

CONNECTING CULTURES

ISSUE 21 SPRING 2013



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Cover Saraswati Raut with her daughter Smriti, and Jenny Eggink
Photo Leigh Dome

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Kia ora Welcome

The whanau of NooZeRaBi Ba Lie are grateful for their mother's courage and resolve – she ensured their survival through extremely difficult times. Reading her story reminds me of how important it is to value the bravery of our newer Kiwis.

Many former refugees and migrants have shared their stories in this *Connecting Cultures*. Most have made extraordinary sacrifices to secure a safer, more prosperous future for their families.

With their resolve and endurance, and with our help, people like NooZeRaBi and her family are now making a meaningful contribution in their communities, committed to building a stronger future for themselves and for New Zealand.

As we're a charity, it's through our amazing volunteers and generous donors and funders that we're able to continue our essential work.


Nicola Sutton
Chief Executive



Thank you!

Because of your generosity newer Kiwis feel more included in our neighbourhoods and workplaces.

Donate!

Help more refugees and migrants lead the independent life many of us take for granted.

Go to www.englishlanguage.org.nz
or call 04 471 2382



Confidence *is everything*

Saraswati Raut has reached her first English goal: to write the story of her loved Bhutanese grandmother. Di Billing

It's a wealth of information about Ganga Karki, her hard work and respect for learning.

"When she was a child she was very clever," Saraswati wrote about her childhood mentor. "She learnt to read and write in Bhutan. Most girls didn't. She also learnt to cook, knit and weave woollen mats." And later, at the age of 31, when her husband died, "she worked hard for her children to grow."

Saraswati arrived in Palmerston North in 2009 from Nepal where she had been a refugee since she was small. At that time, she wasn't particularly

interested in study, "I liked to do things with my hands." But she realised she needed to improve her English to reach her big dream: To get a job.

Her husband, Ran, had better English and secured a job doing gardening and building. Saraswati became pregnant and her daughter, Smriti, is now three and attending kindergarten.

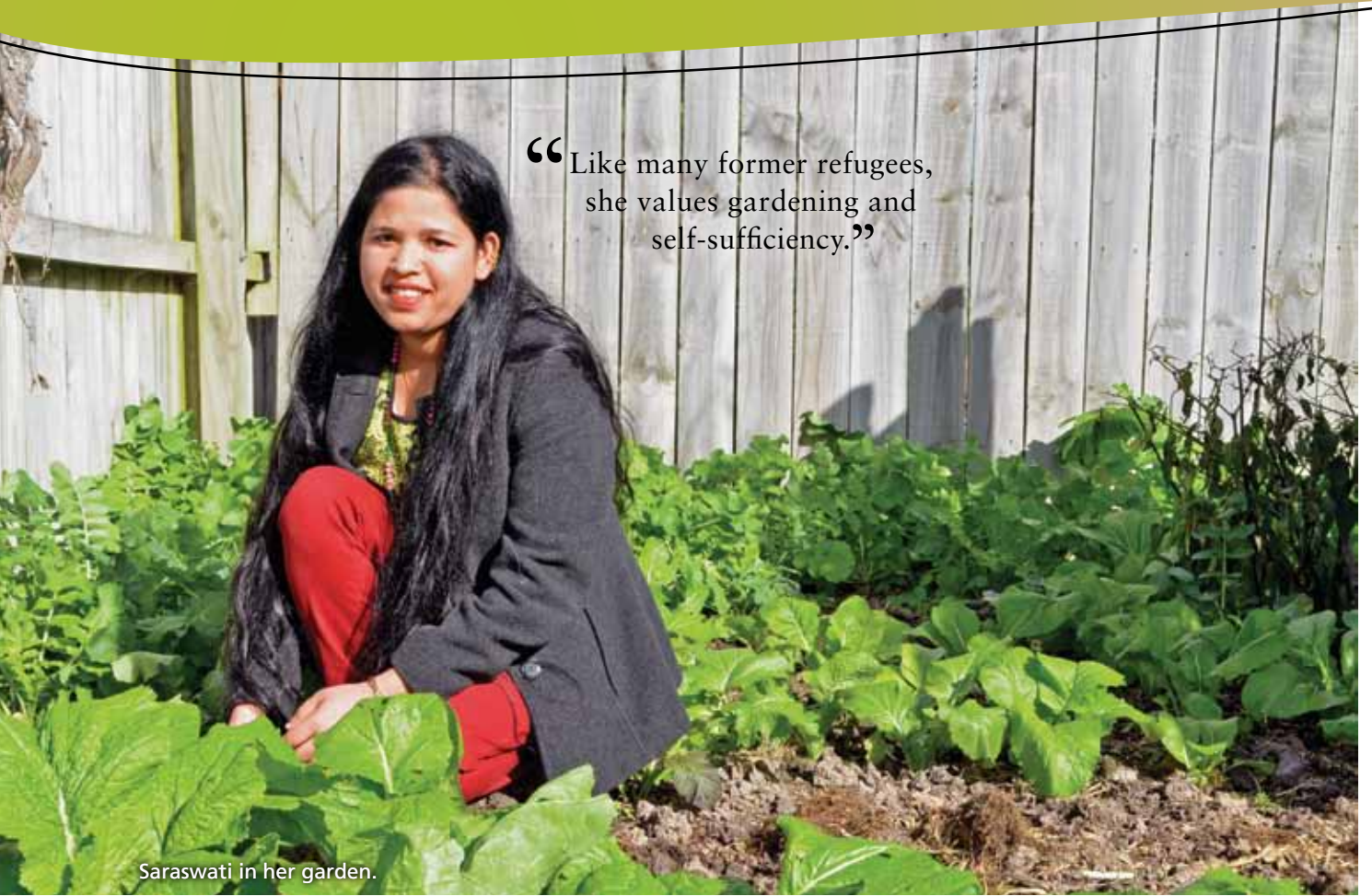
Saraswati enrolled with English Language Partners and started ESOL home tutoring. Her volunteer tutor, Jenny Eggink, says her progress was at first slow, then steady, as she gained confidence. ▶

PHOTOS: LEIGH DOME





Saraswati with chillies
grown in her garden.



“Like many former refugees, she values gardening and self-sufficiency.”

Saraswati in her garden.

► “And now, with the pride she has from writing her grandmother’s story, her progress is monumental. Confidence is everything”.

Home tutoring suits Saraswati. She was shy about joining a group. Learning at home also allows her to keep an eye on Smriti who takes a keen interest in the weekly sessions.

Saraswati likes the mixture of “learning and doing” in Jenny’s tutoring, which includes visits to the local library. She has also improved her English doing domestic activities, especially in her aromatic kitchen where she showed Jenny how to make a Nepali curry. In return, Jenny worked with her to make a chocolate cake.

Saraswati is an excellent cook: She was taught by Ganga Karki. She and Ran are particular about the ingredients they use for curries. Most are grown in their back garden which includes a homemade greenhouse where they grow six different varieties of chillies.

The garden also has big patches of greens, including spinach and white radishes with tasty, long leaves. “We eat mostly Nepali food,” says Saraswati, “but now Smriti will sometimes ask for a sandwich.”

Saraswati is a skilled and knowledgeable gardener. She recently joined a group “with some refugees, some Kiwis” that runs a suburban community garden. Like many former refugees, she values gardening and self-sufficiency. She enjoys making friends at the garden and, increasingly, being able to talk about the planting.

Saraswati is also using her improved English to interpret for refugees from Bhutan and Nepal, at the local hospital, MidCentral Health. She supports family members, including her disabled mother-in-law Ganga Raut, when they visit the doctor.

Saraswati is now 29 and looking to the future. She is determined to get a job and hopes to use some of her existing skills in cooking, gardening, knitting, sewing and other hand-

crafts. She would love to care for the elderly, based on her experience with her mother-in-law and her pride in her Ganga Karki. “I would be good at this,” she says.

She knows she may need to get a qualification and will continue to work hard at her English. Jenny is leaving for a new position in Auckland but Saraswati promises she will “work hard and learn” with her new home tutor. She also practises her English with her husband and daughter. “I am so proud she will have two languages,” she says.

She is still in touch with Ganga Karki who is now 87 and living in the United States with other members of Saraswati’s family. She says: “I want her to be proud of me.” Jenny adds, “Perhaps one day you can write your own story for her.” ✨

You can help a refugee like Saraswati to learn English by making a donation at www.englishlanguage.org.nz

‘Million dollar woman’

Volunteering for Mother Teresa in India, working as a lawyer and becoming an ESOL home tutor, were experiences which led to Amanda Calder founding the Refugee Family Reunification Trust. Patricia Thompson

Launched in 2001, the charity helps former refugees in the Wellington region bring immediate family members, who are in a refugee situation, to begin new lives in New Zealand.

“The most important factor in the successful resettlement of refugees is family reunification,” says Amanda, who chairs the trust and received a Queen’s Service Medal in 2011 in recognition of her work.

“But the costs involved are often the barrier to families being reunited – frequently parents and children. This is the reason the trust was set up.”

Sitting in the office of her home, Amanda pulls up images on the computer of some of the 200-plus families the trust has helped reunite.

As well as practical support and advice, the charity provides crucial funding to help cover the expenses of the immigration process which refugee families could otherwise not afford.

Last year it assisted with 52 applications, providing \$152,000 towards such costs, including paying airfares for 30 adults and 34 children.

The trust has no salaried staff and no premises. Everyone, including Amanda, works on an entirely voluntary basis and 100 per cent of donations go to refugees. Amanda has raised almost \$1 million for this work over the past 12 years.

Amanda (centre) with Afghan family members reunited by the trust.



Her interest began when, having graduated with a law degree, she went to India to do voluntary service with Mother Teresa's charity.

Returning to New Zealand, she joined a law firm in Auckland before moving to the Ombudsman's office in Wellington – because “fairness and justice” have always been the driving motivations for her interest in law.

After the elder of her two children was born, Amanda volunteered as an ESOL home tutor with English Language Partners, her first experience of working with refugees.

Amanda with children from a family assisted by the trust.

“I absolutely loved home tutoring,” she says. “I was working with a Somali lady who did not have a word of English and was illiterate in her own language”.

“She had a mailbox full of mail. Not only could she not read the mail, she didn't know it was her mailbox.”

Amanda also began volunteering for Refugee Services, using her legal knowledge to help former refugees with their immigration applications for family members.

“Those experiences made me very aware of what an incredibly difficult

situation these people are in. They come here and they have no English, no networks, no funds, nothing,” she says.

“Often their closest relatives may still be living in appalling situations in refugee camps. But, not only do they face language difficulties in negotiating the immigration process, the fees required by Immigration New Zealand, costs for medicals and the airfares to bring their relatives here are simply beyond their means.

“It just seemed so very wrong that, because of this, people could not bring their close relatives, including their children, to New Zealand.”



Former English Language Partners' Wellington manager Therese O'Connell was among staunch supporters in setting up the trust and is still a trustee.

"We have the support of other agencies working directly with refugees and use English Language Partners' postal box," says Amanda.

"Many of our refugees have an English Language Partners' home tutor. Often their tutor does so much more than help with English. They become a friend, a mentor and someone who can help with so many life skills."

Amanda was also instrumental in setting up the Refugee Immigration and Legal Advice Service with lawyers providing pro bono support – a service which is now run by Community Law Wellington and Hutt Valley.

"There are really good lawyers providing advice for refugees free of charge," says Amanda. "Without them the trust couldn't do the work we do because if people are going to get their families here, they need really good immigration advice.

"It is a very difficult process. We have just brought in a Somalian family from a refugee camp in Kenya and that has taken six years. Everything is so hard for these people. On their own, it would be just about impossible. For us it is not easy, but it is possible.

"For me personally it is a great challenge and every success feels wonderful. I love going to the airport when people finally arrive."

Funding this work, particularly airfares, is one of the biggest challenges.

"Fundraising for refugees is not easy," says Amanda. "As a very small trust we have a different approach to most fundraisers. We don't ask people for money, we don't have the resources to do that.



Amanda receiving her Queen's Service Medal in 2011.

"However, when it comes to fundraising, for any NGO working with refugees, I think it is vital to make sure people know what you do. You need to show that strong link between the funding, the programmes and the benefits they bring."

Funding for the Refugee Family Reunification Trust comes from a number of sources including private donations and fundraising events. Many donations come about by word of mouth.

"Some people make regular payments while others might donate \$10 or \$20 occasionally," says Amanda. "We are hugely grateful for every one and I always send a hand-written thank you card. The small donations are just as important as the larger ones, they really add up."

The trust also has valued relationships with a number of trusts and organisations such as Queen Margaret College in Wellington, with students and parents raising about \$1,000 a year as well as providing practical help.

"A family with two young children recently arrived and the students at Queen Margaret College have provided so much, from work clothes for the father, to household goods, hand-made blankets and baskets full of toys and warm clothes for the children," says Amanda.

The Elite International School of Beauty and Spa Therapies also donated more than \$12,000 last year – raised through students providing competitively-priced beauty treatments for customers as part of their training.

"People are so very kind," says Amanda. "And they are ultimately responsible for the successful reunification of so many deserving families." ✨

For more details
contact Amanda Calder
email acalder@xtra.co.nz or see
www.refugeefamilyreunificationtrust.org.nz



On the job English

Antonio Claridad, Felix Rodiano and Anthony Caintic came for a better life and agree New Zealand offers a wealth of work opportunities. Kate Gaskell

The three men arrived from the Philippines eighteen months ago and are based at Fielden Metalworks, a sheet metal manufacturing company in Christchurch.

Nigel Maxey, owner and managing director, enrolled Antonio, Felix and Anthony in a course that's having a dramatic effect on their lives. "Their English has improved and I think they're more outgoing for it."

Thanks to Nigel, the men have attended workplace English evening classes run by English Language Partners.

Joanna Fox, Coordinator for English Language Partners, says that many people are coming in on work permits to assist with the Christchurch

rebuild. "Demand for English classes is growing," she says. "We try to offer lessons at times that suit workers."

Joanna believes it's essential people can communicate easily in their new communities as well as the workplace. "People on work permits need the opportunity to learn about Kiwi life and culture."

Without permanent residence, Antonio, Felix and Anthony are unable to access government support to improve their English. However, Nigel believes investing in his workers' English is vital for workplace knowledge and safety. "These courses are very important and more would be good."

He says, since attending the classes, not only has the men's general English improved but also their "understanding of work instructions."

"We get fewer errors between what was asked and what happens. So it's helpful."

The men are clearly grateful. "He is happy to send us to the English classes because it is important, especially at this company and it's very good for the three of us," says Antonio.

But English lessons aren't the only kind of support Nigel provides. The men speak fondly of other help he offers— even purchasing bikes for all three to ride to work on. "He's a very good guy."



Antonio Claridad, Felix Rodiano and Anthony Caintic

PHOTOS SIMON FORSYTH

Antonio says their boss looks out for them, "Nigel has always cared about us and he's often asking what's the problem, what is needed, and he can help sometimes."

All three have found that their new skills and confidence have improved outside work too – even at the mall! Felix points out that English is an essential part of Kiwi life, "you need English in everyday life in New Zealand. 100%."

Anthony says the simplest of things can be tricky if you don't know about them. "When I was not going to English classes, I wrote a report, all in capital letters. I now know that you don't do that!"

Where they would usually stick to themselves, the lessons have also given them confidence to interact with workmates. "On our break time or smoke time we socialise," Felix says.

Nigel has ideas for extending their English further: "If we can find a way to have some sort of a social group as well, that would get them interacting more with Kiwis."

Learning English has also made the men positive about the future.

"For me, long term, I would like to open a small business in the Philippines. That's me," says Antonio.

Felix's goals are more family orientated: "My plan is that I want to get my family and bring them to live in New Zealand."

Antonio, Felix and Anthony are keen to embrace Kiwi culture and learn more about English. Their employer also wants them to build on their existing skills, "Just help them along," says Nigel.

"They learn English at school but it's not a first language. It's like us trying

to go to Europe and suddenly be speaking French or German. You may have learnt it at school but it doesn't equip you very well for day-to-day life unless you've done it to a very high level."

And it's that high level Antonio, Felix and Anthony are keen to reach one day. ✨

For more stories visit
www.englishlanguage.org.nz/learners-stories

Working the talk

Four weeks' preparation can make the difference between winning a job and being overlooked.

Alison Robertson

Over four intensive mornings a week for four weeks, Workplace Coordinator Susan Wright and two other teachers cover a whole gamut of topics, starting with how and where to look for work and moving on to health and safety, the Treaty of Waitangi, legal issues, and workplace communication.

Work Talk, created and delivered by English Language Partners, is a Hamilton course preparing people for work in New Zealand.

"Our focus is really on getting people to be successful and independent job seekers," says Susan. "We look at their skills and qualifications and

where they fit in our job market, or how they can transfer skills into other opportunities. Sometimes we'll find their skills can be applied in areas they may not have thought of."

People come with hopes and dreams, and often with a reasonable command of English, and it's easy to lose confidence when they can't find a job, says Susan.

"We can give them strategies to help build confidence, and to tailor cover letters and CVs for a New Zealand context. Also to get ready for that life-changing job interview."

She tells of a South African couple

who had Afrikaans as a first language, but were competent English speakers.

"They were becoming despondent, unable to find work and had doubts about our course because they thought it was too language focussed. But we were able to help the husband make his CV more specific to the jobs he was applying for, and in very little time he had two or three significant job offers. He said all job seekers should do our course!"

The centre is running seven courses in 2013, each with 10-12 students. The Lottery Grants Board and the Lion Foundation provide essential funding.

Alongside the job-seeking skills, participants are encouraged to create their own networking opportunities.

"A lot of jobs are not advertised, so we suggest students join local clubs and attend events where they might meet potential employers, and we encourage them to volunteer while they're searching for paid work.



'Benvenuto' to a new life

Andrea Baldin and Monica Cugnolio are from Biella in Italy. They made several visits to New Zealand before deciding to settle here. Now Hamilton is home.

Alison Robertson

"In some countries volunteering isn't valued," says Susan. "So we have to convince people it's important and that volunteering can count as work experience, provide positive references and a better understanding of the New Zealand workplace."

Once they complete Work Talk, job seekers with permanent residency or a full and open work permit can move to the next level – assistance from the Migrant Employment Project. It's run by the Hamilton Multicultural Services Trust and Susan is seconded there for 19 hours a week.

"We help them with their job applications, interview support, contact potential employers and education providers and can build on what they've learnt at Work Talk.

"It's a good wrap-around service. Employment is key to finding your feet in a new country, yet it's often the hardest challenge," Susan says.

"It's great to help people get their new lives here off to a good start." ✨



Another successful Work Talk.

“We can give them strategies to help build confidence, and to tailor cover letters and CVs for a New Zealand context.”

Andrea and Monica live close to Hamilton's Migrant Resource Centre where English Language Partners is based, and so dropped in to find out a little more about working in New Zealand.

Susan Wright told them about Work Talk and they signed up.

"It helped our language and our listening," says Monica, "but it did much, much more. I think the most important thing was practising how to do an interview. I applied for one job, and I got it. I felt calm and confident in the interview. I did everything I had learned."

PHOTO ANN HUSTON

Monica, a former office administrator in Italy, is working as a caregiver for a business called Home Instead Senior Care and she says she's enjoying the change of role, working with the elderly. She has also done an MYOB course at the Migrant Resource Centre and plans to do another focussing on payroll.

Meanwhile Andrea, an IT specialist, has his own business AB SoftLab Ltd and is working from home. "For me, the course prepared me for the New Zealand work environment ... like how to contact people and how to do cold calling."

He was also able to visit the local Chamber of Commerce, a local Rotary Club and is continuing to make connections. "I still have a client back in Italy and I have picked up a new client here."

He's feeling positive about his future. ✨

Thanks to the Lottery Grants Board and Lion Foundation, learners are able to participate more fully in life in New Zealand.



Men *and* women in sheds

Hamilton's Men's Shed recently welcomed women through its doors when a local initiative got English learners conversing while doing something practical. Alison Robertson

“We worked with Neil Bruce, coordinator for Men's Shed, to set up a woodwork class for some of our language learners,” says Jo de Lisle, English Language Partners' manager.

The group, ranging in age from late 20s to 60, of mixed language and woodworking abilities, and hailing from China, Japan, Taiwan, Russia and Korea, turned up keen to get started on a 10-week course.

“They took to tutor Ces Oldham straight away,” says Jo. “He's a former Wintec tutor; he explained everything clearly – and despite a thick Welsh accent, the group had no trouble understanding him, including his jokes.”

Jo says the woodwork class was a good opportunity to get people more confident about having day-to-day English conversations in a relaxed environment. “Many in the class had some English but weren't very confident about speaking in unfamiliar situations.”

So the talking began – as they all made a box with a lid and a handle.

Two class members were Mark Lee and his wife Lily Shen. They attend an English Language Group and liked the idea of making something in wood.

“I thought it would help me do some DIY round the home,” says Lily. “It was good to learn about the different types of wood and what you can

Lily Shen and Mark Lee

do with it. I like rimu, but it's very expensive.”

Mark says in Taiwan, buildings are all constructed in concrete, so working with wood was a new experience.

“Finding out about wood and all its uses; I learnt a lot. And I'm hoping to do another class sometime soon.” ✨

PHOTO: ALISON ROBERTSON

Creating success stories

Guest word: Hon. Michael Woodhouse, Minister of Immigration

It gives me great pleasure to acknowledge the invaluable work English Language Partners New Zealand (ELPNZ) carries out with refugees and migrants.

Community-based services such as yours are integral to settling refugees and migrants into their new communities and, in particular, linking them to local residents who provide them with essential skills and networks.

I am really impressed with the fact that over 20,000 New Zealanders have volunteered and completed the ELPNZ training programme to gain the skills to tutor adult refugees and migrants.

We know how important English language is for refugees and some migrants to secure a job. ELPNZ's volunteers make a real difference here, as do the workplace language classes that you deliver. It's particularly pleasing to see how much learning is now going on in the workplace as well as in more traditional environments such as at home.

Immigration New Zealand's Settlement Unit has recently developed resources to assist newcomers better understand our Kiwi workplaces.

The Government recognises that finding a job is often the hardest challenge for refugees, and this is why employment is such a key focus of the whole-of-Government Refugee Resettlement Strategy we launched late last year.

Of course, not only does a job offer the key for refugees to take part in New Zealand life, it also gives them a realistic context where they can improve their English.

Under the Strategy, we will obtain more information about refugees before they arrive here that will help assess their work readiness and employment options.

We'll follow this up by including a greater focus on employment as part of the reception programme and, where possible, we will ensure that refugees are housed closer to employment opportunities in their settlement communities.

Since our resettlement programme began in 1944 with a group of young refugees from Poland, we have given 33,000 refugees the opportunity of a better future here, and it is always heartening when you hear about the success stories from refugee communities – often against overwhelming odds.



Invariably, these stories involve people who have come to New Zealand with little or no English, and it is likely that through the efforts of many of ELPNZ's volunteers, they have learnt English and done well for themselves. We want to do all we can to ensure that refugees resettling from the world's trouble spots are given the tools to make the best possible contribution to their new life here.

It's well recognised that New Zealand also relies on increasing numbers of migrant workers and attracting them is going to be increasingly difficult in a highly competitive global market.

Not all migrants are fluent in English – particularly those who came as partners or family. This is where ELPNZ plays an important role – firstly, in reaching out to help them learn English, but also in linking them to a community of friendship and connections. Increasingly, New Zealanders' welcoming and generous qualities will make the "point of difference" in attracting skilled migrants.

The work that ELPNZ is doing certainly makes a huge difference to newcomers' perception of our nation and to adding real value in people's lives. ✨

Immigration New Zealand resources

worktalk.immigration.govt.nz

www.ssnz.govt.nz/working-in-new-zealand/settling

Key to whanau's survival: *One superhuman mum*

Visitors will be offered fruit when they visit NooZeRaBi Ba Lie's home. Di Billing

Fruit is highly valued, as it was rare in the Thai refugee camp where NooZeRaBi and her family spent nearly 10 years. Bananas helped them survive many gruelling weeks spent in forests as they fled to Thailand.

Safe in Palmerston North, you are likely to find grandmother and matriarch NooZeRaBi, originally from Myanmar, in the company of several of her six children and her four grandchildren.

You will be made very welcome. NooZeRaBi is known for her warm, hospitable nature.

She is learning English in classes run by English Language Partners and one of her greatest pleasures is being able to say, "Hello, how are you?" to new friends in her English classes.

The rest of the family improved their English through schooling and NooZeRaBi realised she needed to catch up. She now has enough English to make essential household tasks easier.

"I did not even know how to say 'Hi!'", NooZeRaBi says, "Maybe now I talk too much!"

At first she was bewildered by all the things available in New Zealand supermarkets: after decades of poverty, she was also afraid to spend too much, even on fruit for the family.

Now NooZeRaBi shops with confidence and enjoys conversation with people at the checkout.

She is also pleased to be able to read the price tags on the fruit.

Best of all, she can communicate in English with her grandchildren, aged from one to 11. She looks after the younger ones two days a week as part of the PAUA (Preschoolers At Home Uniquely Learning) Early Childhood Education programme.

PAUA supports refugee-background caregivers, allowing parents to study and reach their own resettlement goals. The training, including first aid, has also helped lift NooZeRaBi's confidence and her English.

"I am happy," she says, as she talks about her grandchildren. She helps them with basic learning like counting and reading. She likes to take them to play outside and is pleased she can now read weather reports to plan for the children's visits.

NooZeRaBi's own children, aged 16 to 29 are all in Palmerston North, and are supportive of their mother and proud of her English progress. They are also grateful for her determination, hard work and

sacrifices on their behalf as the family made their way from Myanmar to Thailand.

The story of their journey is dramatic and complicated: NooZeRaBi's eldest daughter Lahe, now 21, helps translate and adds her own memories to the story.

Fifteen years ago, the family fled soldiers advancing on their village in Myanmar, making their way through many kilometres of dense forest. NooZeRaBi was pregnant with her youngest child and the other five were very young. For the first few days they ran as fast as they could, using up the small amount of food the older boys had been able to carry from the village.

"The food ran out," says Lahe. "Then we would look for banana trees and eat the bananas. We also built ourselves a little house made of banana leaves."

Mosquitoes were a constant problem. NooZeRaBi groans and swats her face at the memory and Lahe talks about how long the bites would





NooZeRaBi Ba Lie

PHOTOS: LEIGH DOME

take to heal. At times they were forced to drink stagnant, often toxic water, which killed members of other fleeing families. "And we worried about animals, especially snakes and tigers," says Lahe.

When they eventually arrived at the Thai camp, there was little available. "Too many people," says NooZeRaBi. They had to build another house, this time from bamboo, and had to rebuild every year because of flooding. To get money for food, the children went back into the forest to help their mother gather bamboo to sell to other refugees. They started a garden and sold some of their beans, corn and cucumber, but money was still short.

So NooZeRaBi and Lahe, then 11, went to work, tramping to the nearest city to pick chillies in the big gardens. Both NooZeRaBi and Lahe remember trying to get rid of the burning sting of the chillies on their hands. Their pay was small, but Lahe once used most of hers to buy a treat for her brothers and sisters. "They wanted to eat an apple. So I bought

one. I could only afford one. We cut it up into little slices and shared it."

In 2007, they took up the opportunity provided by the New Zealand Government to travel to Auckland as refugees. After six weeks in the Mangere Refugee Resettlement Centre they moved to Palmerston North, where NooZeRaBi was pleased to find a house big enough for all of her children.

NooZeRaBi is now 47 but usually says, "I am 55," when asked. "I feel older," she says, "from all that looking after the children."

She is proud of her progress with English: "But it is easier when you are younger".

Her tutor Catherine Taylor says NooZeRaBi was shy but has come out of her shell.

She says NooZeRaBi stands confidently at the front of the class and "makes us all feel welcome". ✨

For more about PAUA
www.paua.ac.nz

Network news

Simply the best

Our Wellington centre scooped the 'Supreme Winner' award, Wellington City region, at the 2013 Wellington Airport Regional Community Awards in August.



First aid for new mums

What to do in an emergency if you don't speak English well? A recent session in Aoraki covered calling 111 and other emergency procedures.



British dignitary visits Waikato

The British Speaker of the House of Commons, the Rt Hon John Bercow MP visited the Waikato centre in August to see how Afghan interpreters and their families are settling in.





Ruth Hamilton

Teaching people to soar

It doesn't take a lot of digging to uncover Ruth Hamilton's dedication to her job.
Malcolm Pullman

Her class is the noisy one tucked away in the back where laughter, often at her own expense, is the key to unlocking the shackles of fear so common to immigrants embracing new cultures.

She will tell you that her job is easy: "I just sit there and talk. I like talking to all sorts of people."

But dig a little deeper and the foundations to this bubbly enthusiasm are exposed. She sees breaking down barriers to make people feel comfortable in their new surrounds as one of the most important factors in learning English.

And one of the best ways to remove barriers is to learn a little of the culture that comes with each person.

"I think language is a relational thing. If you can get a handle on where the learners come from and understand a little of their different world view, it can make a huge difference in establishing the trust you need as a teacher."

Ruth spends many hours researching the customs and etiquette of her learners' countries.

"I'm aware they are in a new country and will need to adjust, but I don't think there can be any harm in adjusting my behaviour too, just a little, to make people feel more comfortable."

Ruth describes a breakthrough moment in a recent class: "I started

moving around the table talking to each learner about their country until I had ignited an animated discussion among them all. All except one.

"Every time I tried to engage her, she would just shake her head and say "My English no good. I stupid, stupid woman" and laugh with embarrassment.

"She was Chinese. My Mandarin is horrible, scarcely intelligible, and absolutely perfect for calming a learner convinced of her own stupidity.

"I sat down beside her, took her hand in mine, and began to speak my horrible Mandarin. She gave a shriek of pure joy and began to answer me in English.

"Maybe she had thought 'good heavens, I can't be worse than that'. Or maybe she just wanted to meet me half way. I don't know. What I do know is that she never called herself stupid again.

"Someone once told me, 'If you want to succeed with people, go low, go low.' It's true. If you are willing to go low, you will teach people to soar."

Ruth's own education is somewhat unorthodox. Born and raised in Whangarei, she was home schooled, which allowed plenty of time for other interests, so as a teenager she worked part time in a florist shop.

When she was 17, her family moved to Connecticut for her father to study, and her knowledge of flowers and floristry translated into helping a friend teach some classes at a local agricultural college.

There she noticed a recent Ukrainian immigrant, a girl with excellent understanding of written English but with no confidence to apply it. Ruth wanted to help but didn't know how. She wasn't able to overcome the barriers between herself and Juliana. Long after Ruth moved on from Connecticut, she kept thinking about Juliana. Even though there had never been a friendship, Juliana had changed Ruth's path forever.

Back in New Zealand, Ruth saw an advertisement for volunteer training with English Language Partners Northland. The memory of Juliana emerged and she saw a chance to help. She signed on as a 'tutor in training' in 2011 and discovered the world is full of people like Juliana.

"As a teacher, learners will often subconsciously put you on a dais up in front of them, but I find it so much better to be alongside them.

"I have discovered that the art of teaching English is to listen with your eyes and understand with your heart." ✨

You can support our teaching programmes by volunteering at www.englishlanguage.org.nz/teach-english

Network news

Adult Learners' Week

Hutt's outstanding group learners received certificates and shared a lunch together.



North Shore awarded tutors with long service volunteering. They presented certificates to over 20 tutors who reached five, 10, 15 and 17 years involvement.



Taupo's awards ceremony was held at Waiariki Hospitality School – coffee by trainee baristas!



Matariki in Auckland

The North Shore celebrated Matariki in July with vibrant presentations, tutor certificate awards and a shared meal.



Ruth with class members



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