



# Language Class

## What we discovered – Open Door Church tell their story

*“I can now be a mother to my children. We moved here because of difficulties in my home country but I could not speak English. I could not work and I could not provide for my beautiful children. But because of the Open Door Church Sunbury, I am now able to work and help my kids.”*

*Thandar San, Myanmar*

Open Door Church Sunbury has been running ESOL classes since 2012. This way of outreaching and serving the community sprang out of the realisation there was a growing number of foreign nationals in our area, which at first glance was not particularly ethnically diverse, who were isolated because there were not large groups of their ethnicity gathering in any other way in our area. We saw them gathering at school gates but not being spoken to. We saw them go to the shops but not communicate with the others milling around in Tesco's. We began to see that these were potential students who needed to know Jesus. Who needed a family; and the church is the best family they could meet because the Father is VERY good! Who were the nations in our Jerusalem (Acts 1:8). The Lord had brought the nations to us! What should we do? We could do what we all can do – learn the English language.

We teach ESOL every week in term time. We have a Beginner and Intermediate level class serving 20 students a week. Some of these are the most weak and vulnerable in our community; those isolated by language and culture – stay at home mothers (often whose husbands learn English at work), aux pairs, grandparents over to help their children and their partners who both need to work. We have students from Myanmar (Burma), Ethiopia, Egypt, India, Morocco, Japan, China, Italy, Romania, Latvia, Nigeria, Peru, Russia, Hungary and Pakistan. Our classes are taught by qualified teachers who teach the ESOL Core Curriculum but with a wide range of teaching methods so that students can learn skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening and learn about living in the UK in a way that serves them and helps their confidence and skills.

Classes are FREE!! Why free? Because the majority of the people involved are poor and could not afford classes. However we encourage cultural food to be brought and shared at break time (a break time where only English is to be spoken). Many have come to these classes have made friends, some have gone on to find work, some have taken their children to our church youth groups, older people's groups and Kidz Klub and some have become part of our church and been saved! Now that is reason enough to reach the nations in your Jerusalem.

Anyone can start a 'conversation class' if they can speak English. Just gather foreign nationals to chat but most churches could teach ESOL with only a few hours prep. We eventually got qualified at ODILS (Open Doors International Language School) in Plymouth – a Christian Teacher Training School (see <http://odils.com>) who offer a CERT TESOL qualification but teach as a Christian School. Do not



disqualify yourself; anyone with a reasonable grasp of English can teach. Let local schools, SUREstart Centres, Local Government, Doctors Surgeries, Community Centres and other churches know what you are wanting to do and they will feed you students. And watch your church become more ethnically diverse....."One new humanity in Christ!"(Eph 2:15)

At present we do not offer qualifications because we cannot afford the process. We are talking to a local college about how we can grow the work and looking for external funding.

Churches have a unique opportunity to reach Muslims with the gospel through ESOL; how? Many Muslims would not go to a college to learn ESOL because of the morality a college engenders. However in a church based ESOL class they find a high morality, family friendly contexts that affirm them without proselytising. Get them to belong....let Jesus do the rest. Honour their cultures and religions and do not be afraid to talk about yours nor hear about theirs. Churches can reach 'hard to reach groups' like no other group in our society and create a context for diversity; social cohesion and evangelism!

Ex Teachers are great!

Older people can be involved; usually their generation had better grammar and spelling and they are loved as older generations respected and are grandparents for those who have none!