

Community Project of the Year 2016



We are delighted to announce that our English classes have won the Learning and Work Institute Wales (formerly NIACE) Inspire! Award for Community Project of the Year 2016. The awards kick off Adult Learning Week, and recognize exceptional learners, employers and projects that are committed to improving the skills of adult learners in Wales.

Eighteen months ago, a collaboration between Dr. Mike Chick of the University of South Wales and the Welsh Refugee Council saw the start of a project designed to improve access to free quality English classes for refugees and asylum seekers in the area. The project started with one class a week, accessed by around 15 students. Following funding from the Waterloo Foundation and Community Foundation in Wales, we are now able to run eight classes a week in our Cardiff offices, which are accessed by around 100 service users a week.

During term time, three classes a week are taught by students from the University of South Wales in their final year of studying TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) as part of their assessed teaching practicum. The sessions are an important learning opportunity, both for the student teachers and the learners. One student teacher wrote:

*"Prior to my involvement with the Welsh Refugee Council, whilst I had empathy for refugees, I was rather ignorant as to what goes on. Now, not only do I understand the issues, I see refugees as **people**. I think we need to push awareness in local communities with local people, in order to change perceptions."*

Our projects' capacity has increased to such an extent that we rely on a dedicated team of volunteer language teachers to help us meet the high demand for lessons. We have also been able to welcome a PGCE student from Cardiff University on a six-month teaching placement, which she passed with excellent results. In addition, one session a week led by Elizabeth Porter of Cardiff Libraries has helped 137 refugees and asylum seekers join the library, as well as gain valuable information on life in Cardiff, such as; navigating public transport, registering with GPs, council waste management and finding accommodation.

All our classes provide a lifeline for new arrivals in the area, and are particularly helpful for those who have missed out on a space in Further Education, or who have aspirations towards Higher Education.

One learner said of his experience:

"I choose [the Welsh Refugee Council] because it has best teachers. It's very good and it let me meet new people from other country and culture."

Another said:

"When I arrived in the UK, it was extremely difficult for me to communicate. I had problems shopping, using transport and it made every detail of day-to-day life challenging. I was told about free English lessons at the Welsh Refugee Council and without the teachers there, I wouldn't be able to do anything."

We are extremely grateful to the University of South Wales lecturers and student teachers, Cardiff Library, our volunteers, staff, and funders The Waterloo Foundation and Community Foundation in Wales. Most importantly, we are indebted to our learners from the refugee, asylum seeking and migrant communities, without whom there would simply be no classes.

For more information on the project, please contact Iona Hannagan Lewis (Project Co-Ordinator) at iona@wrc.wales