

CONNECTING CULTURES

ISSUE 31 WINTER 2019



*English for work
& everyday life*



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Kia ora

It has been inspiring to see the kindness and consideration people have shown for each other since the horrific March 15 terrorist attack. Kiwis have been reaching out to show their support for the Muslim community and, in response, our volunteer numbers have swelled around the country.

We share our stories in Connecting Cultures because we believe it's important to acknowledge the contribution former refugees and migrants are making to New Zealand.

People like Mohammad Hilal, from Syria, who's recently joined our Ethnic Advisory Group and volunteers to teach children Arabic, all while studying for his master in IT. Mohammad's dream is to contribute fully in his new home. Mohammad says "I appreciate the opportunity the New Zealand government has given to me and my family to settle in a safe life."

Dairy farm workers Gerald and Maricel Dailisan, from the Philippines, were keen to roll up their sleeves and participate in their new life in the Waikato. Moving was a financial decision, but they fell in love with New Zealand. Good English is essential to ensuring they can work safely, communicate well with co-workers and succeed in the lives they enjoy so much here.

Access to English language programmes, even in our more remote rural areas, plays a vital role in helping newcomers integrate well into our communities.

Nicola Sutton


Chief Executive

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- 1** Mail us your donation slip (See inside back cover.)
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Practising English *on the cows*

A 'happy accident' led to Gerald and Maricel Dailisan moving to New Zealand, to bring in-demand skills to the dairy industry. Support from English Language Partners is helping them settle in to Kiwi life. Story & photos Stevie Hight

Gerald and Maricel Dailisan are both students at English classes set up especially to service remote rural communities around Tokoroa. The couple also have an ESOL home tutor.

Gerald was a sous chef in their native Philippines but, finding it tough to save on his salary, applied through an agency for a cooking role in Saudi Arabia.

"Only, when I got there, I was assigned to a dairy farm," says Gerald.

"I told them I didn't know how to milk cows", but they said, 'You can learn.'"

He did learn, becoming an experienced dairy worker and sending earnings home to support Maricel and their daughters. Then his recruitment agency suggested he work in New Zealand, 'the dairy capital of the world'.

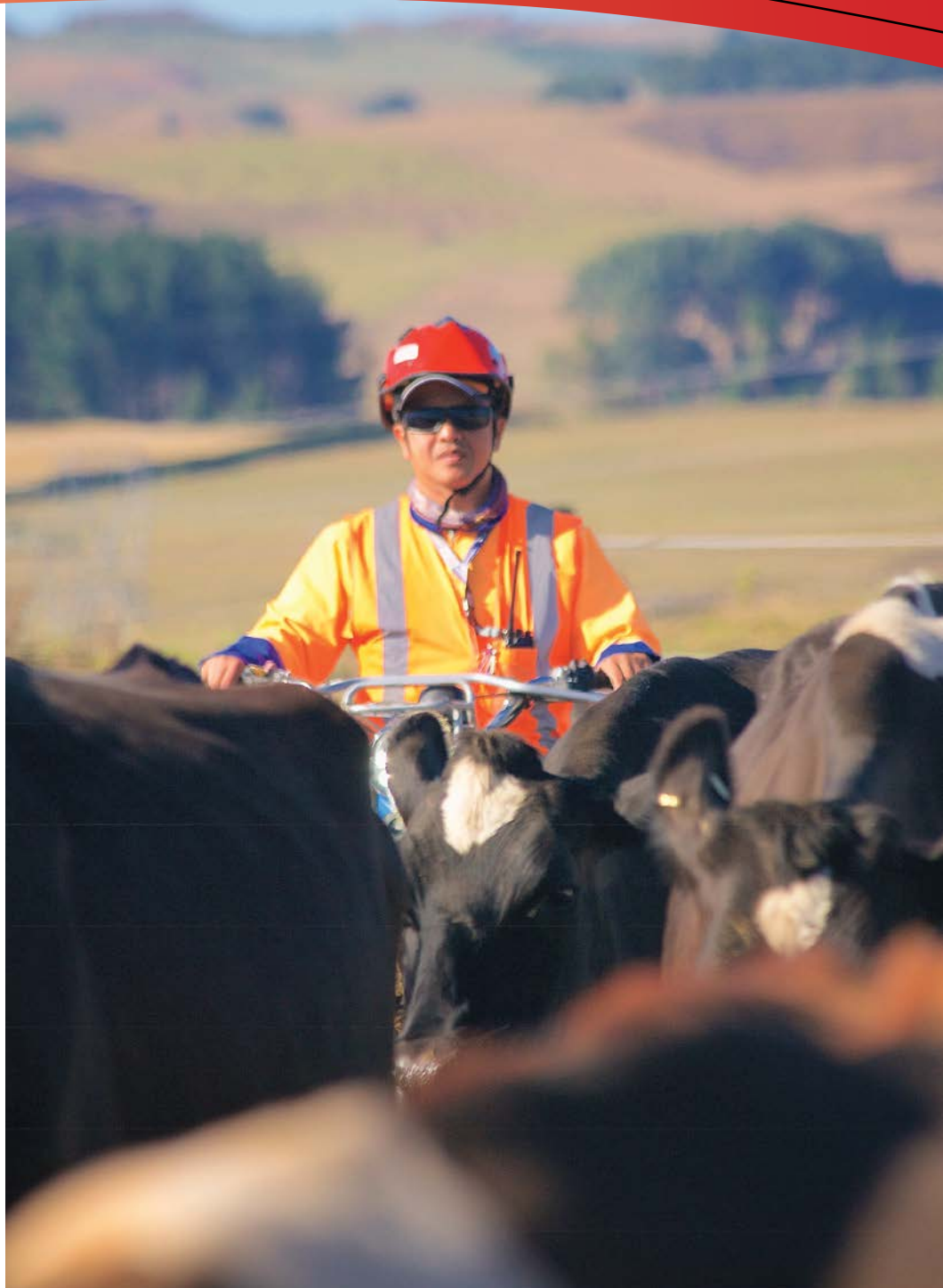
Gerald's skills enabled him to gain a work visa, and he went to work on a farm in Waimiha, in the King Country.

"I just came to work and send my salary home to help my family, but I fell in love with New Zealand," he says.

Initially, Maricel wasn't sure about moving from Manila, but it was hard to be separated, so in 2016 she and their youngest daughter Gianna joined Gerald (their eldest daughter is at university in the Philippines). The Waimiha job couldn't accommodate family, so Gerald moved to a farm in the Waikato.



Gerald and
Maricel Dailisan



“

I just came to work and send my salary home to help my family, but I fell in love with New Zealand.

– *Gerald Dailisan*

”

For Maricel, it was her first time on a farm.

“I’d never seen so many cows!” she says. “But I loved them. Four days after we arrived, I asked if I could help on the farm. I really wanted to start working as soon as I could and, luckily, they were able to provide me with a job. I’ve done a lot of training since, especially during calving.”

The next step was to improve their English. Gianna was proficient due to lessons in Manila but while her

parents learned English at school, they’d rarely spoken the language.

Gerald found he could understand his manager’s instructions, but replying in English was difficult. However, through talking with his employer and co-workers, this steadily improved.

To continue their careers in the dairy sector, they were keen to get their English skills to the next level to take the IELTS English test required in residency applications as evidence of English abilities. ▶



Gerald and Maricel Dailisan



Tokoroa evening class for rural workers

Lessons for rural workers in Tokoroa are **custom designed**, with a focus on workplace communication.

- Mhyzel Tagle, secretary of the North Island Filipino Farmers Association (NIFFA), had studied with English Language Partners in Rotorua, and approached the organisation about setting up English classes for farm workers in the Tokoroa – Taupo area.

Starting early in 2019, the classes have proved popular, with 17 learners from the Philippines and one from Kiribati. All work in farming or horticulture.

Classes suit rural working lives: two hours a week in the evening, making it easier for people to get there.

Jo de Lisle, English Language Partners Waikato manager, says it's been great working with NIFFA to reach Filipino employees. "Working safely on Kiwi farms is incredibly important, so understanding your boss and other

workers is key. It also helps the farm run productively."

"If you are in a working relationship, you have to communicate," says Maricel. "I practise at work, even on the cows! I talk to them; I ask them if what I'm saying is correct."

"Most of our classmates are already rural residents, but still want to learn and improve," says Maricel. "We enjoy that community and have awesome relationships with our boss Glen and our Kiwi co-workers."

"Some Kiwis speak very fast. The good thing is Glen always says to us: 'If you want me to repeat what I am saying, it's all right, just ask until you understand'. Glen's wife also teaches me, she is such a good teacher, a patient mentor."

Loving their life and work, and with Gianna settled at school in Tokoroa, the family are keen to stay.

"It began as a financial decision, but then we fell in love with being here. We really now feel like New Zealand is one of God's most beautiful creations," says Gerald.

"People here are humble and down to earth. You can approach them, and they want you to treat them as your friend."

"We are really lucky to work on this farm, with very good accommodation and a supportive employer."

"We hope we can stay. We have to know we can secure another visa before we make any long-lasting plans here. We just keep on praying." ✨

More about how we help with English for work
www.englishlanguage.org.nz/english-for-your-employees/



Yanny Liu,
owner, Tasty Fish
and Chips, Taupo

From new migrant *to business owner*

Xiaoyan Liu, known as Yanny, arrived in Taupo in 2010, leaving a big-city life in Canton province for a quieter lifestyle. Story & photos Stevie Hight ▶



► **“W**hen I came, it was very hard,” Yanny Liu says. “I couldn’t speak English, and my husband didn’t make much money, so I needed to find a job to pay the rent. I could do anything, except speak English!”

Today, Yanny runs Taupo’s Tasty Fish and Chips with her husband. It looks out over the lake.

Between serving and joking with her customers, Yanny describes her journey from new migrant to business owner.

Some Chinese friends gave her a job initially: working in their fish and chip shop. Her busy work life meant she couldn’t find time to devote to learning English. Several years later, when Yanny’s second son was born, she stopped working, and a friend told her about English Language Partners, and she joined an English Language Group and accessed other programmes.

“I learned for about a year, and during that time, my English improved a bit.

“
My teacher really pushed my English. Before, I wasn’t talking too much English, but now, I’m really confident in myself.

– Yanny Liu

”
 But I needed to start working again. So my teacher said: ‘Yanny, when you’re free, come to my house, I’m happy to teach you.’”

“When I had time, I would go,” Yanny says. “It was really nice.”

Four years ago, the family took the plunge and started their own take-away business.

There were a lot of official documents to be understood. “So I went back to English Language Partners for help,” says Yanny.

“My teacher really pushed my English. Before, I wasn’t talking too much English, but now, I’m really confident in myself.”

Jackie Moffat is one of English Language Partners’ teachers. “When I think of Yanny, I think of someone pretty confident and fun,” she says. “You always know when she’s arrived in the room.”

Although Yanny still has a lot to learn, she’s fearless in her efforts to speak English. She is always smiling and laughing, and her enthusiasm is endearing, as is her way of stringing words and phrases together.

“Her ability has grown with time,” says Jackie. “She still has pretty basic English, and her pronunciation is a work in progress, but it’s never stopped her from throwing together a sentence.”



Business owners Yanny Liu and husband.

They run the family business in the truest sense: just Yanny and her husband, with their eldest son helping out in the weekends. He's in his last year of high school, and Yanny is proud of his English.

"He always jokes with me, 'Mum, your pronunciation is not too good!' and I say I want to get better, practise practise."

The family has no regrets about their move to Taupo.

"Taupo is a clean city, I love it here," Yanny says. "Months ago, I went to the South Island. Everyone says South is beautiful, but I still love Taupo. It's such a clean city, and the people are so nice and friendly."

Yanny likes to help her customers who are tourists in Taupo, and always recommends the free thermal spots where they can bathe.

"I like walking on the hills and around the lake, that's my favourite thing. And I can relax in my time off by going to the spa.

"I am really lucky here." ✂

English Language Groups

Talk to your closest centre about their classes:

www.englishlanguage.org.nz/our-centres/

Yanny says English Language Partners has helped. "I think it's really good. If you go to class, you can meet lots of people from every country, and all have different stories," she says. "You can meet some friends. This is a really good thing. If you need extra help, I can ask Jackie. She can give me help always."

The support that English Language Partners lends to their learners often extends beyond language lessons.

"I went with Yanny to her son's parents evening at school," says Jackie. "She didn't want to go, as she was nervous, but it's so important to attend these things, so I said 'I'll come with you'."

When Yanny bought a house, Jackie also helped during the auction process, as well as ensuring the family could understand and adhere to the codes and practices concerning running a business in New Zealand.

"What I think is really special about what we do as an organisation, the

English Language Group focus on Kiwi English and culture. They run in all ELPNZ centres.

language learning of course, but it's so much more; it's about navigating community and culture."

Six months ago, Yanny and her husband moved to the new premises they are at today. It was a good move for them.

"We're in a good position now. My husband and I are a bit more relaxed, we are not working too hard.

"Four years ago, we were so busy," she says. "We used to make more money, but we were too busy. Too much work, too much thinking!"



Determined to *dream big*

Growing up in El Salvador, Eric Alvarez dreamt of becoming a police officer. Story & photos Stevie Hight

It has taken perseverance to get to where he is, but today Eric Alvarez is a fully-fledged constable, based in Rotorua.

Eric was able to realise his dream after events led him to seek refuge in New Zealand.

"El Salvador is one of the most dangerous countries in the world. Organised crime has taken control," he says.

"For a time, my family was fine. But then we received a phone call demanding money. They told me that if I didn't pay, they would kill me, my wife and son. They knew where we lived, so I started paying.

"I was so scared, I couldn't sleep. We used to get up thinking 'What's going to happen today?'"

Fortunately, Eric's uncle was based in Australia and helped apply for visas to leave El Salvador. "We left our village overnight in secret. If I'd told my friends, the news would spread."

The family hid in San Salvador and didn't feel safe until the plane took off.

They arrived in Auckland in 2011, and Eric's uncle helped them apply for protection. He also recommended they travel to Rotorua. "He knew leaders there, and said the Māori

community would welcome and look after us. And they did," says Eric.

Three months later, the family were accepted as refugees. But they'd arrived with no English. "It was awful. It felt disrespectful not being able to answer people's questions," says Eric.

“

His empathy towards victims, I imagine, is birthed out of his own challenges and trials in El Salvador.

– *Inspector
Brendon Keenan*

”

Initially, they stayed in a motel where the owner saw they were struggling and introduced them to English Language Partners.

"I attended lessons for a year. The staff were friendly, and the other students were in the same boat. We became a small family."

With help from English Language Partners, Eric found volunteer work at the Third Place Café and after three months, was offered a job.

"I worked there for five years, starting as kitchenhand and progressing to cook. I am grateful, because they trusted and trained me. Knowing about New Zealand food has been amazing."

A hard worker, Eric was named the café's Employee of the Year, and was a finalist for the Rotorua Chamber of Commerce's Employee of the Year.

While at the café, Eric enrolled in the English for Employees course to improve his workplace language.

"I still remember things I learnt, like the word 'shout'. I didn't know what it meant. Now I hear it often, like when we are patrolling, and my partner says: 'Eric, let's go get a coffee. Is it your shout or mine?'"

"Another cool thing about English for Employees is you meet other working professionals.

Eric also had an ESOL home tutor, Mark French. "Mark helped me get my driver's licence, and one evening he turned up with a little white car and said, 'This is for you'. He's been my guardian angel. It's more than just language. It's a friendship."

Eric's improvements in his English allowed him to dream big again. "Mark found out about the requirements to join the police, as we didn't have a computer." ▶



English for Employees is a course for residents who are in work. The programme runs in ELPNZ centres around New Zealand.



Eric Alvarez, (third from left) with colleagues.

Eric, and his wife and son gained citizenship in September 2018. "That was a special moment, to be recognised as New Zealanders. Now we feel we belong."

Eric acknowledges the importance of learning English to succeed, and wants his story to inspire others.

"The better our spoken English, the more opportunities to find or get a better job. When I started, I struggled. Then, when I was really into it, it was fun. I started to love it. You just need time. The better our spoken English becomes, the more you feel at home.

"I want to encourage people to dream big. In New Zealand, any goal can be achieved, as long as we commit ourselves."

Eric's next goal is to buy a house. "I love Rotorua, it's been home for us. I can't see us ever moving away." ✂

More about English for Employees
www.englishlanguage.org.nz/english-for-your-employees/

► To take his studies further, Eric joined Te Wānanga, passing tests in literacy, maths, computing and abstract reasoning. He then submitted his application to the police.

"I was training hard for my physical, and studying and working. I would come home, have a 20-minute rest, then off for an hour run. I was afraid of failure, and kept pushing myself."


He had to learn to overcome failure, however, initially falling short on a couple of his exams. "It's not always an easy road. You need to be determined. You fall, get up and try again," he says.

Nowadays, Eric loves the role he's carved.

"What I like most is being able to go to a situation where people need help, and make people feel better and safe."

Inspector Brendon Keenan says Eric displays a real sense of integrity, strength, courage and compassion. "His empathy towards victims, I imagine, is birthed out of his own challenges and trials in El Salvador," he says. "He brings a greater degree of trust and confidence to our community."

Eric says his workmates are very supportive. "They know I'm still learning the language and the culture. They give me feedback in order to improve, so it's really cool."



Nary Nhean

Cambodian immigrant Nary Nhean has a dream of taking her teenage son on holiday to Queenstown, to stay in a hotel and to go bike-riding.

When Nary moved to Nelson four years ago, her then 13-year-old son couldn't come with her, and stayed in the care of family. Nary has been sending money back to help provide for him.

Staying in touch has been her priority. She's been back to visit, but having him join her has presented many challenges.

Nary works casually as a hotel house-keeper, and has been studying with English Language Partners for about two years. She was living in Thailand when she met her Kiwi partner.

Her son, Prakarn Homchuan, from an earlier relationship, had never had a passport, and complications around the family name on his birth certificate have made it difficult for him to visit or move to New Zealand.

Nary needs an immigration lawyer. But that's hard to afford on her income.

Enter community navigator Cristy Aydon.

Cristy's role is to help former refugees and migrants make their way around New Zealand's social support, health and government systems. Her half-time job is a new initiative from English Language Partners, Multicultural Nelson Tasman and the Victory Community Centre. The position is funded by the Nelson City Council and the Rata Foundation, and sees her helping people find jobs, access health services, find housing and deal with agencies such as Inland Revenue, Work and Income and Immigration New Zealand.

The community navigator role offers three layers of support: providing information, making referrals and ▶

Stand *by me*

A Nelson initiative is helping former refugees and migrants navigate their way through the complicated systems of New Zealand society.

Story Joanna Davis | Photos Steve Hussey



Nelson's community navigator Cristy Aydon (second from left,) with Jinjing Jackson (Pitt and Moore), Nary Nhean, Tony Fitzwater (ELPNZ) and Mike McMellon (Pitt and Moore)



Jinjing Jackson and Cristy Aydon



Tony Fitzwater and Mike McMellon

- ▶ providing direct support, such as attending appointments with the person.

"I'll help with anything that comes my way," Cristy says. "Of course, people need to be referred on but when English is a second language, referring isn't easy. They need a liaison, an intermediary."

In Nary's case, Cristy put her in touch with immigration lawyer Mike McMellon, a partner at law firm Pitt and Moore, and Mike provided an initial consultation and assessment of the case for free.

Mike, who is on the board of Multicultural Nelson Tasman, says initiatives such as this are needed to counter the isolation people new to the city and country can feel.

"Getting people talking to each other, to know each other; it breaks down barriers."

As well as migrants, Cristy deals with former refugees, who in Nelson tend to be from Colombia, Myanmar or Bhutan. She says many new people do not like to challenge authority, which can be an added barrier to those for whom English is a second language.

Tony Fitzwater, from English Language Partners, says his organisation had often found itself picking up the pastoral care role, and he is pleased to be able to refer people on to the community navigator, solely because many of the problems are outside of their core role of language teaching.

“

I'll help
with anything that
comes my way.

– *Cristy Aydon*

”

“They've been what we call 'unsupported services'," Tony says. "For example, we find out that one of our learners has a problem with their house, such as black mould, which is a huge problem here. Each case takes time: following up landlords, rental companies, visiting, sorting it out.”

Tony says he expects the local initiative to be a real success and could be instituted nationally. “It works perfectly for us, so we're hoping others will roll it out too.”

Cristy says Nary's case is complicated and the outcome is far from certain, but that Nary was pleased to have a friendly, familiar person going in to bat for her.

“Meeting Nary, even though what she wanted hasn't happened yet, she's just so grateful," Cristy says.

“It's good to have someone on your side. It gives her hope that something can be done.” ✨



Mohammad Hilal

Committed to *giving back*

“I believe if we give knowledge to others, we grow ourselves.”

Patricia Thompson and Mohammad Hilal |

Photos Stevie Hight

Mohammad Hilal is the newest member of English Language Partners' Ethnic Advisory Group (EAG).

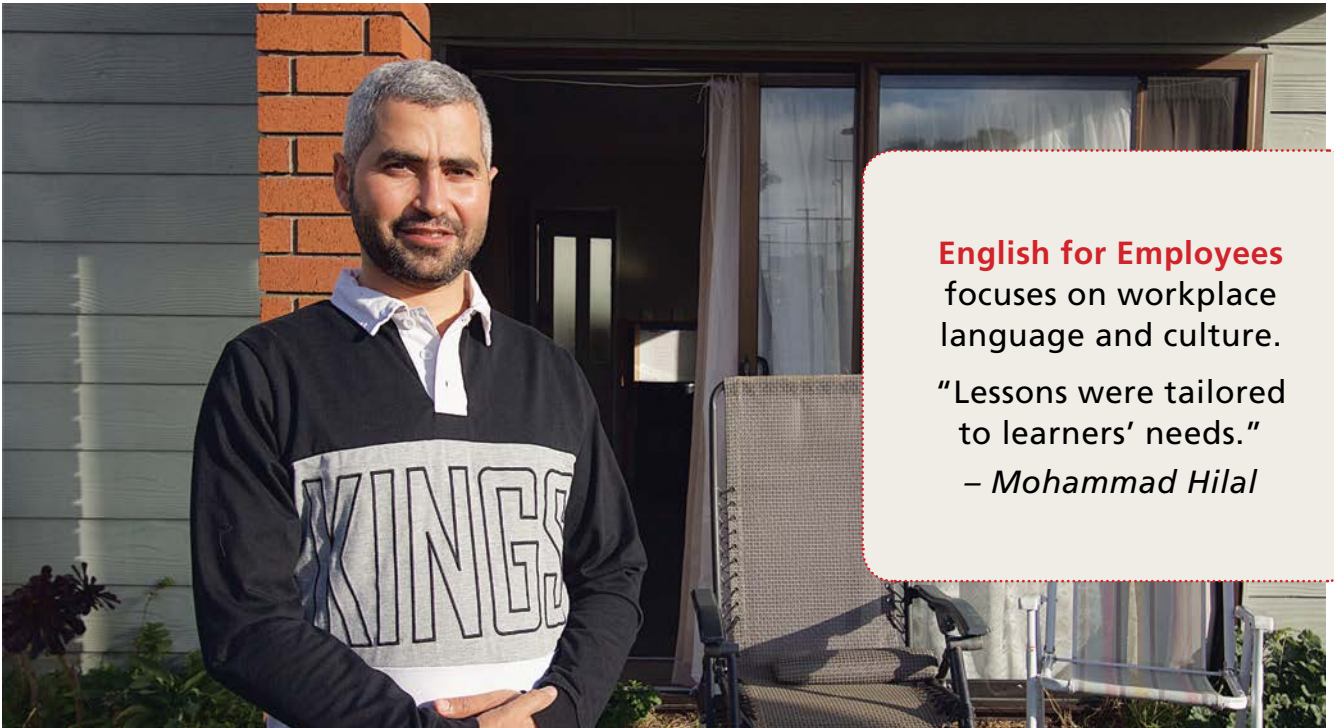
As well as sharing his expertise on the EAG, he and wife Fatima volunteer teaching Arabic to children.

Mohammad completed the English for Employees course last year while working as an Uber Eats driver. The part-time course helps learners in full

or part-time work to improve English skills for their job, learn more about Kiwi workplace culture and how to communicate well with customers and staff.

“English language is the key for a better future,” says Mohammad.

“The classes were in the evenings, which worked well for me. Lessons were very good and tailored to learners' needs. ▶



English for Employees focuses on workplace language and culture.

“Lessons were tailored to learners’ needs.”

– *Mohammad Hilal*

► “I feel very comfortable with English Language Partners because the relationship with staff is so friendly. I improved my English skills, which is also very useful for future employment. My dream now is to get a good job.”

Mohammed originally studied Arabic language and linguistics, while working part time in IT, and planned to become an academic. However, the war interrupted his post-graduate studies so he began teaching Arabic.

In 2012, when bombing began, their home in Aleppo was among the first to be hit, and the couple fled for their lives with their children, then aged one and two, and only the clothes they were wearing.

“We walked for about five kilometres through our completely bombed-out neighbourhood to get to safety at my father’s house, where we stayed for a week,” says Mohammad.

“We couldn’t stay there long because he had about 100 people sheltering at his house, most of them relatives, my 10 brothers and sisters, their children and my aunts and uncles.”

“

I hope to fully contribute to New Zealand by gaining a good qualification and full employment.

– *Mohammad Hilal*

”

They moved to Malaysia, where they didn’t need visas, and registered with the United Nations refugee agency.

“After five years we heard we could come to New Zealand,” he says. “In Malaysia there were no opportunities to get permanent residency or a passport. It was illegal for us to work, and there was no education available for the children. I got a job teaching in an Arabic school but it was pretty much ‘under the radar’.

“We shared a small flat with another family, with just one room for each

family. My wife got a job with very little pay, working at the refugee school.”

They arrived in New Zealand in July 2017, starting out at the Refugee Resettlement Centre in Mangere.

“When I asked if I needed ID to go walking in Mangere I was told I didn’t. I was amazed,” says Mohammad.

“We set up home in Wellington. We have a garden and lovely neighbours. Our children are settled at school and my wife is studying at English Teaching College.”

Mohammad had studied English in Syria and found it was also spoken as a second language in Malaysia.

“So when we came to New Zealand, the language was not so hard for me, but I still wanted to improve my English and a friend told me about English Language Partners.”

The destruction wreaked in Syria is a cause of deep sorrow, but Mohammad and Fatima are committed to helping children maintain strong connections with their culture and language.

Every Friday, the couple voluntarily provide lessons in Arabic reading and writing for up to 55 pupils. They call their classes 'Future Blossoms.'

"Eighty per cent of Aleppo has been destroyed in the war," Mohammad says. "There is no power, very little drinking water and most basic infrastructure, like hospitals and schools, have been bombed. Before the war, Aleppo had a population of almost five million and was the largest city in Syria. Over four million people have now been displaced, and over 470,000 people have been killed.

"When children come here, they can begin to lose their mother tongue, so we offer the classes. The children are from Syria, Palestine and Iraq and some were born in New Zealand."

Mohammad joined the EAG in March. Members are Kiwis from non-English speaking countries. Their work informs the Chief Executive and National Board on refugee and migrant issues.

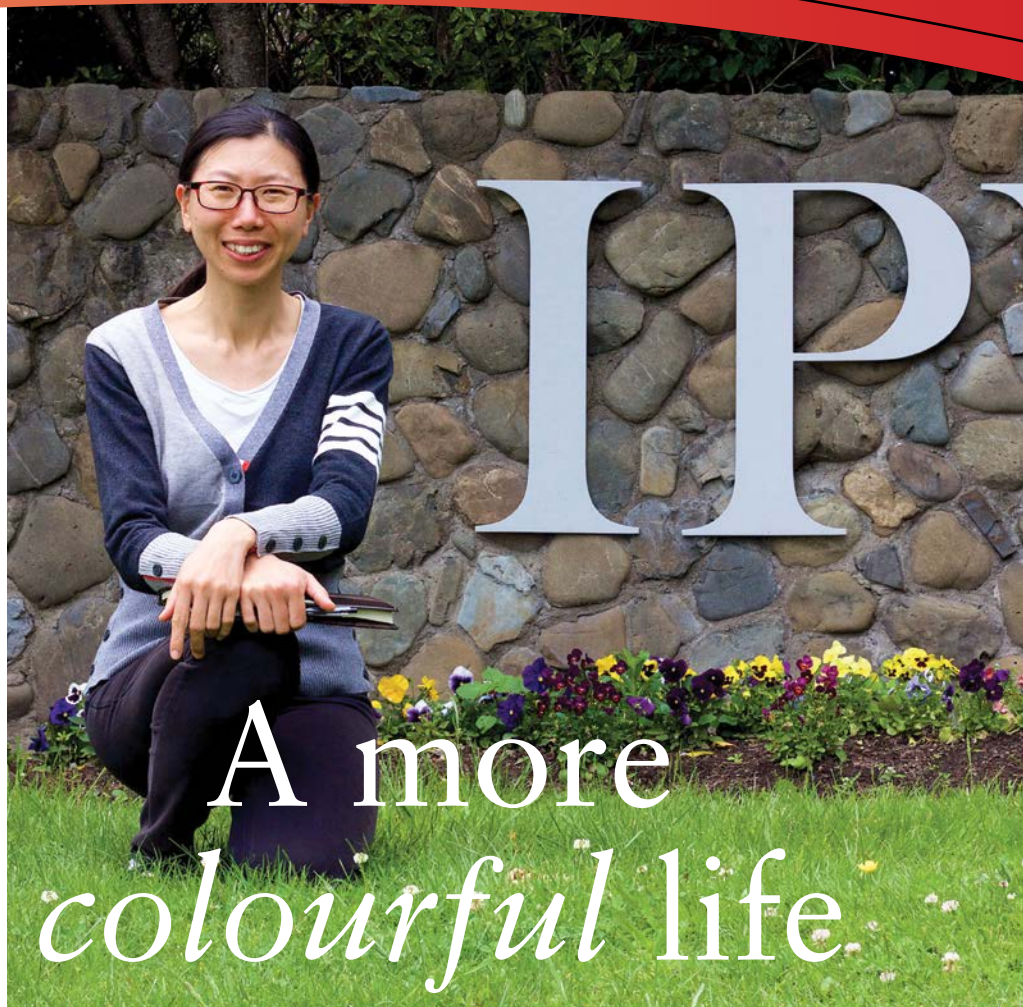
"It was my pleasure to accept," he says. "Every ethnic group has different experiences and different needs, and we benefit from working together."

Mohammad has now embarked on a one-year Master of Software Development programme at Victoria University.

"I'm really happy to be here.

I appreciate the opportunity the New Zealand government has given to me and my family to settle in a safe life. I hope to fully contribute to New Zealand by gaining a good qualification and full employment.

"And I hope that one day there will be no more refugees in the world." ✂



Before moving to New Zealand, Judy Zhu worked as an environmental engineer in Beijing.

Story & photos Stevie Hight

Judy Zhu says her job was an 'iron rice bowl' job. "If you have a good job, you can eat from this bowl without risk of breaking it. The institute was state-owned, so the job was secure, a guarantee I could work there forever."

With job stability, and a newborn son, Judy's friends said she was crazy when she considered migrating and starting a new life for herself and her family.

Nowadays, Judy works in Palmerston North as a recruitment officer at IPU New Zealand, in a job focused on attracting Chinese students.

Getting to this point wasn't easy. "Every step has been a big challenge," she says.

When she arrived in 2015, despite having learned English since middle

school, Judy discovered her 'book-focused' learning didn't translate to the real world.

"I couldn't understand a word people were saying, and I couldn't communicate. I felt deaf and mute.

"We were living in a motel. There was a shared public kitchen, but I was afraid to go there in case I had to speak to people. Luckily, after a few months, I discovered English Language Partners."

She joined an English Language Group, and quickly began to feel less isolated, and to see improvements in her language ability.

"Classes gave me a place to go each week where I felt welcome, so I was able to extend and branch out. I started to know more people, and ▶



Work Talk is an intensive four-week course.

“Everything came in this great package.”

– *Judy Zhu,*
IPU New Zealand

► to join activities. I felt more immersed, and like I was taking part.

“I came to experience a new life, not just stay in the house, so I pushed myself to go out and talk to others.”

Judy used her new-found courage to launch headlong into her community. She volunteered with the Manawatu Chinese Community Trust and Global Parents Support, tutoring Mandarin to young Chinese children. Through connections made at English Language Partners, she joined library book clubs.

Then she decided to study for a post-graduate diploma in international studies, and English Language Partners wrote a reference to help Judy gain a scholarship to IPU.

Judy’s studies helped develop a broader world perspective and with her connections to China, she realised there are a lot of openings in international recruitment.

“The problem was, I worried that my English wasn’t good enough, so I went back to English Language Partners and joined their Work Talk programme.”

Manager Jess Yap says “Judy was raring to go from day one, with a lovely inquisitive nature. She was hungry to know more about all things Kiwi and the work environment.”

Judy says the course prepared students to go into the workplace, covering everything from writing CVs, finding job opportunities, to interviews and phone calls. “That was really helpful, I’ve always been scared on the phone!

“We also covered informal conversations in the workplace. I loved that. Everything came in this great package. I recommend Work Talk, I think it’s very helpful.”

The confidence Judy got from the course helped gain her recruitment officer job, and she’s using her skills to become a valuable member of the IPU team.

“I’ve changed my field of interest. It’s part of my new life and career,

“

I came to experience a new life, not just stay in the house, so I pushed myself to go out and talk to others.

– *Judy Zhu*

”

so I’m happy to be able to try something new”.

Judy’s perseverance is key to her success, but she says participating locally and improving her English was also crucial.

“English was the most important thing. But it’s not just the language, it’s the cultural aspects and joining in that makes me feel at home in my new Kiwi life.

“I really want to encourage others to take part in their community. They will find their life will be more colourful.” ✨

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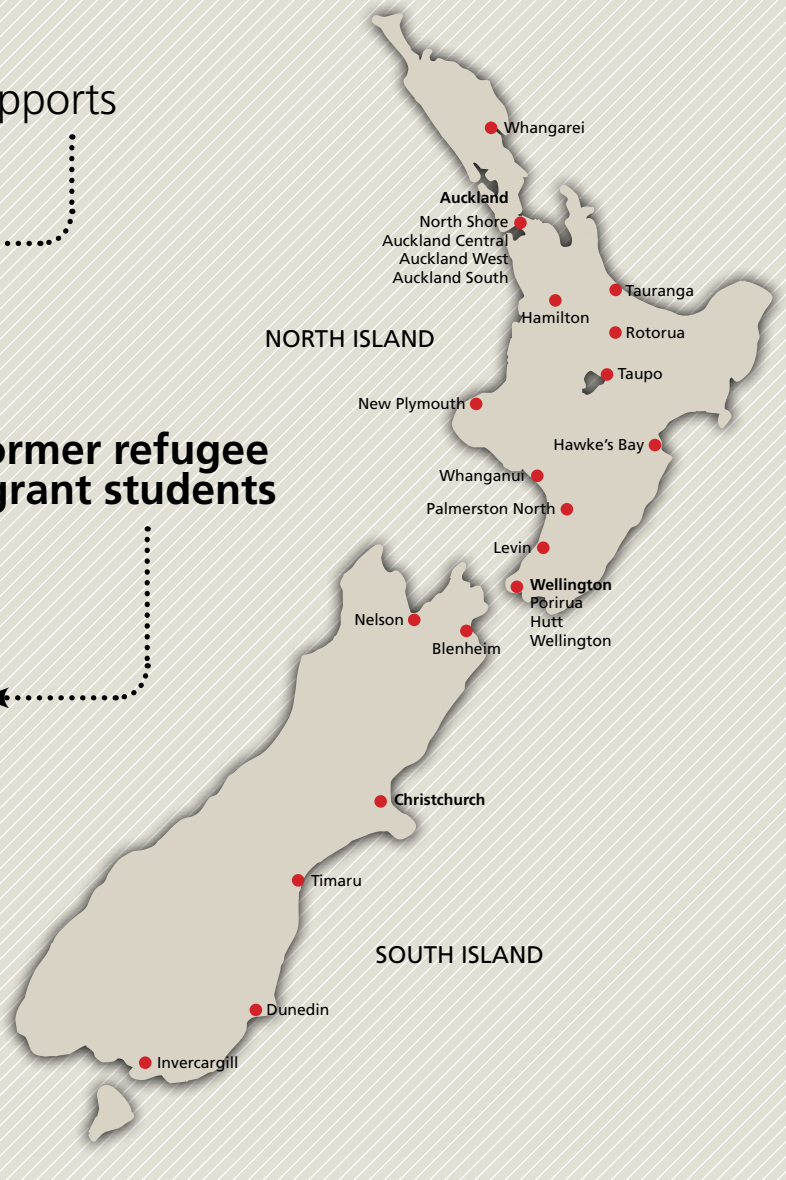
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