



Rural Refugee Network
www.ruralrefugeenetwork.org
Registered Charity No 1165796

AN EVALUATION OF THE RURAL REFUGEE NETWORK'S ESOL CLASSES FOR UKRAINIAN REFUGEES
(January to July 2023, St Laurence Church, Petersfield)

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“I think you can love more than one place. I think you can move across a border and still be a whole person.”

Edmund de Waal

Table of Contents

Rural Refugee Network CEO Forward2

1. INTRODUCTION 2

2. THE EVALUATION 3

2.1. Research questions 3

1.1. Methods 4

3. RESULTS 6

3.1. Intended outcome 1 7

1.1. Intended outcome 2 11

1.1. Intended outcome 3 17

1.1. Unintended outcome 18

1.1. The case study 19

1.1. Project process effectiveness 23

4. CONCLUSION 26

5. RECOMMENDATIONS 27

WITH HEARTFELT THANKS TO28

APPENDICES 30

o Appendix A: Focus group moderator guide 30

Appendix B: Consent form 31

Appendix C: Questionnaire 32

Rural Refugee Network CEO Forward

The Rural Refugee Network's ESOL provision spoke of a need brought to our attention by our community in 2022. We are really starting to see how they can make a difference to the lives of people grappling with the challenges of settling into a new community and culture. It has exceeded our original expectations and I am delighted to read the feedback and understand the strong sense of community and impactful learning imparted by our qualified ESOL teachers, Hilary Wright and Susanni Jameson and our volunteers Bridget Hughes and Yuliaa Tsymbal. These classes have given students the confidence and speaking skills to shop or travel on their own and to interact and integrate with the local community in Hampshire. Gaining employment is a vital first step to independence and it has been wonderful to see that 40% of students in both groups have already found work, as teaching assistants, interpreters, in hospitality and housekeeping. The RRN is committed to helping these students going forward as they strive to reenter the professional world so many of them left behind.

Nadia Potts, CEO, July 2023

1. INTRODUCTION

This evaluation captures and analyses student and teacher perceptions of the impact of a 6-month English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) course for Ukrainian refugees, run by the Rural Refugee Network (RRN) in Petersfield in Hampshire.

The conflict in Ukraine that began in February 2022 has led more than 8 million people to flee their homes for safe haven in other countries.¹ Over 400 of those are in East Hampshire, where the Rural Refugee Network has been supporting refugees since 2016². In May 2022, RRN identified a need in the community for ESOL provision for newly arrived Ukrainian refugees. RRN's expertise and experience delivering language lessons as part of its package of support gave it the capability to respond rapidly to fill this gap and, with funding and support from East Hampshire District Council, the charity designed a bespoke pilot programme. The evaluation of that 8-week pilot found rapidly enhanced language skills, the value of RRN's qualified ESOL teachers' experience in working with refugees and a strong need for further provision. Students were signposted to register at a further education college in September 2022 but for some, access, frequency and transport turned out to be a challenge, and the RRN identified ongoing need for local, accessible provision.

The Hampshire and Isle of Wight Community Foundation generously funded a six-month course from January 2023 which aimed to support thirty Ukrainian refugees to improve their language skills, integrate

¹ As of February 2023 <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/emergencies/ukraine-emergency>

² As of July 2023

with the local community, meet other Ukrainian refugees and gain the confidence and knowledge they would need in order to look for work locally. That provision, the focus of this report, was built on the recommendations in the pilot course's evaluation report, from the structure of the course to practical considerations such as building in funding for each student to have access to the textbook. It also aimed to address the need identified in the pilot for support to help this highly-qualified group of refugees on their journey to accessing employment that makes the most of their skills. Lessons continued in St Laurence Church in central Petersfield and each student had a copy of the textbook, English for Everyone, a structured programme for adults to learn English as a second language. This programme starts at beginner level and works up to advanced English, using clear visual teaching methods that are reinforced through exercises and examples and is structured with self study in mind, helping students to catch up at home on any lesson they need to miss or review material at their own pace. The beginner class was supported from May 2023 by a language assistant who had been a teacher in Ukraine and whose high level of English allowed her to help those with very little English understand and access the material through Ukrainian explanations of English grammar points and communicate effectively with the teachers through translation. An RRN volunteer also attends to support these students, particularly those joining new and needing support to access the general level in a class where most students have been learning for quite some time.

2. THE EVALUATION

This evaluation research aimed to capture the impact of the provision on students for summative reporting and formative lessons for the teachers and organisers to inform future provision. In the event, the intermediate group's conversation about how a supplementary reading and conversation group would enhance their learning was something that the programme was able to act on straight away and eight learners enjoyed an extra weekly session through July.

2.1. Research questions

Outcomes:

What has the impact of attending these classes been on:

1. Confidence and wellbeing
2. Language skill and knowledge
3. Finding meaningful work experience or training

Processes:

Was the design, planning and delivery of the course effective and how could it have been better?

1.1. Methods

The evaluation draws upon data from a range of sources. Using a multi-method approach it:

1. Held in-person focus groups with purposively sampled groups in each class to elicit high-quality data from small groups. The beginner class focus groups were supported by a translator to ensure accessibility for all students who wanted to take part and fully informed consent.
2. Undertook an online survey to gain each student's responses in consistent format. Beginner students were supported to complete this through a translator. Students were asked to:
 - Rate on a Likert-like scale the extent to which they agree or disagree with statements about planned outcomes
 - Comment on the teaching, what worked well and how provision could be improved
3. Recorded a detailed case study through an interview
4. Reviewed the teachers' written reflections, ongoing judgements against the outcomes grid and information about student progression.

Progress in learning outcomes was assessed through teacher and student perceptions. Example documentation is available in the appendices of this report. The participation of the organisers and teachers in this evaluation will ensure that the findings will actively inform future funding bids and the detail of provision, and help the teachers to understand where they are at their best and build on the best of what they do. This research took an appreciative enquiry approach, which 'aims to identify good practice, design effective development plans, and [...] offers an affirmative approach for evaluating and envisioning future initiatives based on best practice'.³ In a context in which ethical concerns precludes keeping some students on a waiting list in order to create a comparison group, the evaluation foregrounds participants' voices and uses the sensitive interaction of a qualitative approach to provide feedback for the project through a meaningful process for participants.⁴

The dataset comprised:

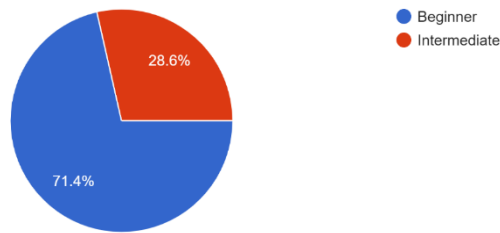
- Student focus group transcripts (18 participants in 3 focus groups)
- 21 questionnaire responses (out of 37 students enrolled). Almost two-thirds of the responses were from the beginner class who were supported to complete the survey in class time whereas the intermediate class were provided with a link to complete in their own time

³ National Foundation for Educational Research (2009) <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/aen01/aen01.pdf> p2

⁴ Mills, A., Durepos, G. and Wiebe, E. (2010) Encyclopaedia of case study research. Available at: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412957397>

Are you attending the beginner classes or intermediate class?

21 responses



- The case study interview
- Feedback from teachers
- Organisational records

The spoken and written responses to open questions were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis⁵ which involves the following six steps:

- Familiarisation: responses were read, re-read and annotated
- Coding: succinct labels, codes, capturing units of meaning were linked to excerpts
- Generating initial themes: the codes were collated into broader ideas
- Developing and reviewing themes: these ideas, or themes, were reviewed against the coded dataset, checking the fit to the research questions and the aims of the study
- Refining, defining and naming themes: each theme was developed to clarify the scope and focus and given an appropriate name
- Writing up

The qualitative data analysis software package, [Dedoose](#), was used to analyse the dataset from step 2 onwards and the underlying data were filtered and analysed by respondent and by theme.

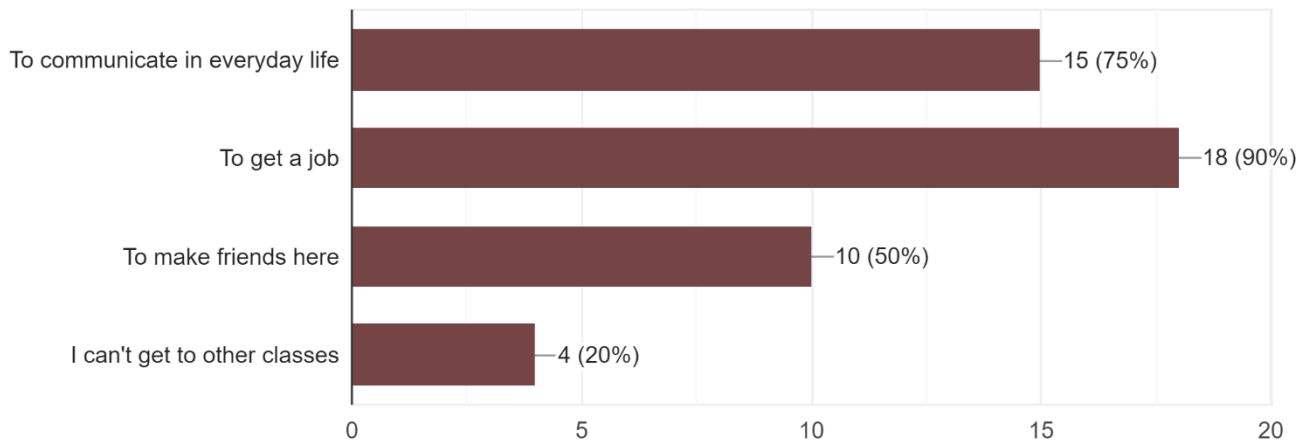
⁵ Braun, V. and Clarke, V. *Doing Reflexive Thematic Analysis* <https://www.thematicanalysis.net/doing-reflexive-ta/>

3. RESULTS

The research began by asking the reasons for students taking the course:

Why did you need these classes?

20 responses



The chart above shows that the main reason students enrolled on the ESOL course was to gain the skills to search for and communicate in a job and to carry out everyday activities such as shopping or navigating public transport. Some wanted to engage more with the local community and make friends with other refugees in the same position, attracted by the local accessible venue.

This section now presents students' and stakeholders' perceptions about the two questions a project evaluation needs to answer:

1. Outcomes: does the project achieve its intended **outcomes**?
2. Processes: what factors contribute to this? Were the project **processes** implemented as intended and are they effective?

3.1. Intended outcome 1

Increased confidence and wellbeing, enabling them to work toward their individual goals

3.1.1. Health and Wellbeing

The three focus groups discussed the impact on their wellbeing and how the classes had helped them feel better, choosing to explore the following themes in response to being asked how the classes make them feel:

- Feeling supported
- Feeling welcomed and comfortable in the space
- Feeling able and comfortable to ask for support
- The calm friendly atmosphere: “now here I relax” (intermediate student)

The conversations about the enhanced sense of belonging and integration reported in the following section infer a positive impact on life satisfaction, although the beginner teacher qualified their report of good self-rated wellbeing with the observation that:

“They often express positive feelings about the class but have many worries including uncertainty concerning their accommodation, work etc. The learners’ sense of happiness and life satisfaction often depends on long term security and a sense of permanence which few of these learners have.”

1.1.1. Social and Community

There was strong evidence that students enjoy a warm, friendly, inclusive environment conducive to learning. When asked the opening focus group question ‘how do these lessons make you feel?’, students chose the following word cards – connected, comfortable, supported, belonging, welcomed, relaxing. One participant stated *“You don’t have [the word] fun!”* when asked to choose a word from the pack, and wrote it herself on a post-it note. The focus group discussions highlighted the impact of this and students reported feeling at ease, able to take risks and make mistakes.

“There is a warm atmosphere which is very important for learning.” (beginner student)

The role of these classes in helping them to integrate into the local community came through strongly in both focus group discussions. As one beginner student explained, *“For me it’s not only about English it’s about being part of this society, English society”*. Another beginner elaborated that they *“don’t feel lonely here and feel supported”*. The beginner teacher had observed her students *“feeling confident enough to share needs or ask for help”*. She elaborated on this theme, reporting that *“learners have been signposted to*

work opportunities, supported with references and job searches, links made to the community with help given with furnishing new accommodation or bicycles donated by local charities.”

Students’ responses indicated that they perceived a strong role for the classes in enhancing their understanding of the culture, behaviour and expectations of life here.

“About culture, it’s good to know about how you celebrate Christmas, Easter and about famous local women, I remember Jane Austen. Because really not just English language we study, Susanni teach us different kind of life for example, for us it’s very important.”

(intermediate student)

Another intermediate focus group participant elucidated how she had learnt *“about real life, about literature, about clothes, it makes me feel more confident.”*

Beginner focus groups also touched on this theme, with one student describing how the teacher *“introduces me to the culture of England, to English traditions”* and another adding how the teacher is able to *“adapt the lessons to life in the UK, different nuances and habits of people, a lot of quality and useful information.”*

Another student described how the teacher reacted to her recounting a medical emergency at work by adapting the following lesson to introduce medical vocabulary. This student went on to reinforce the value of the cultural element to the classes:

“Hilary prepared the next lesson for medicine and it’s very important for us and Hilary not only teach us English grammar, she teaches us about English traditions, culture so we can understand English friends, English colleagues and special slang. Very important for real life.”

1.1.2. Increased meaningful social mixing

A beginner student described how she had *“connected with other students, with other Ukrainians, place for meeting”*, while an intermediate student described her group as like *“just family because we communicate after class”*. An intermediate student, who found a job as a teaching assistant in May, described the impact of the local group dedicated to Ukrainian refugees:

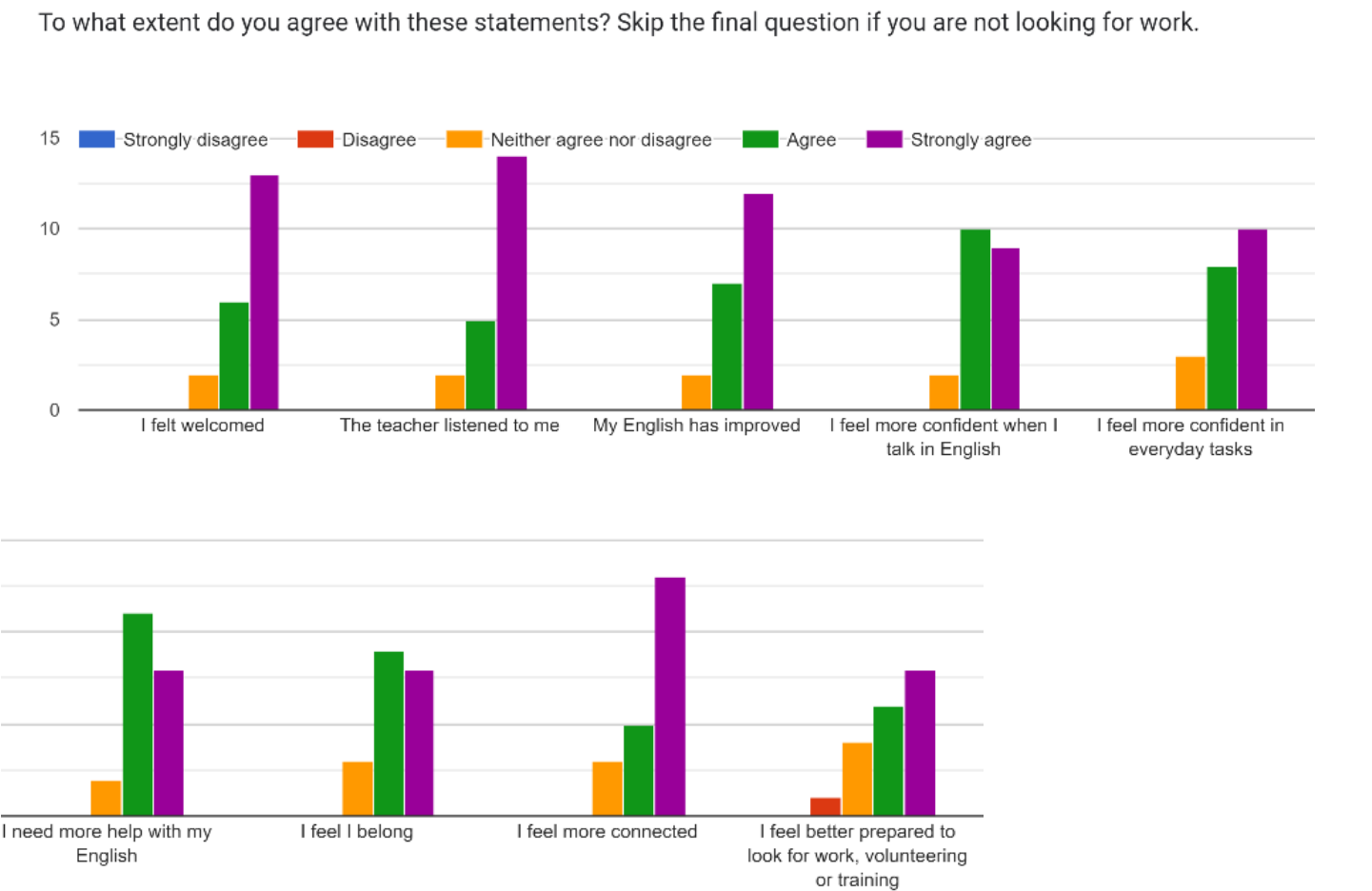
“For me the class was very very important because, I remember one year ago was the first time when I see Ukrainian people because I am alone here. And now I feel more comfortable, I feel friendly, and now it is very important studying English because I find job.”

The collegiate nature of the class dynamics was in evidence in the focus groups, particularly the intermediate group where a translator was not needed but students helped each other with vocabulary, asking each other words in Ukrainian and without fail one member of the class would be able to help. This was reflected in the intermediate teacher’s reflection that *“meeting up, face to face, on a weekly basis has given them an opportunity to form and reinforce friendships, voice anxieties, give and receive advice.”*

As the teacher recounted to this evaluation how towards the end of the course some students increased their working hours or attended online DWP classes and were not able to attend consistently, she mentioned that “they maintained contact through WhatsApp and homework sheets shared via friends”, which illustrates the strength of the relationships formed through this course. One of the intermediate students explained how the group has helped each other navigate challenges such public transport:

“I come here, I don’t buy my tickets on the train, I started here [the classes], other students show me how to buy them, buy the cheap tickets, it’s very easier”.

Survey responses indicated strong self-reported impact on the measures above:



Several students described how these impacts, particularly their increased confidence in English and the classes’ cultural elements had made them feel able to go shopping or use public transport on their own and speak to people in these everyday situations, which they’d previously been too scared to do. This suggests an impact on refugees’ sense of belonging, which could potentially mitigate the risk of social isolation,

helping them to feel more integrated into the local community. This theme is examined further when this report looks at language acquisition in the following section.

1.1. Intended outcome 2

Development of language skills and knowledge to enable progression onto a higher level ESOL programme in listening, speaking, reading and writing skills.

Students reported a good balance of the four skills, speaking, writing, listening and reading, and each focus group featured agreement that the classes are having an impact. One beginner student commented: *“I have noticed the difference between attending and not attending”*. Focus group participants explained how the teacher provided clear explanations and examples, breaking down complex concepts into manageable chunks and using audio and visual techniques to aid understanding and memory. Focus group discussions featured general agreement that they feel they have improved across the four core skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening, particularly speaking and listening and participants provided examples of the impact which this section will explore. Several beginner students explained how they had arrived speaking no English at all:

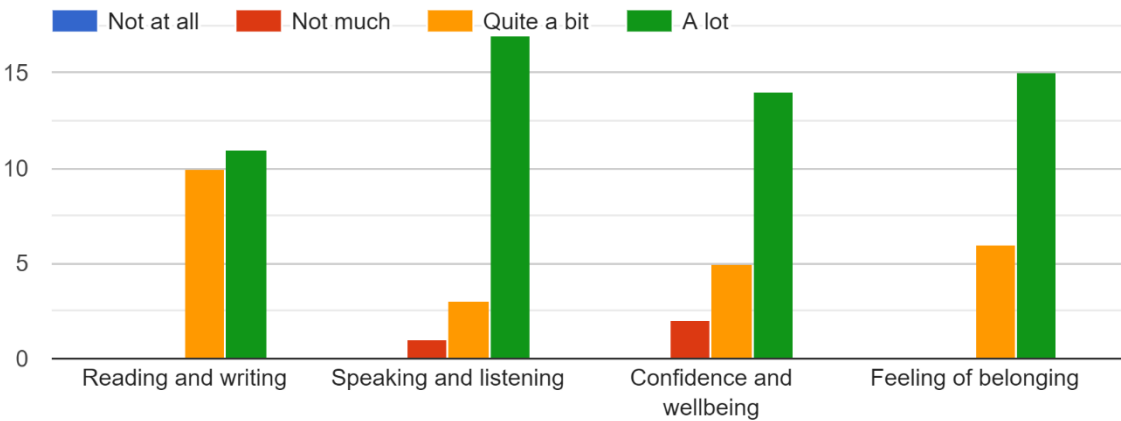
“For me, very important. In Ukraine, I didn’t study English, Zero. These courses help more. Yes, very important for me.”

The beginner teacher summarised the impact:

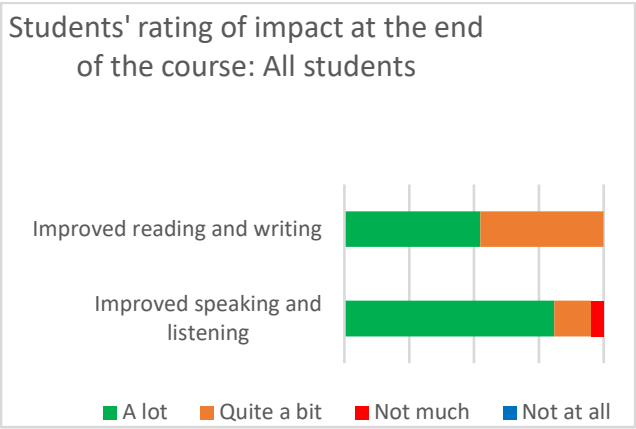
“All learners made good progress and gained confidence in speaking, reading and writing and clearly benefited from the nurturing, supportive approach. Many learners found the confidence to look for work, apply for jobs and have been successful in being offered part time positions.”

Survey responses indicated that the impact was greatest on speaking and listening skills but that students perceived an impact on all language skills:

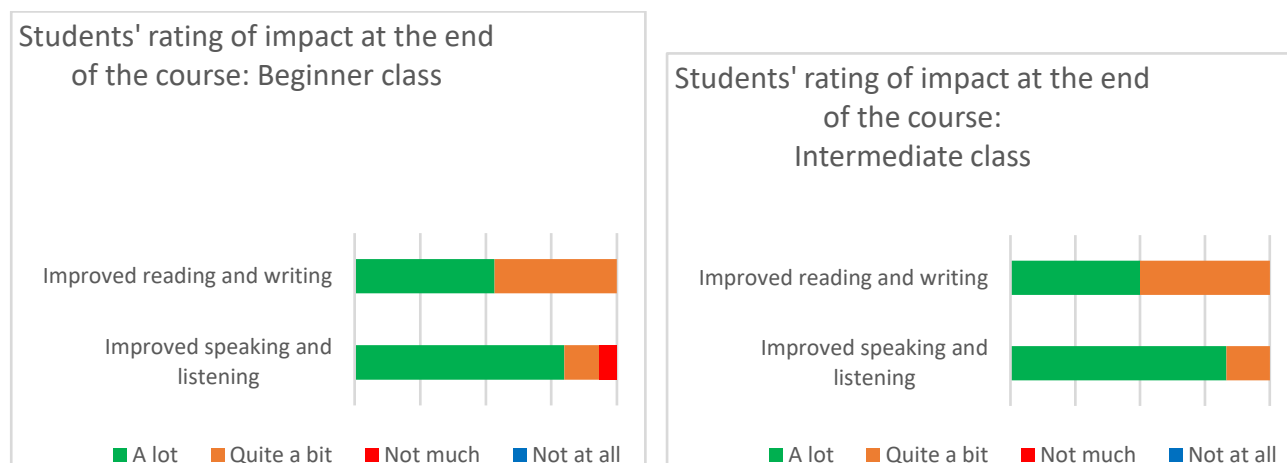
This class helped to improve my:



Looking in more detail at the responses on the four language skills we can see that students felt the most impact on speaking and listening, which ties in with the priority they themselves place on this form of communication:



Analysing responses by class shows that the beginners saw a more even impact whereas the intermediate students were particularly struck by the improvement they felt in their speaking and listening skills:



This focus is possibly linked to the intermediate students' acute sense, articulated in the focus group, of the gap they now face between basic communicative English and the requirements for functioning in the professional environment they aspire to.

"I need to improve my English tenses and grammar more, and work on my pronunciation. Learn as many words and phrases as possible." (Intermediate student).

1.1.1. Speaking & Listening

Focus group conversations for both groups featured the impact of these classes on students' confidence in every day life situations such as speaking and understanding in shops, at appointments or on public transport. Many articulated the change:

"After this courses I'm not afraid to go to shops alone, use train alone and I think I'm happy that I study English here" (beginner student)

Students reported that the approach in class has impacted on their confidence to speak and this is as valuable as any enhancement to technical language skills.

"feeling more confident because earlier, [when I] go to the shop, I know many words but I not speak. Now it's comfortable, not scared, not stressed." (beginner student)

"I became more confident after the class. I still struggle with speaking but I understand a lot" (beginner student)

The intermediate teacher's reflection mirrored these judgements:

“Over the last six months, it has been noticeable how much more willing and able they all are to engage in everyday conversation at the beginning and end of the sessions, as well as during our sessions.”

The teacher went on to describe how one student had told her about how pleased they were to have been able to communicate with the guide at a day out in Portsmouth Dockyard with her son and related how *“she felt it was because she hadn’t focused on what she couldn’t understand but had just listened and, as a result, understood everything. I guess she is getting to the point where she isn’t translating everything she hears but is just relaxing into the language. It was such a pleasure to see her delight.”*

Students spoke about how they felt their vocabulary had really come on, particularly due to the teacher’s clear explanations that they had been able to internalise:

“The teacher explained tenses, grammar, excellent pronunciation, and accent very well.”
(beginner student)

“Our teacher explains really well. Also she mimes which helps to understand the meaning of words.” (beginner student)

Students also discussed how the classes had helped them to communicate at work:

“The English course helped us for communication with people and for me my work. I work in pub.” (beginner student)

Focus group participants were clear about the impact of the teachers’ clear pronunciation and local accent on the progress they felt they were making in understanding, in speaking confidence and in pronunciation. They also felt that they had had individualised feedback that had enhanced their progress:

“She feels our weaknesses and tries to correct us, inspire us and give better examples”
(intermediate student)

When asked what could be improved about the course, one student answered: *“We don’t have negative because she try to understand everyone”.*

A few students felt that their speaking skills had not improved as much as they had hoped for as they would have liked more intensive lessons with more hours on more days per week.

1.1.2. Reading & Writing

Beginner students pointed out that those arriving without having studied English in Ukraine faced an immediate barrier in the different alphabet. While communication remains difficult they expressed relief to be able to read and write.

“I find it more difficult to find work because of my level of English, but at least now I can read and write.”

The beginner teacher concurred that students are now *“more secure with reading and writing at a beginner plus level”*. The teacher explained that:

“For example they can independently read books with simple texts, read information in the course textbook , read ‘real life’ examples such as application forms or WhatsApp texts. Most learners show progress in writing evidenced in dictation, spelling checks, class practice exercises and weekly homework as well as in real life situations such as replying to texts, writing postcards or filling in application forms.”

While beginner students’ focus was largely on spoken communication once they had conquered the alphabet, intermediate students had particularly appreciated the support with perfecting their reading and writing, with some asking for more traditional reinforcements:

“check tests and grammar for better writing” (intermediate student)

“More reading; to have the new vocabulary checklist every session” (intermediate student)

1.1.3. The impact of enhanced skills

This word cloud shows the themes of the focus group conversations around language acquisition, in which the students described their perception of improved skills in all four areas but moved quickly onto the

impact of the enhanced confidence in those skills allowing them to tackle things they'd previously been nervous about or ineffective at:



1.2. Intended outcome 3

Finding meaningful work experience or training commensurate with their interests, skills, experience and qualifications.

Focus group participants explained that while many of them (40%) are in work, it is generally not commensurate with their previous qualifications and experience. The teachers also mentioned that “many learners have found part time work, however this has not often been commensurate with their skills, experience and qualifications, for example nurses working in hospitality or cleaning, an accountant working in a café.” The groups included accountants, nurses and teachers, all of whom have been unable to pick up their careers in the UK due to difficulty in transferring qualifications and, so far, showing the required standard of English. The situation was summed up by the beginner teacher:

“For many learners their increased language proficiency has supported their progression into employment and thus given them an increased knowledge and understanding of the UK Employment landscape. However, some of the learners feel frustrated that they are unable to use their professional skills and view their lower skilled work as the first step towards working in their preferred employment. Other learners have found employment in their profession for example Pâtissier, Beauty therapist and see a positive employment path ahead.”

Students benefited from National Career Service and the RRN employment expert and CEO have arranged for individuals to access the RRN’s contacts and expertise to support their journey to achieving the necessary qualification status to enter their previous profession in the UK.

The themes identified in the focus group transcripts were:

- The importance of English, particularly the specific business or field-specific English which was not a focus for these general classes, in finding and thriving in employment
- How much these general classes help with communication with colleagues and customers at work
- The support students have appreciated in their job search and the impact of access to RRN’s specialist knowledge and contacts
- How finding appropriate employment here is a long journey in which classes like this are but one element

The beginner teacher judged that “most Learners can now read job adverts, write applications and speak confidently in job interviews and respond to and ask relevant questions.” A beginner explained the impact of the support she had found in the classes: “I met people here and that helped me to find the job”. The impact inferred there was underscored by an intermediate student who articulated how important the classes are in helping her look for work, her overwhelming priority: “I find better job, my life better.”

The intermediate class focus group in particular spent quite some time discussing the barriers they are facing in the UK finding employment in the career for which they had been qualified in Ukraine. This comment in one of the beginner focus groups though typifies the situation many are in:

“I work as a barista and waitress in a cafe part time 9 hours a week. I would like to work as an accountant or teach economics at a college or university [as she had in Ukraine]. I would like to take the first steps, volunteer and work in the future.”

The group concluded that a national system of appropriate professional sustained work experience placements is what they need. One participant took strength from the group discussion, as illustrated by this extract from the transcript:

“We should change something, global problem, we should do something. In one month there will be meeting with MP so, I think I will take it. I will take it. I promise I will do it”. [clapping].

This extract exemplifies the impact of this supportive group on people’s confidence, indicating that this learner felt empowered by the group support to take on a strategic change.

More work-related vocabulary and bespoke topics was a repeated theme in responses suggesting what they would like in future.

“I would be grateful for more job searching oriented lessons” (Intermediate student)

Focus group discussions evidenced progression resting on the increased confidence and skills, for example one student described having the confidence to talk in an English-speaking working environment having arrived in the UK speaking no English. While students reflected that their hosts had also helped with this, there was general agreement that the structured lessons and clear explanations from an experienced practitioner had been key, offering group practice to develop listening and speaking skills in particular.

1.1. Unintended outcome

The language assistant, a Ukrainian refugee herself who provided translation in the focus groups, explained that the opportunity had led to an interesting new job role:

“When I started here helping with the classes, just starting working, communicating and then it just happened, yes I applied and became more confident and I applied and got the job [as a support worker for Ukrainians]”.

1.2. The case study

To complement the focus groups, surveys, and teacher feedback, a case study of an individual learner was also undertaken, with the intention to explore in depth the impact and experience of the classes from the perspective of a single learner. This case study was undertaken in person to a prepared [brief] with the support of Yuliaa Tsymbal. The interviewer asked questions in English, which were subsequently translated by Yuliaa into Ukrainian. The learner tended to respond in Ukrainian, speaking mainly through the interpreter aside from occasional agreement, conformation, or exclamation in English. The learner summarised her experience of the ESOL courses by saying:

“I am very happy here in the UK... I find the courses really useful and helpful... Hilary is a perfect teacher, and she finds [Yuliaa] as well as a helper very useful person to have.”

First, the learner spoke about their reasons for joining the classes. Two key themes were mentioned. Firstly, they centred the necessity of improving their English, stating that *“because my level of English is really low, I...need to attend any of the...classes that are there”*. As will be explored below, the learner’s primary considerations in improving their English related to employment and confidence in daily life. Secondly, the learner emphasised the importance of the geography and timing of RRN’s classes. As the learner found work almost immediately in Petersfield, discussed in more detail later, it was necessary for them to find classes within Petersfield that they could fit around their work. They stated, *“I was searching for courses only in Petersfield area...basically this is it. Any other time or place were not very suitable...because I was already working at that period of time”*.

● Intended Outcome 1

The case study interview revealed several themes relating to the programme’s **Intended Outcome 1** on confidence and wellbeing. When asked how the classes had helped them, the learner emphatically responded: *“the courses helped me in all the areas of...life. At work, in my day-to-day activities, everywhere!”*. They gave examples of using public transport and going to the shops as areas where their confidence has grown especially. They also highlighted the increased confidence they felt in communicating with their host family, something that their limited grasp of English had previously restricted. In the context of talking to neighbours, the host family, and navigating daily life, the learner stated that the classes were instrumental in allowing them to *“start the conversation”*. This matches similar feelings expressed in the focus groups.

○ Process - cultural knowledge beyond ESOL syllabus

The interview indicated that a central process facilitating this increased confidence was the lessons’ inclusion of cultural and historical knowledge of England and the local area. They mentioned one specific example which they felt was key to their increasing confidence and engagement with daily life and community in Petersfield. The learner reported that Hilary spent a lesson exploring the local landmarks and geography, the best ways to get to important places like London, and the skill of map-reading, using a local map as a prop to introduce learners to English symbols

and place names. When asked why learning such aspects beyond the syllabus of ESOL classes was useful, the learner responded, *"First of all it is just basically very interesting to know about historical themes and cultural aspects of English life"* as well as mentioning their ability to use this knowledge *"to talk to their neighbours [and] their hosts"*. This response shows firstly the practical benefits the learner experienced from learning more about English culture through these classes. They felt more able to engage in conversations and develop a relationship with their host family once they had a grasp of British social norms and cultural practices and felt more settled and confident in the local area. However, the learner's emphasis on the interest and excitement they felt around exploring these topics, the history of England and unique cultural points especially, suggests that the classes may play a role in enabling the learners to again experience learning for the sake of enjoyment not just out of necessity.

○ Social mixing

A further aspect of wellbeing the learner cited as a major impact of the classes was the access the classes allowed to social mixing and community. The learner said, *"this English class is a place where I have found a lot of Ukrainian friends"*, none of whom they knew before coming to the area. This implies the classes allowed them to regain a sense of community and social support. They stated that, *"It's really nice to have people around,...just to see those who speak the same language, have more or less the same problems in life, during the cup of coffee or during the break from class, or after the class...it really helps to get on with life"*. This suggests a generalised improvement in the learner's wellbeing as a result of the classes. While the ESOL syllabus does not explicitly provide opportunities for discussing shared problems, the participants' shared experience combined with the open atmosphere created in the classes seems to have made individuals feel less alone and more able to share their struggles. Referring to the classes as the basis of a social group with time protected for social interaction, for example in breaktimes or before and after the class, shows how the structure of the classes may aid learner wellbeing by providing a protected setting for social connection. The comment that it helps them *"get on with life"* suggests that in providing a route back to ordinary life, the classes fulfil more functions than simply improving the learners' English.

The social aspect of the classes however was also labelled by the learner as an important factor in their improvement with English, the classes' primary function. They stated that *"it really helps because I see other people, we communicate, and basically it is more fun to learn language with other people...when we meet after classes we always discuss topics or what we've learnt during lessons"*.

● Intended outcome 2

A second theme explored in the case study was Intended Outcome 2, the learner's experience and success in language acquisition with especial focus on the four main language skills, reading, writing, speaking, and listening. The learner reported feelings of strong personal progress in all four of these skills, and even when encouraged, could not say they had felt more progress in one than another. The learner said, *"because I started I had never learnt English before so...all four of those aspects I improved, and I even cannot say that one of them has improved more"*. When asked about the balance between these skills in the classes, the learner reported that *"I find the balance perfect...I find this really useful"*.

The conversation then turned to the lesson and learning techniques which enabled this self-reported feeling of progress. As with the focus groups, the learner highlighted the role, enthusiasm, and skill of the teacher. They said, *“the fact that Hilary explains everything in very friendly atmosphere, and she gives a lot of examples and she talks about not only grammar but also cultural aspects of language, historical things”* was important to their improvement. They also focused on Hilary’s enthusiasm and active approach to the lessons: *“Hilary she uses different techniques during the lesson. She is a perfect artist, she draws really well so the students understand, and... she is a great actress as well, so without a helper she was trying to explain with her miming with her body language words or phrases or topics”*.

The impact the learner reported of these improved skills were discussed in the first section of the case study and are well-aligned with those reported in the focus groups. Especially emphasised by this learner was the importance of the friendly, non-judgemental, and interactive atmosphere in the class, which made it easier and more pleasurable to improve possibly challenging skills.

● **Intended outcome 3**

Finally, the case study enabled a detailed examination of the impact of the classes on an individual learner’s experience of finding meaningful employment or work experience. The learner was able to find employment related to their previous skills and experience relatively quickly following arrival in the area. Having worked as a cleaner in Ukraine, the learner was able to employ their existing skills in a local market with plenty of demand. As previously mentioned, their quick entrance into employment was a major factor in choosing to attend RRN’s ESOL programme, as was more easily incorporated in their schedule.

The ESOL classes were therefore not instrumental to the learner’s initial pursuit of employment, as they were successful in finding work before gaining a better grasp of the language. However, the learner did state the importance of the classes in improving their feelings of confidence and capability in their job. However, despite the learner’s self-reported ease at finding employment, the learner also reported a strong desire to pursue further career ambitions, dissatisfied with the current arrangement of her job. The learner’s career in cleaning in Ukraine was specifically in hospitals and surgeries, environments in which they enjoy working, carry specific skill in, and aspire to return to. They have found, however, that their current level of English is insufficient for working in this more specialised workplace, stating that *“because my English is limited I cannot find anything there”*. The learner confirmed that, based on their positive experience of the classes so far and feelings of rapid personal progress because of them, they believed continuing existence and attendance of RRN’s classes will be crucial to their ability to transition into this new workplace and achieve further satisfaction with their employment.

In summary, in the sphere of employment the ESOL programme’s main outcome for this learner has been increased confidence in their existing job, which is situated within the sector that matches their experience and goals. However, they have not yet achieved the proficiency necessary to pursue their ultimate aim but are confident that continued attendance of RRN’s ESOL classes will be instrumental in this.

● Potential points of improvements

As in the focus groups, the learner was asked what aspects of the class could be changed to enhance their effectiveness, enjoyability, or access. As previously mentioned, the learner highlighted the importance of the scheduling and location of the classes. However, similar to the feedback gained by the focus groups, they also stated they would prefer longer and more regular sessions. They said, *“I find it very useful that classes are regular, and I would love to have them longer, for two hours for example”*. However, they also noted the difficulty in finding enough time for this expansion, especially since in their experience *“quite a few people are not attending classes at the moment because they are working”*. They cited the morning schedule of the class as a particularly difficult factor: *“to be honest it is becoming more and more difficult to find this hour and a half or two hours in the morning for those who work”*. Instead, in contrast to the majority view in all three focus groups, this student indicated a preference for classes in the late afternoon.⁶ Summarising their feelings on the class, they stated: *“I would improve the timing only. I really appreciate that fact that we have books to take home now, it has been really useful for me”*.

● Conclusion

The interview concluded by asking the learner if they had anything else to say. They concluded, *“I really hope that the course will continue in September because I will love to attend”*. The central themes of the case study therefore support the findings of the wider report, with the key themes reported by the learner or inferred from their testimony being as follows:

- The increased confidence in communication, especially with their host family
- Their increased confidence at performing day to day tasks, such as going to the shops.
- A greater sense of wellbeing, belonging, and comfort.
- A valuable foundational understanding of English cultural and social norms
- A greater sense of community due to the social importance of the classes
- A sense of improved progress due to the sociable and friendly organisation of the classes
- A return to feelings of normality and routine
- Consistent improvement across all four language skills
- Strong praise for the teacher’s enthusiasm, skill, and techniques
- The self-reported importance of the class in improving their confidence at work.
- A belief that continued attendance of the classes will enable them to reach stated career goals.
- A desire for longer or more frequent sessions, though with awareness of the scheduling and logistical challenges this might pose.

⁶ The classes were set to morning hours to take into account both the childcare commitments of learners and the capabilities of RRN.

- A strong desire to continue attendance of the classes if their provision continues into September.

1.1. Project process effectiveness

This report now moves on to examine findings about how the project was conceived and implemented and how that could be improved in future.

1.1.1. What worked well

Students highlighted three areas that made the classes particularly successful:

1. The teachers

Students identified the teachers' skills, professionalism and personalities as key to the classes' success and to the impact on their learning.

"The teacher's dedication, enthusiasm, and effective teaching strategies played a significant role in enhancing my learning experience" (intermediate student)

The creative, energetic teaching methods created classes that students described as fun and engaging, something to which they looked forward each week. The fact that the students clearly found the course enjoyable and relevant to their everyday lives promoted engagement with the course and supported their learning. For beginners in particular, the teacher's ability and enthusiasm to use art, gestures and realia to explain key vocabulary and concepts had clearly enhanced their learning and engagement. In particular, participants really enjoyed the actions the beginner teacher added to her explanations and all groups mentioned the teachers' patience and skills in speaking clearly and stopping to help one student to understand when needed. The teachers' skill was complemented not only by the Ukrainian language assistant but also by an RRN volunteer. The beginner teacher reflected that *"the extra support means that learners have many opportunities to practise listening, speaking, reading and writing English with 1:1 help."*

Student input to this evaluation highlights the teachers' personal teaching style and warm personalities so appreciated by this group of students:

"Hilary is very energetic and she tries to explain all the details and she is really patient about a word, really helps us remember. She enjoys, she writes on the board. Very nice woman."

Some of the comments inferred that these are very experienced, professional ESOL teachers:

"what she teach me I understand and all words that she says I understand, sometimes English people speak quickly but she speaks all words, understanding for us, speak correctly, she understand sometimes we need more slow." (beginner student)

"[the teacher] explains very simple way don't need to translate" (beginner student)

The responses about the teachers infer that the relationship with the teacher has been a key motivation for attendance and engagement. Some participants who also attend other classes reflected on the

benefits of the warm, energetic environment, local teachers and convenient location they have valued in the RRN provision.

2. The careful structure, progression and textbook, supplemented by skilled teachers bringing in a mix of activities accessible to all students.

Students felt their learning had been enhanced by the structure, and described how they like the way that one thematic topic is studied each lesson through multiple skills and approaches, thoughtfully adapted, for example tailoring discussion to the particular jobs the students were interested in doing.

“Different things on the lesson, game, book and homework and pictures” (beginner student)

“Not only we go through the book but she adds a lot of additional material, she brings cards, she brings things and explains a lot apart from using the course book” (beginner student)

“Another example about cutlery everyone remembers. When we study topic of kitchen, she brought spoon, knives, fork” (beginner student)

One beginner student described in detail the impact of the teachers’ techniques for bringing learning to life for visual students:

“And Hilary makes picture of birds and I’m very remember this because now I see bird ‘Oh robin’, ‘oh swan’.”

Students all agreed in focus groups that having their own copy of the textbook was beneficial, and it was highlighted by almost every student in each group both verbally and non-verbally:

“My English not well but I have the book, I want study English in the home, and I start listen the book” (intermediate student)

“I remember more when I write in my own book” (beginner student)

“It’s important that I have the course book that I can come back to at home, revise, do homework” (beginner student)

3. The local community-based provision

Focus group participants in all groups felt that the local nature of the classes, and the teachers’ local knowledge, contacts and accent had been particularly helpful. One beginner student commented that *“you know very important, local real English accent”*. The small class sizes and volunteer support allowed the teachers to get to know and understand each student so that they could differentiate activities and signpost in response to questions and issues that may otherwise have impacted on engagement and learning. The local venue was key to this, being particularly accessible from surrounding villages and those on the train line, with the space in a local church hall contributing to the friendly and relaxed atmosphere of the programme that students appreciated. It seemed to have provided students with a

sense of belonging to the local area and a place where they could feel comfortable. Students wanted us to know that *“the room is comfortable and transport is good next to train station.”*

The Rural Refugee Network’s contribution in kind above the paid ESOL teachers significantly enhanced the provision, with the teachers mentioning the value of the CEO’s experience and support, the volunteer support for the beginner class and the employment expert and contacts with the National Careers Service. In particular, several students cited the language assistant, herself a Ukrainian refugee but with good English and a teaching background, as particularly beneficial for them as beginners. They had found that her explanations in Ukrainian of the basics of English grammar gave them the tools to make the most of the classes and access the learning. The teacher reinforced this message, reflecting that:

“Yuliia has been an invaluable addition to the classes as she is able to adapt the teaching to respond to individuals needs, explain new concepts and differences between the English and Ukrainian language. This has been a really positive addition to the outcome of the classes as she is able to support individual learners, translate new concepts and extend learning for some learners. She often sends additional supplementary homework to learners where she has identified need and has successfully set up a learners support WhatsApp to share information and answer queries. We work very closely together, often team teaching and her English teaching experience has been invaluable in explaining clearly differences between English and Ukrainian.”

This section would not do justice to the students’ input to this evaluation if it did not touch on the many, many heartfelt expressions of thanks and praise for the teachers’ professional, friendly approach and creative, tailored teaching. Here are a few of them:

“The classes have, in my opinion, very helped because we are very lucky [to] study with this very intelligent, clever and beautiful English lady”.

“Really lovely amazing, excellent. Usually a smile.”

“She is a teacher, animator, actor!”

“I just want to say Susanni is one of the best teacher who I have been known before because I come depend it’s very important.”

“Teacher helped us in many different ways, the help was extremely appreciated and valuable”

And just simply *“she supports us”*.

1.1.1. What could be improved

Focus group participants mentioned practical issues for the programme to consider, from a rickety whiteboard, to the timing of the classes. The intermediate group discussed how more rigorous regular testing of key foundational vocabulary would help them to structure their learning outside class.

Having access to recordings of classes was raised as something to consider in future and one of the focus groups discussed whether it would help to have a TV to play video content in class, concluding it would not be an effective use of class time. They did not feel the classes needed livening up; to quote one participant's comment on the teacher: *"She is the main entertainment"* and the group felt that *"video in a class would take up too much time, better to watch for homework"* (beginner student).

One student mentioned that she knew some refugees who had arrived knowing absolutely no English and for them joining an established class setting can be daunting. With only capacity for two levels in these classes, even the beginner class assumed the familiarity with the alphabet and basic structures that most students had. Participants in this focus group had quite a long discussion about how future provision could address this, concluding that such students would need one to one support to enable them to access the main class unless future classes could be funded for more granular levels starting at pre-beginner.

The intermediate students explored how their formal classes could be supplemented with structured language opportunities to reinforce the language work, such as a book club, film club or choir. One student explained that:

"we need to practise it, but to practise it in public places is difficult because in one minute you can meet 10 people with different accents, but if we can practice between us and with other British teachers who can correct us, who can design for us a good sentences and good connection with each other it will be better."

The beginner teacher suggested that opportunities for RRN to liaise even more closely with the local further education provider would enhance students' ESOL journeys.

Participants' main concern in response to being asked what could be improved was to ask whether the classes will continue and stress how much they would like them to. Students generally agreed that they would like to attend several of these classes in Petersfield each week.

2. CONCLUSION

This investigation demonstrated that the provision has had a beneficial impact on its participants and that the project met its objectives through professional, caring teaching and effective project delivery. The research, and the teacher and student reflection undertaken, offers insights that can inform future similar provision. Tentative initial findings were fed back to the RRN soon after the focus groups and the later teacher input revealed that one of the students' ideas explored in the intermediate focus group has been acted on, successfully, straight away with a reading and conversation session added on a Thursday morning now that the Further Education College course attended by most students that morning had finished for the

summer. This is likely to further enhance this evaluation's finding that students felt heard and acquired confidence and the sense of agency their recent experiences are likely to have taken away.

The overwhelming feeling in each focus group was of a bonded, engaged group of students who valued the classes, and their teacher, very highly. The findings point to factors that differentiate this provision from other ESOL classes. While it does not offer accreditation, it clearly complements the accredited college courses with other benefits that students value. Students highlighted the value of the regular social local contact, the relevance to their local context and the teachers' skills in tailoring to the needs of their students. They reported feeling comfortable in the classes and that this made them confident to practise their language skills and able to fully engage. This infers that community-centred recruitment to provision run regularly in a community space in a central, accessible location can deliver not only improved language skills through thoughtful teaching by qualified ESOL teachers with experience in this context, but also impact on students' confidence, integration and wellbeing and help with their search for meaningful employment. The teachers' local knowledge and agile approach combined with access to the Rural Refugee Network's local community and relationships facilitated a course which imparted more than pure language skills.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

The data in this evaluation point to the following recommendations. Some reflect ideas directly from participants, who were asked how provision could be improved, others have been inferred from the data by the researchers.

For RRN and similar providers:

- There is a strong drive from the students and a clear rationale for these classes to continue in this format in the next academic year.
- Future provision should continue to prioritise and fund the use of the qualified and experienced ESOL teachers this evaluation has shown to be key to both engagement and learning, particularly in an environment with a wide variety of language proficiency within each class.
- Classes should continue to be based in an easily-accessible, central location in Petersfield.
- Consider capacity and need to run longer classes (2 hours), to offer classes on several days each week or to incorporate intensive days within future courses.
- Consider a language based film club, book club, conversation classes or work shadowing activities.
- Consider related support such as individual CV-writing support or courses such as first aid.
- Consider how RRN could address the evidenced need for more advanced courses, particularly IELTS preparation.

For statutory bodies:

- Future support for this cohort would be enhanced by provision of business English and IELTS qualification preparation.
- Statutory agencies should consider facilitating structured work experience placements for Ukrainian refugees in the fields for which their experience and qualifications had fitted them in Ukraine.
- Future provision should consider mechanisms to deliver employment-related language teaching tailored to each student.

For further research:

- Beyond the focus of this evaluation on the classes' impact on wellbeing, language acquisition, and employment, future research into their effect specifically on the learners' feelings of dignity and agency presents a possible direction of study. This would provide an interesting link with current debates on the role of education in long-term solutions and wellbeing for displaced individuals.

WITH HEARTFELT THANKS TO

The Ukrainian students who gave their time, energy and ideas to this research, and everyone who took time out of busy lives to share their reflections. We are grateful to the two teachers, Hilary Wright and Susanni Jameson for participating in this research and giving us access to their sessions and language assistant Yuliia for her translation of focus groups, case study interview and survey text responses. Thank you too to the funder, the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Community Foundation, for generously supporting the project.

The project would also like to highlight the contribution of:

- Rural Refugee Network volunteers, trustees and CEO.
- The teachers, the language assistant Yuliia Tsybal, and RRN volunteer Bridget Hughes who helped on the beginner course each Monday.
- Our admin volunteer Helen Vyner who helped throughout the project.
- St Laurence Church, Petersfield for waiving venue fees for their hall in the centre of the Petersfield community and supporting the Rural Refugee Network's work.
- The students' hosts for their support, such as helping with homework or driving their guests into Petersfield for classes.

Focus group participants were keen that this research recorded their thanks:

"We would like to thank you for the class." (beginner student)

APPENDICES



○ Appendix A: Focus group moderator guide

Introduction

Welcome, we would like to understand your experience of the English classes, what they have meant to you, what you have learned, and work out together how we could make them better.

- I will record and write down what you say today and use anything you write
- I will write a report about the classes
- I will not use your names in my report
- People will just know what you as a group think about the project
- We will talk about 4 things:
 - How did you feel in the classes?
 - How have these classes helped you in daily life or in looking for a job?
 - What was the best thing about these classes?
 - If we could provide these classes again, is there anything we could do differently?
- Before we start, it is very important that you understand and that you sign to tell me you are happy to take part.
- Remember, you don't have to respond and you can keep quiet or stop at any time. There are no wrong answers – we want to hear from all of you, so please say what you think, even if other people say something different.

Participants complete consent forms

Ground rules: Everyone's opinion is important. One person talk at a time. Phones on silent.

Opening question

When I say 'learning English' what does that mean to you?

Discussion questions

1. How did you feel in the classes?
Word cards as prompts [relaxed, connected, rushed, safe, worried, supported, comfortable, belong, welcomed, happy]. Or write their own word. Why did you choose that word?
2. How have these classes helped you in daily life or in looking for a job?
3. What was the best thing about these classes?
4. If we could provide these classes again, is there anything we could do differently?

Finish

Summarise main messages. Is there anything that's been missed? Thank participants.

Moderator role:

RRN Petersfield ESOL provision evaluation

- Regularly check all are happy continuing
- Prompt deeper responses - 'Can you explain further', 'Can you give an example'
- Avoid interrupting or jumping to fill a gap - silence can help draw out responses
- Keep the focus on the key discussion questions
- Write down main points of discussion, including exact quotes (no name attribution just 'beginner student')

Appendix B: Consent form

Dear ESOL student,

Thank you for helping us understand your experience of the 8-week English programme you have attended by taking part in this focus group.

We will talk about 4 things:

- How did you feel in the classes?
- How have these classes helped you in daily life or in looking for a job?
- What was the best thing about these classes?
- If we could provide these classes again, is there anything we could do differently?

I will use what you tell me to write a report about the programme. I will not use your name and no one will be able to identify you in the report. This research is run by Katherine Lawrence, an experienced evaluator and trustee of the Rural Refugee Network. If you have any questions about this survey, you can contact me at research@ruralrefugeenetwork.org.

.....

Student consent form

I understand the areas to be discussed, that I do not have to take part and how what I say in the focus group will be used. I agree to participate in the focus group.

Name	
Signature	
Date	

Appendix C: Questionnaire

Rural Refugee Network ESOL programme in Petersfield, January - July 2023. Feedback survey

Thank you for helping us understand your experience of the English programme you have attended.

I will use what you tell me to write a report about the programme. I will not use your name and no one will be able to identify you in the report. This survey is run by Katherine Lawrence. I am an experienced evaluator and trustee of the Rural Refugee Network. If you have any questions about this survey, you can contact me at research@ruralrefugeenetwork.org.

If you choose to provide your contact details and subsequently decide that you want to withdraw your responses, you can do so by contacting research@ruralrefugeenetwork.org.

* Indicates required question

1. I have read and understood the above information and agree to participate. *

Yes

2. Are you attending the beginner classes or intermediate class? *

Beginner

Intermediate

3. Why did you need these classes? *(Tick all that apply.)*

RRN Petersfield ESOL provision evaluation

To communicate in everyday life
 To get a job
 To make friends here
 I can't get to other classes

4. This class helped to improve my: *

	Not at all	Not much	Quite a bit	A lot
Reading and writing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Speaking and listening	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Confidence and wellbeing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Feeling of belonging	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Understanding of how to look for a job in the <u>UK</u>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

5. To what extent do you agree with these statements? Skip the final question if you are not looking for work.

	<u>Strongly disagree</u>	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	<u>Strongly agree</u>
I felt <u>welcomed</u>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The teacher listened to <u>me</u>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My English has <u>improved</u>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel more confident when I talk in <u>English</u>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel more confident in everyday <u>tasks</u>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I need more help with my <u>English</u>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel I <u>belong</u>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel more <u>connected</u>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel better prepared to look for work, volunteering or training	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

6. What did the teacher do that helped you to learn well? *
7. What do you feel you need next to help you improve your English? *
8. What aspects of this course were most useful or valuable?
9. Thank you for completing this form. You do not have to give your name or contact details. If you would like to provide your contact details please add your email address here. Withdrawal of anonymous responses will not be possible. Your details will not be retained once the project report is complete and will not be shared with anyone else.