



Cumbria Community Integration Project

Cumbria Community Integration Project - Learner Case Study (Miss I)

Background

The Cumbria Community Integration Project is a two-year project funded by the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government's Controlling Migration Fund. The Project is developing infrastructure to support the integration of Cumbria's migrant and resident communities through asset based community development approaches led by Cumbria County Council and delivered by AWAZ Cumbria in partnership with voluntary and community sector and statutory partners.

The main aims of the project are to strengthen communities and reduce the impact of migration on services. This approach recognises increased public perceptions of migration through fostering good relations that is tackling prejudice and promoting mutual understanding, provable reduction in demand for services and firm action to tackle the root causes of racism and extremism.

One of the ways in which the project aims to strengthen communities is by recruiting and training community integration volunteers to deliver English language support to migrants. This is done in order to help migrants improve their English to the point where they can attend and benefit from mainstream ESOL classes.

Introduction

In October 2018, Nicole (Community Development Worker, AWAZ Cumbria) arranged to meet with an ESOL tutor and observe a Beginners ESOL class delivered by the Cumbria Community Learning and Skills service. The aim was to gain an understanding of the level of English required for the beginners' class, in order to signpost Cumbria Community Integration Project (CCIP) learners to appropriate ESOL classes.

The tutor explained that some of the learners in her class had a very basic understanding of English and wouldn't necessarily pass the class at the end of the year without additional support. As learners can only access public funded courses (at the same level) once, they wouldn't be able to redo the same class if they didn't pass. They also wouldn't necessarily be at the appropriate level to progress to the Intermediate ESOL class.

Nicole and the tutor agreed that if any of the learners felt they would benefit from extra support; they could contact Nicole and she would arrange for them to meet with a CCIP volunteer in addition to their ESOL class. Miss I from Spain was one of those learners.

Miss I completed an online British Council "Test Your Level" assessment at the beginning of the CCIP English Language Support Programme and scored 44% (Beginner to Elementary). The British Council categorises Beginners Level as an individual being able to say numbers and dates and making a





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telephone call and Elementary Level as being able to introduce yourself and have a basic conversation about work and everyday life.

Challenges & Results of Intervention

When Miss I arrived in Carlisle, she was working on a zero-hour contract at a local factory. She didn't require any level of English to work there and found out about the opportunity from a friend whilst living in Spain. She was isolated in her workplace because she couldn't communicate with her colleagues who mainly spoke Polish and Romanian. There would be weeks where she couldn't afford to buy food because she wasn't called into work at the factory. She lived alone and struggled to meet people and find opportunities to practise her English.

Miss I was paired with a CCIP volunteer, Ms P, in March 2019. In her English sessions with Ms P, she was able to voice her concerns about her workplace and Ms P encouraged her to look for work elsewhere. Ms P offered to provide a character reference for her and to help her apply for jobs. Miss I was also struggling to obtain her National Insurance number, because she moved to a new house and didn't know how to notify her change of address. She also didn't understand the letters she received in the post.

Nicole met with her on three occasions over three months to help her navigate the complicated Department for Work and Pension's automated operator system. It was impossible for Miss I to understand what information the automated voice required and struggled to make herself understood because of her Spanish accent. When Nicole offered to assist her, it took numerous attempts before understanding how to manipulate the system to connect them to a real person (as the enquiry wasn't straightforward). Miss I also struggled to answer the security questions because she couldn't understand the accent of the customer services assistant.

Miss I finally obtained her National Insurance number in June 2019, at which point she had already been in the UK for eight months and had worked in two different jobs. She is now working in a Dementia Care Home and has more opportunities to practise English. As a result of her growing confidence in her spoken English and with the emotional support from Ms P and Nicole, she was able to challenge racial discrimination in her workplace by filing a complaint to her manager about a colleague.

Miss I's ambition is to be a Spanish teacher and she is starting a distance learning Masters in Spanish in November 2019. She is also looking into GCSE and teaching courses at Carlisle College and exploring volunteering opportunities to help her further improve her English. Since being involved in the Cumbria Community Integration Project, Miss I has attended community events such as the Community Iftaar, the Culture Bazaar and the Carlisle International Women's Group Coffee Mornings and has consequently expanded her social network through the connections she has made. She has expressed that she will continue to meet up with Ms P beyond the life of the Cumbria Community Integration Project.

Ms P is a regular listener to BBC Radio Cumbria and first found out about the CCIP through listening to an interview with Mike Zeller and Nicole on the Breakfast Show in October 2018.





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Miss I and Ms P featured on BBC Radio Cumbria's Breakfast Show in May 2019 to talk about their experiences and to promote the CCIP English Language Support Programme.

Miss I's Account

I arrived in the UK in October 2018. I started with the ESOL Beginner course and one day Nicole came to class, presenting her programme to help practice English. A week later I contacted her, and she immediately explained the objectives of the program and when it was about to begin. In February, Nicole assigned me a volunteer, Ms P, to help me in conversation or grammar. Thanks to this program and the people who develop them, I have greatly improved my English, I have developed more capacity for understanding, fluency and conversation. I can't thank Nicole enough, since my arrival in the UK, not only has she helped me with the language, she always helps me with any problems I have had. And she always sends me a message to attend the events she organises. Nor can I thank Ms P enough, she is the volunteer who helps me with English. She dedicates her time, which is so valuable, from the beginning we connect very well, and we are very good friends, we not only practice English, we also travel together. For example, we took a day trip to Edinburgh to explore the art galleries. It is very important for a person who changes their country alone, to find people who empathise with that situation, Nicole and Ms P have done it and they are two very important people in my life. Many thanks to Nicole, Ms P and the program they develop, it is a great job, because it is very frustrating not to be able to communicate with anyone when you do not know the language.

Changes within Partner Agencies

Cumbria Community Learning and Skills have, in September 2019, implemented Pre-Entry (the level below Beginners) and Improvers (the level below Intermediate) ESOL classes in order to bridge the gap in their services mentioned in the introduction.



