

CONNECTING CULTURES

ISSUE 25 SUMMER 2015



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2015 Adult and Community Education Aotearoa
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NEW ZEALAND
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Kia ora

The plight of families fleeing their war-torn countries for the relative safety of Europe has been one of the most visible exoduses in recent world history.

The tremendous response from Kiwis keen to support and welcome more refugees demonstrates our willingness to lend a hand and to share our country with newcomers.

We're a nation with a strong migrant background – many of us have parents or grandparents who arrived seeking a better life in Aotearoa.

Giving others a fair go is a belief that's deeply held in New Zealand. It's realized in the everyday work of English Language Partners' volunteers and teachers who help newer Kiwis to get ahead and feel they belong in their new communities.

I'm immensely proud of their support of people who are building a new life. This work often extends far beyond the immediate people they are teaching. Being able to speak English can benefit the whole family and the wider community. Workplaces are safer if everyone can understand health and safety information, and children whose parents can communicate with teachers will feel more comfortable and are more likely to do well at school.

The more people settle in, the more they are able to give back to their new country.

The result is stronger communities in which everyone can thrive.

Nicola Sutton
Chief Executive

Donate – 3 easy ways

Help refugees and migrants lead the independent life we take for granted.

- 1 Mail us your donation slip (See inside back cover.)
- 2 Online at englishlanguage.org.nz
- 3 Call free on 0800 367 376

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Volunteering *fills the gap*

Like many school leavers, Abby Fisher wanted to do something with her gap year when she finished school.

Alison Robertson / Photos: Michael Jeans

But Abby didn't want to go to an elite British institution with a history and reputation as long as your arm, she wanted more of a challenge.

Abby went to Malawi. It's a land-locked country in south-eastern Africa bordering Tanzania, Zambia and Mozambique, with a population of just over 16 million. The official language is English but the locals speak dialects of Chichewa. While some 19-year-olds might be fearful going to a country so different from their own, Abby relished the opportunity to experience a different way of living.

Before going away, Abby did a preparatory course with Lattitude Global Volunteering, an organisation which places 17- to 25-year-old volunteers

all over the world. On arrival, she completed an orientation course before joining the staff at Bwengu Primary School.

"I lived in the village next to the school with two Australian girls who were working with the secondary school. There was no running water but we had electricity five days a week, so we were lucky."

The staple food in the region is nsima, cooked cornmeal of porridge-like consistency, and that was what Abby mostly ate. "There'd be meat for a special occasion, but basically I was vegetarian while I was there."

She also managed to pick up some of the local language. "That was interesting. Sometimes I'd pick up what the locals were saying about me, and would surprise them when

I answered in their language. I lost count of the number of marriage proposals I received. If they'd known I was a poor student, they probably wouldn't have asked."

Abby returned to Hamilton, planning to work and save for university but she couldn't shake the volunteering and travel bugs. And that's where English Language Partners came in.

She found the Waikato centre online, completed the 12-week training course and became an ESOL home tutor. At 19, Abby's a fair bit younger than most of their volunteers (she's the youngest, fully-trained ESOL home tutor in Hamilton) but that doesn't bother her at all.

As soon as the new year began, Abby volunteered to help with Waikato's summer course for refugees and ▶



Abby with her father,
Anthony Fisher.

migrants. Straight after that she had her first learner, from Afghanistan, a mother with two young children. In between her waiting job at a local bar and restaurant, she also made time to volunteer at an ESOL-Literacy class for three hours, including helping with set-up and pack-down three days a week.

She thinks more people should be encouraged to volunteer. "It's the best thing, seeing the progress people make, and some of these new migrants from refugee backgrounds have come so far. There are those special little moments, when you see things click."

ESOL-Literacy class teacher Gayle Pearson says Abby is a natural when it comes to teaching. "She just knows how to relate to these learners. I don't need to tell her what to do, she just knows what to do and the learners love her."

“ It’s the best thing, seeing the progress people make... There are those special little moments, when you see things click. ”

Abby's dedication and enthusiasm was acknowledged when she won the Youth Award at Volunteering Waikato's annual Excellence Awards earlier in the year. She was nominated by Jo de Lisle, English Language Partners' manager, who says Abby has been generous with her time, helping people to gain confidence and independence as they settle into their new community. "Quite simply, she's fabulous," Jo says. "She has given far more time than we ever expected.

"Her experience in Malawi no doubt gives her a better understanding of what it's like to be a stranger in a new

land, and it helps her to empathise with the learners in a completely natural way."

Abby has since returned to Malawi but plans to begin university study at Victoria in Wellington next year, doing a BSc/BA majoring in human development, international relations and second language teaching.

Chances are she'll be back at English Language Partners when time permits. ✂

Watch Abby talking about volunteering in Malawi
www.youtube.com/watch?v=v_WXL3eUunM

A man with dark hair, smiling, wearing a black zip-up work jacket and black gloves. He is standing in a workshop or garage with various tools and equipment in the background. The lighting is warm and focused on him.

A foot *in the door*

For Reza Khaleghi, the best way to find paid work was to begin by volunteering his time for free. James Fyfe / Photos: Andrew Lau ▶



Many qualified immigrants land on our shores each year, hoping to gain work quickly in their specialised field.

Sadly, the reality is that the road to gainful employment can often be long and difficult and, for many, even impossible.

But one Iranian mechanic has proven that with hard work, compromise and a little help from the community, it is possible.

Arriving in New Zealand from his native Iran four years ago, Reza Khaleghi dreamed big from the very beginning, setting his sights not only on finding work as a mechanic once again, but on ultimately being his own boss.

“My dream in New Zealand is to open a workshop myself,” Reza says, from the busy Auckland garage he has worked in for the past few months.

His friend and fellow countryman, Ali Nasiriam, who has lived in New Zealand for a quarter of a century, recognised Reza’s drive but knew how hard it can be finding work in a country when one often lacks vital connections and ties.

The retired real estate agent and former captain in the Iranian Airforce says he loves to stay connected to the Iranian community by volunteering as a translator. And he decided to step in and teach Reza English.



Reza Khaleghi with Ali Nasiriam, his volunteer teacher and mentor.

Although both are speakers of Farsi, Reza says Ali's teaching technique was to use only their adopted language when the pair communicated.

"Ali only sends me texts in English," he says. "Before, it was really difficult for me but now it's really easy. Sometimes we speak Farsi, but most of the time we speak English."

Although Reza initially also attended English classes at AUT, he credits the bulk of his learning to a mix of his

friend's teaching and to practising in real-life situations, estimating that it took him a good six months' hard study to get his language skills up to a level where he could use English on the job.

As his English improved, Reza focused more on achieving his goal of returning to work in the field he loved.

"His previous job was as a mechanic and he was always telling me 'I want to be a mechanic [again]'," says Ali. "He had a lot of confidence."

Knowing that even with improved English, obtaining work wouldn't be easy, Ali suggested that Reza – who was working in a scrap metal yard – get his foot in the door of the mechanic world by volunteering at a garage one day a week during weekends.

"I told him to volunteer first. Once you're a mechanic, you'll meet other mechanics. You're in the environment and who knows, maybe someone will say 'I need a [paid] mechanic'."

Using his contacts in the community, Ali found a garage in Royal Oak willing to take Reza on as a volunteer.

"I love to use my connections as a friend, to do something if I can. I love to do that for people... I felt I could do something for him more than English."

Another crucial step in the process, says Ali, was approaching Work and Income New Zealand to see if they would subsidise Reza's income. Reza had had eight years' work experience in Iran – four as a public transport diesel mechanic and four as a petrol mechanic – and his Iranian training was assessed by the New Zealand Qualifications Authority as equivalent to a Level 3 mechanics' certificate, making him an even more attractive option for a prospective employer.

"Work and Income were encouraging, and they really helped," says Ali. "Without this, he couldn't get a job."

From there, it was only a matter of time until Reza's luck changed and word spread, with Reza finding a job at A1 Dominion Auto and Tyre Centre in Mt Roskill.

Habib Patel, his boss at A1, says he is happy with his newest employee's work.

"He's a good worker," says Habib. "He's friendly, and good with the customers, talking with the customers, helping people, smiling."

With Reza getting back into the workforce and his employer getting the opportunity to hire a skilled and eager worker, the situation is a win-win for all involved.

If Reza's ambition is anything to go by, it won't be too long before he's an employer looking for promising mechanics to hire. ✨

“I told him to volunteer first. Once you're a mechanic, you'll meet other mechanics.”

– Ali Nasiriam



Gayle Pearson (second from left) with Han Mi Da, Ali Yas and writer Alison Robertson.

Funny the way conversations go...

English Language Partners' tutor Gayle Pearson is a quilter, when she finds the time. Alison Robertson / Photos: Michael Jeans

One day, a fellow quilter asked Gayle Pearson what she did at work, and it so happened that the Waikato ESOL-Literacy class she teaches were doing a health unit, discussing ways to keep themselves and their homes warm.

"All the learners live in rental accommodation that's often poorly heated, with inadequate window coverings, and we'd been discussing how that could be fixed," Gayle says.

"We'd talked about putting blankets across windows and how we might

attach them, but some people don't have enough blankets for their beds, let alone their windows."

The Waikato Patchwork and Quilters Guild, which donates quilts to a chosen community organisation each year, was looking for a new organisation to receive free quilts, so Gayle wrote to the Guild and asked that the Waikato learners be considered worthy recipients.

Result! The Guild presented 27 quilts. Cambridge Quilters came on board with another 15, another quilter

gave five, and someone brought in two crocheted blankets. With 49 items in total, each family in Gayle's class took one home. Some learners from other classes were lucky enough to receive them too.

"Only they were a bit flummoxed when I asked some of them to bring them back for the *Connecting Cultures* photo session. One of my Afghan learners said that in her country, when you give a present it's for keeps; you don't return it." That took some careful explaining.



Han Mi Da with her quilt.



The Waikato Patchwork and Quilters Guild also later gifted what Gayle describes as a “beautiful, professionally made quilt” to English Language Partners for a raffle.

Gayle says she tried her best to match the quilts to the recipients.

“Han Mi Da had told me once that her favourite colour was purple, so I made sure she received a purple one.” Han Mi Da and her husband Ali Yas have been in Hamilton for nearly two years, after fleeing Burma and spending 30 years in a refugee camp in Thailand before coming to New Zealand. Their five children, aged between 11 and 22, are a tremendous support to their parents as the family adapts to life in New Zealand.

The couple comes to the ESOL-Literacy classes four days a week for 2.5 hours. It’s a mixed group, including learners from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Djibouti, Eritrea, Somalia, Laos and Myanmar. To assist her teaching, Gayle often works with bilingual speakers, which she says certainly makes her job easier. Often learners are pre-literate; they cannot read and

write much in their first language so it is sometimes necessary to teach learning strategies.

“In these classes we do so much more than basic English,” Gayle says. “We start with greetings, but recently we’ve been focusing on

“Giving our learners the quilts was a way of showing that people in Hamilton do care about them.”

health: keeping warm and healthy, when to go to the doctor, or when to go straight to A & E, how to make a doctor’s appointment. We’ve looked at transport such as how to catch a bus or follow street signs, for example.

“We’ve also discussed how, in New Zealand, a lot of our fruit and vegetables are seasonal and therefore can be very expensive in the off-season.

“And what do you do when a child brings a note home from school?”

Gayle had to phone a school the other day. A note had come home about a barbecue, but the school had made no provision for halal meat for the Muslim children.

“It hadn’t crossed their minds, and they were most apologetic. It was something easy for me to sort out but it may not have been so simple for some of the parents with limited English.”

After 10 years as a tutor, what impresses Gayle is the desire learners have to successfully settle in a new country, and the obstacles they often struggle to overcome.

“I think how hard it must have been for people to leave their old lives behind, families and everything and everyone they knew. Giving our learners the quilts was a way of showing that people in Hamilton do care about them.” ✨

For more on ESOL-Literacy:
www.englishlanguage.org.nz/esol-literacy

It was ‘mentor’ to be

“There is real excitement for a mentor when their person finds a job, we celebrate.” *Olga Smith* / by Patricia Thompson

Olga Smith, Job Mentoring Service Coordinator for English Language Partners, speaks from the heart, having been both a volunteer mentor and a job seeker.

When she came to New Zealand from her native Czech Republic with her Kiwi husband in 2009, Olga experienced being a skilled migrant searching for suitable work.

As part of her personal settlement process, she became a job mentor with English Language Partners in Wellington, and experienced the excitement of all three of her job seekers being successfully placed.

Her background in psychology, social work and in running a mentoring programme in the Czech Republic

also made her an ideal candidate for her current role, which she took over in the middle of last year.

Olga comes from a traditional Czech family. Her father is a soccer coach and her mother a stay-at-home mum.

She studied psychology, social work and social policy at university, graduating as a social worker, and then did her masters degree which qualified her to practise as a psychologist in the Czech Republic but not in New Zealand.

Olga worked as a social worker and manager for Big Brothers Big Sisters Prague, a youth mentoring programme, training volunteer managers and supervising people who were managing volunteers.

She was planning to go into clinical practice but then, on an Outward Bound course for professionals she met her husband Bevan.

“He went to the Czech Republic for ten days and ended up staying for three years,” laughs Olga. “Then, during the global financial crisis, we decided to move to New Zealand.”

Olga, who has a son aged five and a daughter aged four, was pregnant with her son when they arrived, and initially did support work for a young woman with autism.

“I wanted to be at home with the children, so after they were born I worked for Barnardos as a contact services supervisor at weekends. But I wanted to do something more, so went to Volunteer Wellington and

saw an advert for job mentors for English Language Partners.”

During two-and-a-half years as a volunteer, Olga mentored three job seekers.

“One was a Chinese lady who wanted to do admin or beauty work. She became a Lancome representative with Farmers, and was very happy. She got promoted and later moved to Auckland with her husband.

“The second was a German sociologist who wanted to work in a not-for-profit organisation, but it’s hard to break in to that area because there are lots of international relations graduates coming out of university in Wellington and looking for that type of job.

“This woman loved doing spreadsheets and got a job with Wellington City Council. She is back in Germany now but became a good friend and we are planning on visiting her.

“The third was from Hungary. She had been living in the UK, in a rural area, had not worked and was starting from scratch. She’s very smart and has good English. She got onto the Skilled Migrants Programme at Victoria [University], got a job in admin and now works in a government ministry.”

By this time, Olga’s children had started kindly and were loving it, so she began looking for a full-time job.

“I really wanted to stay in the social area. Then, when Alice, the coordinator, was moving on, I was asked if I would like to apply for this role.

“It was really helpful that I knew the programme and the systems. It is a project that involves a lot of work.”

The Job Mentoring Service works with about 35 volunteers at a time – training about 10 new ones annually to replace those who move on – and has a target of supporting at least 35 people a year into work.

Volunteers come from a range of professions – currently, they include people working in accounting, HR, IT, engineering and as business analysts.

Job seekers also come from varied backgrounds. They are skilled migrants who have skills in areas like HR, teaching, IT, web design or the medical profession.

“Sometimes it takes several months for people to get jobs, but we want to see our job seekers succeed as soon as possible.

“Having a job is really important to the settling process, and our main goal is to support people to find employment that might also include supporting them into volunteering, getting involved in meet-up groups and other activities.

“Having a job is really important to the settling process.”

“There was one lovely lady who was very shy and feeling very lost. We came up with an action plan for her. Her mentor helped her find a job as a support worker with elderly people. She enjoyed this job, and she also started doing yoga and other leisure activities.

“I was trying to arrange a meet-up with her recently but she had so many activities on that she only had one gap in her diary, on Tuesday at 4 pm. That showed me we had done our job well.

“I love working with volunteers and working with migrants who are in the same position I was. It’s very rewarding.” ✨

For more on the Job Mentoring Service: www.englishlanguage.org.nz/wellington/job-mentoring-service

Network news

‘Provider of the year’ award

Our organisation won the ACE Aotearoa ‘Provider of the Year Tangata Tiriti’ award for 2015 – acknowledging the amazing work of our volunteers and staff.



Showcase of cultures

130 people from our Palmerston North centre gathered to celebrate Adult Learners’ Week. As well as singing and speeches, the event featured fruit carving by Toto Kotameea, a Thai chef who studies with English Language Partners.





Teddy Bangilinan

A mechanic *with staying power*

After working his way around Africa and elsewhere, Teddy Bangilinan says he's found an ideal home for his family in Timaru. Jack Montgomerie / Photos: Andrew Lau

Although speaking English in New Zealand creates some challenges, the auto-electrical engineer says a course at English Language Partners Aoraki has helped him to avoid getting his wires crossed at work.

Originally from central Luzon, 40 minutes' drive from the Philippines' capital Manila, Teddy Bangilinan arrived in November 2011, after working in Algeria.

His skills and desire to earn money for his family meant he had already been working overseas for several years.

"I worked mostly in African countries like South Africa, Angola, Libya, and also other parts of the world like in Palau and Qatar.

"I need to earn money. I'm married, so I need to take care of my family. It's not easy to be living separately. It's hard, but it's a part of my work."

Some of the countries Teddy worked in lacked something important for him.

"Different cultures, different government policies... Some are very restrictive on religion, but here you are free."

Concerns about safety in some countries also made them less attractive choices for Teddy in the long term.

"There, you cannot roam. It's very different. You need to stay at home. I like it here, because it's very peaceful and most of the people are very friendly."

Because his skills were on the government shortlist, Teddy was able to migrate to New Zealand.

Moving to South Canterbury required some adjustment. Some of his previous employers had provided workers with services and accommodation.

"Here, you need to pay your rent, to cook your food, to wash your own clothes."



Teddy Bangilinan with a work colleague.

Network news

Buzzy bee bake-off

An English Language Group in the Hutt explored the language of recipes and baking during a session where they learned to make this Kiwi icon.



Mini United Nations

A total of 18 nationalities joined a 'Language for Living' class held for our Whanganui centre's International Women's Group.



Fire drill workout

Aoraki's 'migrant mums and babies' English Language Group extended their English during a visit to learn how a New Zealand fire station operates.



Teddy managed to find a boss who is "very patient with me" at Austin Auto Electrical, and settled into a multicultural flat near Aoraki Polytechnic.

Teddy's skills were valuable enough for the New Zealand Government to grant him permanent residency three years ago.

Despite his trade skills, Teddy has sometimes found it hard to communicate with other people in English.

At Austin Auto Electrical, where Teddy is often called out to jobs at different places, and where talking on the phone is commonplace, he realised he had to improve his English skills.

In his previous jobs, he'd used English, but not a lot.

"In the Philippines, speaking English is a mix. Our second language is English, aside from Filipino, but sometimes we use 'Taglish', Tagalog and English. It's our normal way of life. That's why most Filipinos can speak English. If you live in an English-speaking country, you need to improve it."

After hearing about the English for Employees programme, Teddy enrolled with his boss's support.

During the course, Teddy was able to team up with a diverse group of classmates and professional teachers to learn about the trickier parts of the English language he encountered in his everyday work.

Teddy says the friendly environment

has made it easier for him and the other learners to discuss and overcome their problems with English.

His classmates, who have come from places like Japan, Nepal and Romania, all agree the course has boosted their confidence.

"We study like friends, and we talk like friends," Teddy says.

As well as correcting spelling, grammar and pronunciation, Teddy's teachers have helped him understand a lot of New Zealand idioms and words.

Explaining that "bonnet" means to a New Zealander, what "hood" means to an American, is just one of the ways teachers have removed barriers to clear communication for Teddy in his workplace.

"It's a big help," he says.

Teddy is increasingly comfortable talking with customers and workmates. Although telephone conversations remain a challenge, Teddy says his English is improving all the time, and his increasing familiarity with the New Zealand accent is making it easier to talk on the phone.

The course has also made it easier to converse with his flatmates, who all speak English as a second language.

Most importantly, Teddy is looking forward to having his son Onin, 9, and wife Myra move to New Zealand

For more on English for Employees:
www.englishlanguage.org.nz/english-employees

Kia ora koutou katoa

Dame Susan Devoy, Race Relations Commissioner

It is my pleasure to write for *Connecting Cultures*. I admire the work of English Language Partners. The ability to communicate is critical to successful resettlement in our beautiful country.

Nowadays, one-in-four Aucklanders are Asian Aucklanders, and Māori and Pacific Kiwis are a young, fast-growing part of our population.

For the first time in a century, the 2013 Census recorded that more than one million people living in New Zealand were born overseas; 300,000 more than in the 2001 Census.

We all need to take responsibility for the kind of nation we live in, now more than ever.

New Zealand is now one of the most ethnically diverse nations on earth.

Lydia Ko, a young Korean Kiwi, is one of our top athletes, as is Sonny Bill Williams, a Samoan Kiwi Muslim who is one of our top All Blacks.

Our parliament looks more like the people it represents than ever before: three political party leaders are Māori New Zealanders.

There is an entire television channel broadcast in Te Reo Māori. Journalists with names like Ali Ikram, Chris Chang, Ruwani Perera, and economists like Ganesh Nana and Shamubeel Eaqub reflect a different kind of New Zealand from the one I grew up in. And it is a fantastic New Zealand.

Anyone who remembers our Rugby World Cup 2011 Opening Ceremony would be hard pressed to think we're monocultural.

Clear to the world was that there is no nation like Aotearoa. We are finally embracing our uniqueness but we can and must do better at this.

Today, one in every ten Kiwis is an Asian Kiwi. While growth is rapid, Asian people aren't all recent arrivals; the first Chinese arrived before the Treaty of Waitangi was signed, and Indian Kiwis were living and working here 140 years ago. Generations of Asian New Zealanders have helped build New Zealand.

Migrant workers, many coming from across Asia, form the backbone of the Christchurch rebuild.



Susan Devoy with English Language Partners' graduate Nu Vuon.

We're one of the most ethnically diverse nations on Earth. How we treat one another, whether it's with respect or not, is up to us.

It's up to us whether we watch silently, or stand up for someone who is racially bullied on the bus because they are Muslim, or at a rugby game because they're Fijian.

As Race Relations Commissioner, my role is to 'promote and protect human rights for all people in Aotearoa New Zealand and foster harmonious relations'.

I'm responsible for encouraging people to treat each other with respect, dignity and mana: irrespective of race, ethnicity or religion.

Human rights start at home, with everyday people. We need to stand up for the kind of country we want to live in.

New Zealanders are essentially good people who believe in giving others a fair go. We've come a long way when it comes to learning from the past and treating each other with respect. We just need to challenge one another when we need to.

According to the Global Peace Index, New Zealand is one of the most peaceful places on the planet.

We must start to live up to our reputation as one of the most peaceful nations on Earth.

At its heart, race relations is about human rights.

And human rights begin at home. ✂



Remuuna Tar May

Language links to *new life*

Remuuna Tar May's life has revolved around language, since arriving in New Zealand.
Leigh Dome / Photos: Leigh Dome

Not only is Remuuna Tar May working hard to improve her English skills and those of others, she is keen to keep her native Burmese Karen language alive for her children.

After fleeing their home in the Karen state, to escape the Burmese military regime in 1997, Remuuna and her parents and siblings were forced to set up home in the jungle.

"We made a shack from bamboo and leaves, and slept on a dirt floor," recalls Remuuna.

The family eventually made their way to safety at a refugee camp just over the Thai border where they lived for 15 years. It was there, thanks to a friend's introduction, that Remuuna met Win Tun, her future husband.

The couple married in 2000 and began seeking a life beyond the refugee ►

Network news

Whakairo awakening

Hutt City Council has given guardianship of this carving to our Hutt centre, who took part in the 'awakening' ceremony. The carving represents the coming together of the Hutt Valley community and all the groups who use the building.



NZCEL graduates

Level 1 and 2 graduates in Northland received their New Zealand Certificate in English Language. Graduates from China, Japan, Jordan, Kiribati, Malaysia, Russia and Thailand celebrated with English Language Partners' staff.



Doing good in the hood

Our Waikato centre received much-needed funding from their local Z Energy's 'Good in the Hood' station. The money will help 'literacy mums' get to their English classes.





Remuuna and Win Tun with their children.



English Language Partners' manager Jess Yap with Remuuna.

camp. For a time they considered the USA, before deciding New Zealand was to be their new home. They arrived in Auckland in early 2012 and spent six weeks of orientation at the Mangere Refugee Resettlement Centre.

Now settled in Palmerston North, Remuuna and Win Tun, their twelve-year-old son Chan Tha and daughter Eh moo k' Paw (8) have worked hard to adjust to linguistic, cultural and domestic challenges.

"Everything was different," says Remuuna. "We were used to living in a house made of bamboo and wood, and using candles and lamps."

Electricity was not the only thing to get familiar with. "I didn't know how to use a stove or washing machine."

Of all the challenges of their new life in a new country, language has been the greatest.

Remuuna says, "When I came here I was faced with many difficulties, especially in communication skills, so I studied English for two years. In 2014, I joined the ESOL-Literacy class at English Language Partners."

After a few weeks, her teacher Catherine Taylor asked her to help

the Burmese learners as a volunteer bilingual assistant, interpreting the information and the instructions that the teacher had given them.

"I didn't mind doing volunteer work in the class [as] I would like to learn new things in New Zealand. My teacher suggested that I go to the

"We were used to living in a house made of bamboo and wood, and using candles and lamps."

bilingual assistant training course in Wellington. At first I refused because I didn't think I was ready to do that, with my level of English. But I got a lot of encouragement from staff, and decided to attend the training."

Remuuna gained her Bilingual Assistant Certificate last year. She now works for English Language Partners as a paid bilingual assistant, helping Burmese learners who do not speak English, and as a trained, volunteer ESOL home tutor; she teaches English to a Burmese single mother.

She also volunteers one day each week at a rest home in Palmerston North.

Win Tun hopes to do advanced computer studies when his English skills improve. In the meantime, he is an active volunteer at the local Burmese Community Group. He takes a keen interest in the political developments in his home state, saying New Zealand is his adopted home "but Burma is my homeland."

Remuuna and her family have felt welcomed by the local Burmese community, and it is among this group that they keep in touch with their own language. "I want to keep the language alive for our children," Remuuna says.

Youngsters Chan Tha and Eh moo k' Paw have done well to catch up at school, starting with limited English and a lower level of education. Chan Tha says school work was difficult at first, but adds cheerfully, "All you have to do is ask."

Remuuna and Win Tun agree that despite the challenges along the way, they are happy to be in a safe and peaceful country. "We came here so our children could have a better education and a better life."

"And one day," adds Remuuna. "I want to buy a New Zealand house." ✂

DID YOU KNOW

We have **23** centres throughout New Zealand

English Language Partners supports

667,629 hours of teaching



7,000 refugee and migrant learners

from over **150** countries

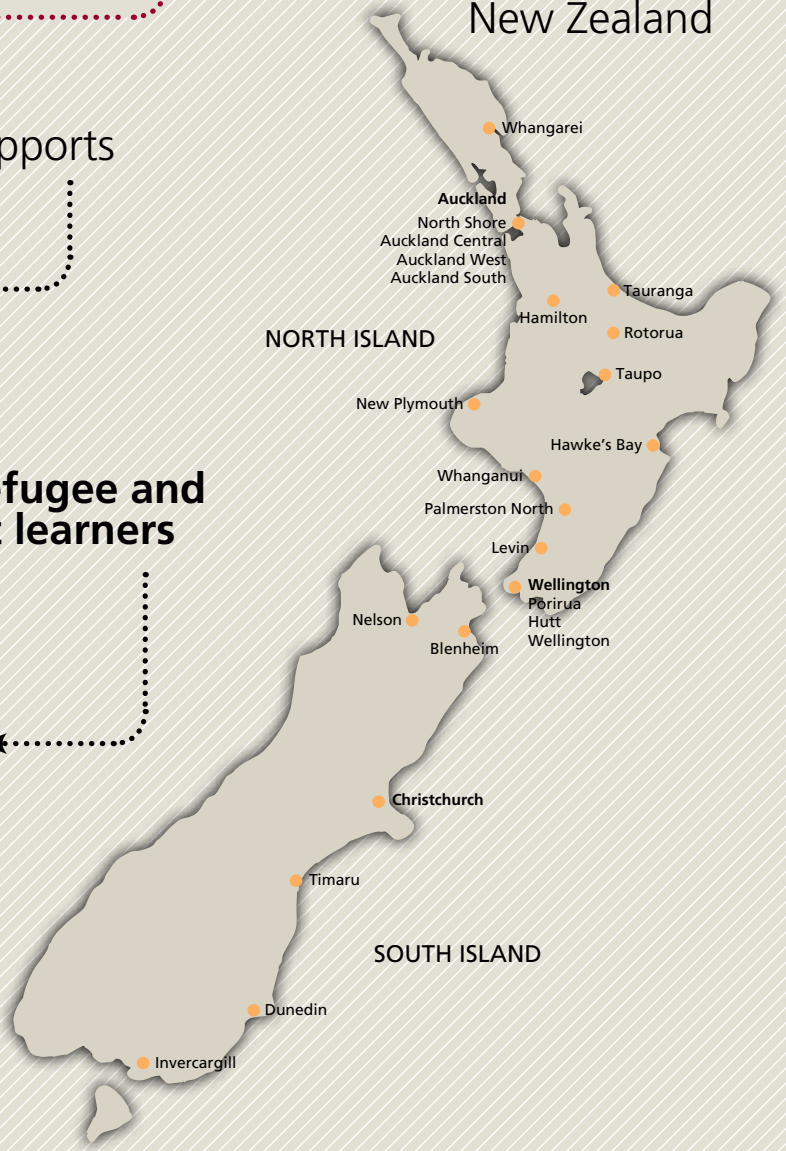


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