



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

AN EVALUATION OF THE RURAL REFUGEE NETWORK'S ESOL PROVISION FOR UKRAINIAN REFUGEES

(October 2024 to June 2025)



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND HEARTFELT THANKS

We would like to thank the Ukrainian learners who took the time to share their reflections and ideas in this evaluation, and for their dedication and energy through the ESOL programme itself.

We are grateful to the teacher, Hilary Wright, for participating in this research, and for her continued and valued commitment to RRN's ESOL programme.

The project would also like to highlight the contribution of:

- Rural Refugee Network volunteers, trustees and CEO.
- Margo Rashkovska, who supported the learners as a translator teaching assistant throughout the classes, and offered her necessary support for this evaluation.
- Our administrative volunteer Helen Vyner who helped throughout the project.
- The Pallant Centre in Havant for welcoming RRN and the learners during this ESOL programme.
- The funding provided by Havant Borough Council which enabled RRN to undertake this project.
- We are also indebted to the many community members and partners who contributed in diverse ways, enhancing the experience and outcomes for all participants. Their generosity, time, and resourcefulness have been invaluable in supporting both the learners and the broader objectives of the programme.
- Sabina Rashkovska, for her continued dedication to help with the monthly outings.
- Naomi Towns, Community Officer at Havant Borough Council, for attending some of the outings and supporting their organisation
- Portcheter Castle, Staunton Country Park, St Faith's Church, Havant Museum, Citizens 'Advice Bureau, Itchen college and all the other organisations and local institutions who gave such welcome to the learners



CONTENTS

Acknowledgements and heartfelt thanks	2
Introduction.....	4
Outings	4
Methodology and research questions	5
Learner aims and the impact of RRN’s provision for Ukrainian learners.....	6
Language skills	6
Wellbeing, confidence, and community	7
Structure and process.....	10
Conclusion	12
Recommendations	12
Appendix 1: Learner Survey	13



INTRODUCTION

Since 2016, RRN has supported newly arrived refugees as they resettle into local communities through government resettlement schemes. We provide accommodation and essential items, foster community connections and a sense of belonging, and offer English language support through bespoke ESOL courses. We also deliver tailored support to help individuals access education, employment, and training opportunities. For unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people, our Youth Discovery Project NEST focuses on wellbeing, language development, and social connection. Additionally, we work to bring the wider community together and raise awareness to build a more inclusive society. Previous (and continuing) initiatives include a 1:1 Employment and Education Programme and, since Summer 2022, English-language support through bespoke ESOL courses. This report aims to evaluate the impact of the ESOL course provided for Ukrainian refugees from October to June 2025.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 sparked a huge wave of displacement, with 5.6 million people fleeing the country and 3.7 million being displaced internally.¹ As of December 2024, over 250,000 Ukrainian refugees were recorded in the UK, arriving through various governmental visa schemes.² The Rural Refugee Network's bespoke ESOL provision was created in response to the arrival of refugees from Ukraine in summer 2022, using our previous experience to respond to the immediate need of individuals for language learning support. Evaluations of RRN's pilot ESOL programme for Ukrainian refugees in July 2022 found that students experienced improvements across all language skills, a greater sense of community belonging, and a strong desire for further provision. Further provision in Autumn 2023 and Spring 2024, generously funded by Havant Borough Council, saw similar improvements across the learners' confidence, competence, and wellbeing, with a strong desire for future provision. Evaluations of our previous programmes can be found on our website. This provision has continued, and many of its beneficiaries have now undertaken multiple classes with RRN.

Classes were delivered once a week by Hilary Wright, a specialised ESOL teacher who has considerable experience working with refugees, at the Pallant Centre in Havant. The classes benefitted hugely from the presence of Margo, the Ukrainian teaching assistant, who supported Hilary and the learners with translations between Ukrainian and English. The majority of learners are above the age of 51, with one learner between the ages of 30 and 51. Many have taken an ESOL class before, mostly through RRN. All the respondents to this survey are women.

OUTINGS

This provision built on the learners' positive response to regular outings, organised as part of RRN's provision. These outings were aimed to help the learners practice the vocabulary they had specifically learned in the sessions, engage with key aspects of life in the UK in protected environments, and gain confidence in their own abilities. The outings were chosen by the learners in consultation with Nadia Potts, RRN's CEO, and were organised by Havant Borough Council in liaison with Nadia and Sabina. Sabina, a CELTA-certified teacher from Ukraine, had previously supported the group as a Ukrainian teaching assistant. Despite now working full time, she continued to support the group in organising and attending the outings. Naomi Towns, the Community Officer at Havant Borough Council, also attended several of the outings.

¹ <https://www.unrefugees.org.uk/where-help-is-needed/ukraine-situation/>

² <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>



METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This evaluation aims to capture the impact of this ESOL programme on its learners, making specific reference to the learners' own aims and the overall aims of the programme. The report will be used to reflect on this provision and inform future programmes organised and run by RRN. Most students wrote their answers in Ukrainian, which were subsequently translated into English by Margo.

This report will measure the outcomes of the ESOL course across two key areas:

1. Improved confidence and competence with English
2. Improved wellbeing, confidence, and belonging in the class and the community.

We will also consider the efficacy of the design, planning, and delivery of the ESOL provision, asking what worked well and what could be done better in future.

This evaluation will draw from student surveys (Appendix 1), written comments from Sabina on the class outings, and a reflection from Nadia on her insights into the programme. In the survey, students were asked to:

1. Rate on a Likert-like scale the extent to which they agree or disagree with statements about planned outcomes.
2. Comment on the teaching and experience of the classes, including what worked well and how provision could be improved.

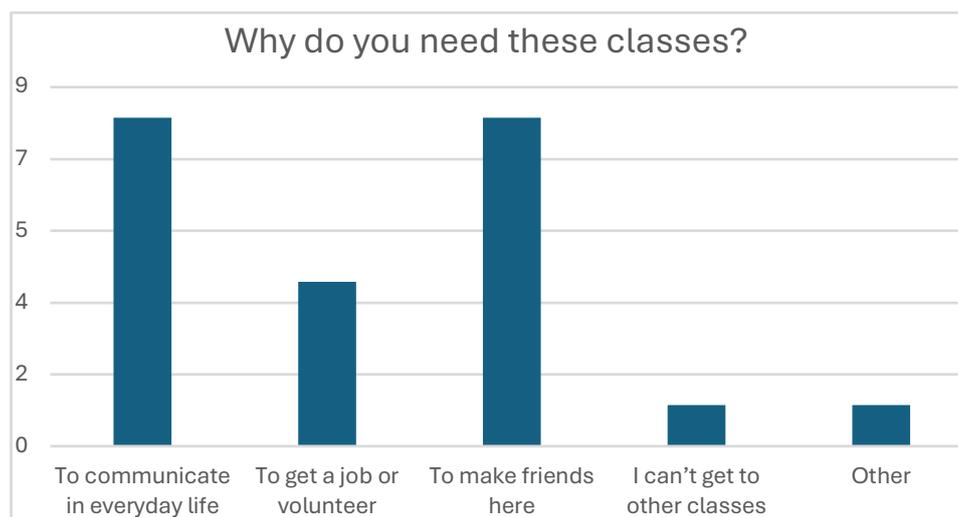
Progress in learning and language skill will therefore be assessed through teacher and learner perceptions. While this prevents evaluation against any objective or formal language competency criteria, this allows better access to the learners' sense of progress and wellbeing, a crucial motivation of RRN's provision. More extensive evaluation is also not suitable for the level and resource of this provision.

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

³ Shuayb, M., Sharp, C., Judkins, M., & Hetherington, M. (2009). Using Appreciative Enquiry in Educational Research: Possibilities and Limitations. National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER). p2.

LEARNER AIMS AND THE IMPACT OF RRN'S PROVISION FOR UKRAINIAN LEARNERS

The learner surveys reveal that the learners' main aims were 'to communicate in everyday life' and 'to make friends here'. Several also noted their aim 'to get a job' or volunteering. Please note that the learners in this cohort are pensioners, some are volunteering in Charity shops. Some learners have mobility and health issues and are unable to work.



LANGUAGE SKILLS

First, this evaluation will consider the impact of the classes on the learners' language skills. All eight respondents agreed strongly that their English had improved. 7/8 reported 'quite a bit' of progress in their understanding, with one respondent reporting 'a lot'. All the learners also agreed (7 strongly) that the outings helped them improve their English. This shows that the outings were a valuable causal mechanism in the learners' improvement in English.

In contrast to previous evaluations, the learners reported less progress in skills, including speaking, writing and reading. The majority reported not much or no progress in speaking and writing, while only a small majority reported 'quite a bit' of progress in reading.⁴ Every session, learners were given the opportunity to read independently and with support to follow guided reading schemes and take books home. This programme followed the previous evaluation when the students requested more conversation and less focus on grammar. The learners

were consulted before this programme, and dialogues reflecting their interests were devised. e.g. 'What's the matter?' a dialogue about feeling unwell, 'At the train station', a role play dialogue about buying a train ticket, and 'Kitchen Conversation', a dialogue about what to cook in the evening. Please see Figure 2 for a detailed breakdown.

⁴ This statistic contains one set of data which may be mistaken. Respondent 2 answered 'not much' or 'not at all' for all statements in Question 8. As their written comments and answers to all other questions were highly complimentary, often in direct contrast to Question 8, these answers can be assumed to reflect a mistake from the respondent, who may have intended to select 'A lot' and 'Quite a bit'. This evaluation preserves the respondent's original answers, but notes that the evaluation may therefore draw more moderate conclusions than the learners intended.



Learners specifically mentioned tenses and speaking practice as areas of language they wished to have more support with. The fact that grammar in general was not mentioned as a specific area of difficulty for the students suggests that the provision successfully implemented the recommendations of previous evaluations to place more focus on grammar. The desire of learners to have opportunities to practice speaking is consistent with previous evaluations.

With reference to Final Report 2024 5.1.1 Speaking and listening. Reflecting on previous evaluations, speaking was an area the learners wished to improve, learners included more practical speaking tasks as something they would like to see more of in future lessons. I was especially keen to plan weekly dialogues that would be used as a reference to use in everyday situations and linked to the monthly outings.

One challenge with the weekly practice dialogues was that the learners would often forget to bring their dialogues with them to the following classes. This meant it was hard to recap and revise these texts.

The overall positive response of the learners to the classes suggests that this data reflects the greater focus of the classes on confidence, community and wellbeing, for example through the outings, rather than on specific language skills. Similarly, the beginner plus status of the learners can be expected to reduce the expressions of rapid progress that were common in RRN's beginner provision. Although it does suggest a valuable opportunity to discuss with the learners which skills they wish to prioritise in future provision, the learners' consistent and enthusiastic praise of the lessons and their teacher, and recognition of the crucial role the lessons play in their experience in the UK, indicates that RRN's provision is still considered high quality and successful by the learners.

WELLBEING, CONFIDENCE, AND COMMUNITY

As in previous evaluations, the learners wrote enthusiastically about the more intangible impact the classes had on them. 7 out of 8 stated that the classes improved their sense of wellbeing a lot. The learners especially noted the importance of the outings to this sense of wellbeing, with one writing, "during the outings we felt happier". This is supported by observations from Nadia and Sabina of the outings and their effect on the students:

"The students left feeling uplifted and appreciative of the opportunity." Nadia, CEO of Rural Refugee Network

"All in all, the students were happy to join the walk, which broadened their minds and strengthened their sense of belonging. Positive atmosphere, incredibly interesting places and nice weather let them feel cheerful and enthusiastic about the next outing in May." – Sabina about the outing to the Heritage Trail

"During the outing the participants were relaxed, engaged, interested and involved. They enjoyed the time spent together in friendly, inspiring and welcoming atmosphere, which definitely impacted their wellbeing and sense of belonging in a positive way and make difference in their lives." Sabina about the outing to Staunton Country Park



7 out of 8 respondents also reported that the classes improved their sense of belonging. All 8 strongly agreed they felt welcomed. One commented specifically on Hilary's teaching, noting that she was "very attentive to any question and did her best to explain the answer", working to create a welcoming atmosphere. One learner mentioned that she joined the class late and found it difficult to catch up with the material but felt very supported by the teachers and the community of the class. Nadia noted that "the group is very cohesive. It has become over time a self-supported group and they are excellent at supporting each other".

As well as among the learners, this feeling of welcome was felt with the local community. All learners agreed strongly that they felt more connected to the local community. The learner surveys suggest this was supported by the outings, especially the Heritage Trail, Christmas baking session, and Portchester Castle. The latter outing "clearly fostered a sense of connection and curiosity [in the learners, who] showed a real interest in British history and often tried to interpret the information on their own before translation was offered". The heritage walk allowed the learners to see local landmarks and places of interest, including St Faith's Church, where the students rested and were able to listen to Margo playing the piano. The outings also supported the learners' belonging in a more tangible sense. A visit to the Citizens' Advice Bureau allowed the learners to ask questions relevant to their lives in Havant Borough and receive advice and support. The learners especially valued advice on accommodation.

This sense of community was also fostered by Hilary's teaching methods and choice of curriculum; one learner commented, "She is not only teach[ing] English, but also tells us about British culture, mentality, cuisine, customs". This inclusion of local customs was also positively received in previous provisions.

The learners also reported significant progress in their confidence in using English. 5 learners said that their confidence improved as a result of the classes and all agreed that they felt more confident specifically to speak in English. One learner commented,

"I have difficulties remembering new words so these classes help me become more relaxed and improve my speaking skill not being afraid to make mistakes"

All also agreed that they feel more confident in everyday tasks following the classes. The outings seem to be crucial in this result, providing opportunities to engage with English speakers in safe, real life situations such as on the train, at the bus station, in a church, or in a museum. These contexts provided new vocabulary and new individuals to practice with. All learners strongly agreed that they felt more confident following the outings, supporting this causal relationship.

One learner noted that to "not be afraid of communicating with native speakers" is what she needs next to improve, suggesting this element of the course can be developed further in future provision.

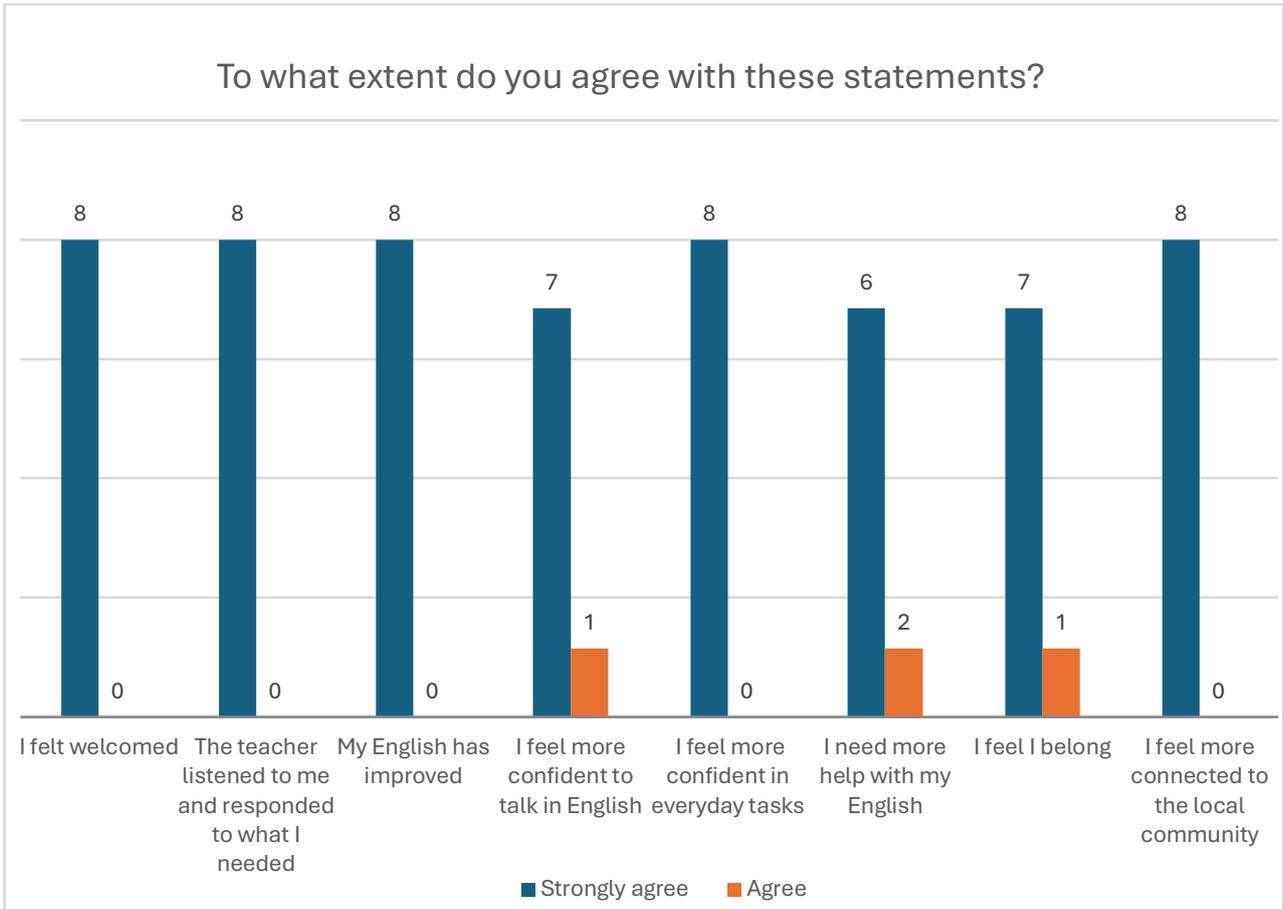


Figure 1

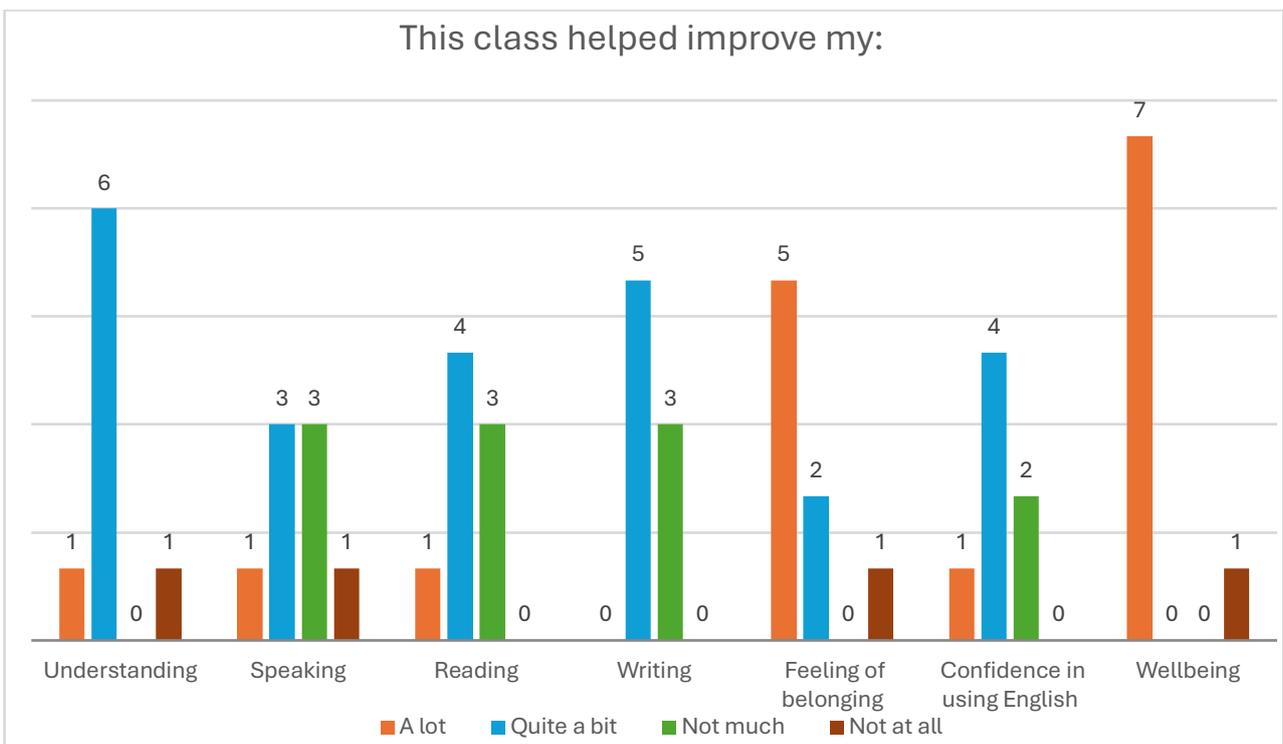


Figure 2



STRUCTURE AND PROCESS

This evaluation will also consider the logistics, set up, and delivery of this ESOL programme. This reflection will consider how the aims of the class were delivered and what lessons this provision can provide for future RRN ESOL programmes.

Based on the recommendations of previous evaluations, a translator teaching assistant was again made available to the learners to great effect. Several students mentioned the importance of Margo's work in the programme and the positive effect she had on its impact. Many of the learners also mentioned Hilary's skill as a teacher. All strongly agreed that she listened to them and responded to what they needed, and many commented on the creative and enthusiastic methods she used to deliver the lessons. This included books, puzzles, drawings, facial expressions, singing, and physical acrobatics ("Hilary stood up on a chair in order to help me with learning difficult words"). One respondent stated "I like Hilary's method of teaching: everything is understandable and accessible" while another summed up the general mood of the class: "We love our teacher".

The learners also commented on the materials Hilary made available to the class, most importantly games such as Shop. Learners also praised the textbook and access to children's books in English, ideas built upon from the recommendations of future provision.

On recommendations from previous evaluations and responses, the process of the outings was deepened to ensure maximum impact for the learners. Before each outing, Hilary and Margo practiced key vocabulary to help the group. This included specific dialogues, which the students noted they found really useful in everyday life. Almost every respondent to the survey mentioned these dialogues as an especially valuable tool for feeling a sense of progress in their confidence and their understanding of English in everyday situations. The outings in general were remarked to "create [a] friendly atmosphere and give the opportunity to practice the language", especially in unique contexts outside the classroom. Many learners also mentioned Sabina's presence at the outing as being a very important factor in their success.

All learners requested further classes, with some expressing a desire for classes twice a week or for longer duration. One learner mentioned she was prevented from attending the class sometimes because of work, reflecting the necessity of balancing frequency with the learners' other commitments. The participants also expressed their common hope and belief for the outings in the future.

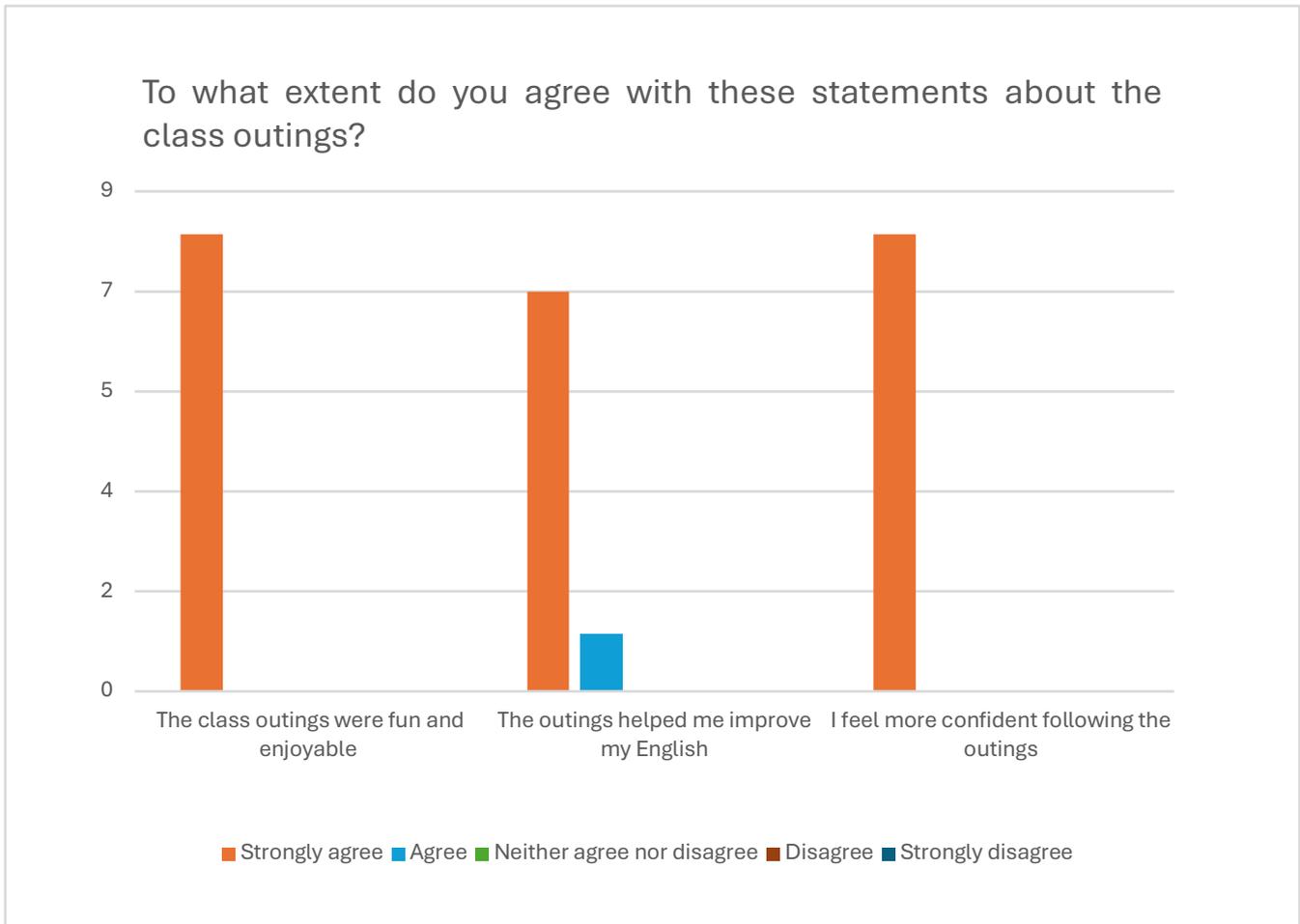


Figure 3



CONCLUSION

Overall, this evaluation finds that RRN's ESOL provision has had an overwhelmingly positive impact on the learners. Although progress on specific language skills was reported to be more moderate than in previous years, the learners all reported consistent improvement in their understanding and confidence. Their feelings of wellbeing, belonging and community were also massively impacted, consistent with previous evaluations. An important factor in this success was the outings, which were developed from the previous year's success with the addition of bespoke dialogues to support the learners' experience. The learners also consistently and enthusiastically praised Hilary, Sabina, and Margo, whose presence improved the learners' experience tangibly.

The greater 'flexibility' that this programme offered may have led to the learners feeling that they couldn't measure progression in the 'following a text book' way where it is easier to revise and use the text book to 'see how far they have come'. In a text book it is easier for learners to see the specific grammar focus. If the lesson objectives have been to gain more confidence speaking this is harder for individuals to acknowledge overall progress.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this evaluation suggest the following recommendations for future RRN provision:

- The provision should continue from September for at least a weekly session of 2 hours. Learners have demonstrated that they need to continue their journey of learning English.
- Further provision should include a translator teaching assistant.
- As before, the learners should continue to be involved with planning the next course and which skills they wish to focus on.
- More opportunities should be sought to speak with native speakers.
- Local events should continue to be communicated to the learners, so they have further opportunities to practice their language in real life settings.



APPENDIX 1: LEARNER SURVEY

RRN ESOL programme, Ukrainian feedback survey | Summer 2025

Thank you for helping us understand your experience of the English programme you have attended. We will use what you tell us to write a report about the programme. Your name will not be used and no one will be able to identify you in the report. This survey 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 research@ruralrefugeenetwork.org. If you choose to provide your contact details and subsequently decide that you want to withdraw your responses, you may do so by contacting research@ruralrefugeenetwork.org

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

YES

2. What is your age group?

18-30	
31-50	
51+	

3. What is your gender?

4. When did you join the class?

5. Have you attended an ESOL class before?

YES

NO

6. Why did you need these classes (select all that apply)

To communicate in everyday life	
To get a job	
To make friends here	
I can't get to other classes	
Other (please explain below)	

Other: _____



7. Was there anything about how we organised the classes that made it easy or difficult for you to attend the class?

8. This class helped improve my:

Please mark the box that applies in each row.

	<i>Not at all</i>	<i>Not much</i>	<i>Quite a bit</i>	<i>A lot</i>
Understanding				
Speaking				
Reading				
Writing				
Feeling of belonging				
Confidence in using English				
Wellbeing				



9. To what extent do you agree with these statements?

Please mark the box that applies in each row.

	<i>Strongly agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neither agree nor disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly disagree</i>
I felt welcomed					
The teacher listened to me and responded to what I needed					
My English has improved					
I feel more confident to talk in English					
I feel more confident in everyday tasks					
I need more help with my English					
I feel I belong					
I feel more connected to the local community					

10. What did the teacher do that helped you learn well? Can you give examples?



11. To what extent do you agree with these statements about the class outings?

	<i>Strongly agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neither agree nor disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly disagree</i>
The class outings were fun and enjoyable					
The outings helped me improve my English ability					
I feel more confident following the outings					

12. Do you have any other feedback about the outings?

13. What do you feel you need to do next to help you improve your English?



14. What aspects of the course were most useful and valuable to you? It will help us if you explain why and give examples

15. What activities helped you learn best?

16. What about the classes could be changed to improve your experience of the course?

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