents living in less-populated areas can find themselves isolated. Alison Robertson

In the Waikato, English Language Partners is working with Trust Waikato with a view to establishing a strategic partnership that would service rural Waikato. It could also provide a template for other regions.

Jo de Lisle, English Language Partners' manager says they are already running a class in Te Awamutu, which acts as part of a pilot project: scoping the needs of migrants living and working in and around the town.

"We have some funding from Trust Waikato to research where the migrants are and what services are available. From that we can find out what help migrants new to rural communities need."

The research is already showing that the real is different from the imagined.

Project researcher Dianne McClay initially thought there would be a large immigrant population out towards the west coast, but research showed that south of Te Awamutu there are large farms employing migrant workers.

"We need to find out who employs migrants, and then, by talking to individuals, establish what the needs are and how we help them," says Dianne.

It's fortunate that she has a rural background and has tracked down people through different agricultural agencies and services, held farm

discussion groups and contacted schools.

The beauty of this project, if all goes according to plan, is that it can accommodate a wide range of migrant families in various jobs and locations.

April Bent runs the Te Awamutu class. She's a former school teacher and a counsellor at Rosetown Counselling, who provide the venue.

"I love to teach. So I jumped at the chance to run this focus class."

She had some names, but also went 'shopping'. "I went to the shops, the takeaway bars, sushi and kebab shops, and some of the people I met came to class," April says. "We cover



From left: Jo de Lisle, Diana Hummel and Dianne McClay from English Language Partners

PHOTOS: TRISH MACKAY

KEEPING *connected*

Guest word: Hon. Jo Goodhew,
Minister for the Community and Voluntary Sector



Hon. Jo Goodhew

Kiwi culture and English, but we can also find out what their specific needs are.”

This all helps the researchers who plan to have completed their work on this pilot project in time to apply for Trust Waikato’s June funding round.

“There seem to be a lot of migrant families living on farms,” says Jo de Lisle. They work, pay taxes and contribute a great deal to the local economy, but isolation may prevent them from accessing the services they need to live a full life in this country.

“Waikato has been identified as a high-need area so it will be great if this project helps to find ways to make living in rural New Zealand everything new migrants have been hoping for.

“We are delighted to be able to work with Trust Waikato to find the best ways to respond to migrant needs.” ✂

Volunteering is close to my heart and forms part of my personal history with organisations such as school Board of Trustees, Victim Support and Plunket. In my work as Minister for the Community and Voluntary Sector, I am privileged to learn more about the activities volunteers generously commit themselves to. They bring their personal resources to this work, including time, energy, and knowledge.

Volunteering is hugely important on many levels, not least socially and economically. Some aspects are more easily measured than others. We have been able, for example, to measure the extent of volunteering and its value to our economy from a 2004 study. This showed that across the sector, over one million volunteers contribute around 270 million hours annually, providing 67 per cent of the non-profit workforce and contributing 2.3 per cent to New Zealand’s GDP.

We know that volunteers work in diverse fields across the non-profit and government sectors. As well as the vital contribution made by volunteers working with English Language Partners to help refugees and migrants to learn English, volunteers work in civil defence and emergency management, social services, health, and education. Volunteers assist with community development, staff local museums, work on conservation projects, and are vital to animal welfare. Thousands are involved in recreation activities and sports, including big

events like the 2011 Rugby World Cup, where more than 5,000 volunteers helped to make it successful.

Although extensive, this list does not come close to covering all the work done by volunteers. Almost anywhere we look, we find people in New Zealand volunteering their services.

The contribution volunteers make to the wellbeing of the nation is every bit as vital, but not as easy to measure. Connection is the heart of volunteering, and, at the personal level, that means volunteers are not only providing practical assistance but are also creating relationships and enriching people’s lives, including their own. We know that working with others enhances wellbeing for all involved.

In your corner of the volunteering world, your work enhances the increasingly multicultural fabric of our nation as you enable newcomers to gain the language skills they need to function successfully in the workaday world.



Trust your inner self

Gurbrinder Aulakh

Settling into life in a new country is never easy. James Fyfe

However, an accomplished lawyer from India says you have to trust your inner self and take a risk for a successful integration.

Gurbrinder Aulakh came to New Zealand nine years ago and, despite being a qualified lawyer back home, he says not only was his law degree not recognised here, at first he struggled to find any work at all.

“I was practising as a lawyer in India and when you come to a new place, you realise your qualifications are zero, nil.”

Gurbrinder says the novelty of moving to a new country soon wore off and, as many employers considered him overqualified, it was only after he removed his law background from his curriculum vitae that he was able to secure work.

“The first nine months to a year is the honeymoon period. You arrive

and everything is clean, green and rosy and then reality starts to hit.

“When you’re not able to get a job, and you have to start from scratch and you’re missing your family and friends [then] you’re at your lowest. Your confidence levels start to drop and you’re wondering if you made the right decision.”

Gurbrinder says he worked in factories, on farms and in the transport sector before finally landing a job in customer service.

“That was my first job, still far below my qualifications, skills and expectations,” he says.

Finally, it was the decision to study law in New Zealand – so he could practise law here – that turned out to be the catalyst for his future success.

“Your inner self tells you that you have got better skills and capabilities than this, so you should move into your

own field. You’re better than what you’re doing because you were doing better earlier,” he says.

“I decided I wasn’t getting any internal satisfaction, so I had to study. I knew it would be a step backward [to begin with].”

Even after re-qualifying, Gurbrinder says finding a job wasn’t easy for a migrant lawyer starting out, though years later, working as a lawyer with G Bogiatto Barristers and Solicitors in Auckland, he is philosophical about his settlement journey.

“There will be times when you hit rock bottom, but don’t lose hope. You’re worth more and you’re not alone – there are many other refugees and migrants going through a similar situation.

“See it as a struggling phase, but eventually you will come out of it. Don’t let the difficult times stop you from reaching where you want to go.”



“ See it as a struggling phase, but eventually you will come out of it. Don't let the difficult times stop you from reaching where you want to go.”

PHOTOS: JAMES FYFE

Despite his successes, Gurbrinder admits at times he feels that, no matter how hard he works, he will never achieve what he could have if he had stayed in India.

“All refugees and migrants have to work twice as hard to prove ourselves,” he says.

Gurbrinder says some Kiwis have a negative perception that immigrants are taking away jobs or not contributing. For every bad experience though, there is a positive one.

“There are many people who make you feel welcome and give you the boost needed for an easy and smooth integration into the community.

“English Language Partners has so many Kiwi-born-and-bred volunteers who embrace diversity with open arms. That's really appreciated.”

Gurbrinder is currently a member of English Language Partners' national board and Vice Chair of the Auckland Regional Migrant Services Trust.

He says that, after being inspired by others who helped him, he wants to give back.

“I felt, if it has been so hard for me, how would it be for others?”

“I meet people all the time who have good overseas qualifications— who have been doctors, professors and other professionals – and they are still in menial jobs or not really integrated into the wider community. But I keep telling them, if you get some qualifications and move into your field, eventually that will give you satisfaction and help you integrate.”

Gurbrinder says during the Rugby World Cup he, like any other Kiwi, found himself cheering passionately for the All Blacks.

“The sort of joy and happiness when New Zealand was winning goes to reflect that, internally, you are also proud to be a New Zealander. You could see migrants that have come here to settle going out to the waterfront and celebrating New Zealand's victory.”

But ultimately, he says, it is through work that one really feels they belong.

“We were at the High Court the other day and when I looked around, the whole room was full of lawyers, witnesses, litigators and the judge, and there I was, the only brown face among all the white ones.

“That gave me a feeling of pride.” ✂

Network news

‘Mothers of Babies and Toddlers’ event

This special Dunedin group enjoys their social outings. One learner wrote this of the group's importance:

“If I stay at home every day with my baby, I have a lot of housework and I get stressed.

“When I come to the group and talk with other mothers and teachers, it relaxes my mind. I learn lots of new information.”



A red hot hit

Palmerton North's Bhutanese refugee literacy class spent a happy, busy day picking chillies in the countryside.





Aline Parrone-Halpin

A special kind of volunteer

Although a trained home tutor, Aline Parrone-Halpin currently volunteers by running a crèche for mothers attending English classes. Mary Atkinson

Aline is aware that settling into life in New Zealand is difficult for many of the women who attend the Mt. Wellington Women's Group lessons in Auckland.

Classes are important, as the women have few opportunities to mix with people from other cultures. Many are mothers of young children, and without the childcare provided by Aline, attending the classes would be difficult, if not impossible.

"I was very lucky," says Aline. "I was able to integrate into the New Zealand community easily because of my Kiwi husband's friends and because I can speak English. I didn't have much homesickness."

She feels she had an unusually smooth transition to life here and is keen to give back to the country. Volunteering is one way she feels she can contribute.

"I'm very proud of doing this job," she says. "I can't say I'm an English tutor, but helping out with English Language Partners has given me a right to claim that I'm helping in that wonderful Kiwi way of welcoming and integrating immigrants and refugees. Not all countries are that welcoming."

"Right now, I'm looking after four infants as well as some older children," she adds. "The older kids help with the younger kids, but the parents come and help, too, if they see I need it."

Class teacher Robyn Martin has a great deal of respect for Aline. It was she who suggested Aline take on the role 18 months ago.

"It's a huge help to have another volunteer here at class to help out with the children and keep them amused," says Robyn. "Aline reads stories, builds towers with blocks and plays with balls, allowing the mums to focus on their language studies. This year has been very busy, with 10 women and eight children in the class."

For Aline, contributing to the group is a pleasure. She believes that her childcare role benefits herself as much as the mothers.



Eva (Lifang) Lan and her son, Thomas

“ I’ve seen people who were very shy come out their shell.”

PHOTOS: ESTELLE SWAN

“It makes me feel younger playing with kids,” she says. “Blowing bubbles and things like that are fun!”

“There’s a sense of family and community there,” she adds. “The learners adore Robyn. They look up to her.”

“The women are learning English and help each other emotionally, too. I’ve seen people who were very shy come out their shell. It’s a bonus of the lessons.”

The women focus on conversational English and on learning about life and customs here. Aline explains that this is their greatest need, and that even for people such as herself, who arrive with excellent written English, learning to speak with locals is not always as easy as they expect.

The schools Aline attended in the Philippines taught in English, and she later created her own English-language website to promote her home province of Quezon. Aline set herself the daunting task of writing a fresh article for the website every day. Yet, in spite of her extensive experience with the English language,

since moving to New Zealand, she has found communication challenging at times.

“Philippine English is not Kiwi English,” she explains. “Each country has its own nuances and accent.”

Recently, Aline met up with groups of Philippine people living in Auckland. This led to her discovering another way she can help refugees and migrants connect with the wider community.

This year, she helped arrange for some from one group to participate in Auckland’s annual ‘Round the Bays’ fun run. The group even arranged to have tee shirts with the Philippine flag on made up for the event.

Aline radiates a quiet confidence and a determination to help – finding new ways to make the change of moving here easier for others. ✨

Network news

Race Relations Day in the gardens

A large group of Wellington learners visited the Botanical Gardens. The 21 March trip had perfect weather.



Celebrating success

Recent participants of the Waikato centre’s intensive workplace communication ‘Work Talk’ programme.



Poster celebrates our many languages

This lovely poster was created to celebrate both International Mother Language Day (21 February) and Race Relations Day (21 March) this year. 2,600 posters were distributed directly to schools.



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