

English at Home Lottery Report October 2019- October 2020

“My teacher is like an angel. She is my best friend in the UK” Meryam, Iran.

An Introduction to English at Home

We are very pleased to be able to share with you this report about the impact of LASSN’s English at Home project between 1st November 2019 and 31st October 2020. Obviously with the global pandemic this has been a year like no other, and the provision we deliver has had to adapt to meet the changing needs of our clients and to work in line with the Government guidelines for safe working. This report aims to inform you of the impact of the service before and during the pandemic, as well as looking to the future and how the project aims to evolve to be as effective as possible. Throughout the report, all names of clients are changed for confidentiality.

During the reporting period we supported 109 matches of a LASSN volunteer with a refugee or asylum seeker. However, we only managed to carry out reviews on 42 of those matches. This is because in order to give an idea of how students have progressed and been supported, we usually collect most of our data over the summer. This is when less training is occurring and learners have been offered places at college or in classes. Due to the pandemic it was not possible to carry out the majority of these reviews and report in the usual manner. Instead, we wanted to share some of the highlights from those relationships and what was happening before the pandemic.



Every single relationship created through English at Home is different.

We make sure that they are all learner-led focusing on what the learner wants and needs. Ali loves the outdoors and wanted to see more of the UK, so he travelled to Pen – Y- Gent with his teacher for a lesson. This helped him to learn numerous vocabulary about what they saw and the weather, as well as creating memories for life. Ali said it was an experience he would never forget.



Through connections with Leeds Playhouse as a Theatre of Sanctaury, we were gifted free tickets to see *The Wizard of Oz* and also *Oliver Twist*. One of our learner's studied Theatre at University in Iran and was overjoyed to see their first production since being in the UK. "It was magical to see a show here. It was so beautiful, I loved it."



We were gifted tickets to a Leeds Rhinos match as well as entry into the Hospitality Suite before one of the matches, made even better by Leeds winning! It was a fabulous experience with it being the first trip to a sports stadium in the UK for nearly everyone attending. One of the boys who came loves playing rugby but his family have never been able to afford to go to a game. He sat in awe during the match and commented that seeing a professional match had inspired him about how he wants to play.



Last year volunteers requested the opportunity to know more about the faith of the person they were supporting so we had a trip to Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha in South Leeds which was a great opportunity to learn and ask many questions about the Sikh faith.

Making sure our volunteers are as equipped as possible to do be most effective in teaching learners is really important to us. For this reason before March we held bi-monthly skill shares where volunteers could share ideas and resources. Over the pandemic these became weekly to help volunteers adapt to the new challenges.

A volunteer who is a language specialist led sessions on teaching English to beginners. Later in the year she also ran 2 sessions focused on Grammar and how to teach certain concepts.



Another way we have equipped teachers is through the [LASSN website](#). Clive and Julie, two of our volunteers, worked diligently to find, critique and tag many resources to make finding them far easier for our tutors. In October we ran a focus group to assess the website and were able to tweak it through the suggestions of our volunteers.



We had begun to focus time and energy in to creating different conversation groups in Leeds since the last report. One group was created in LS11 and one in LS8 and they were designed to help people get to socialise and practise English while getting to know their local area.

Before the pandemic, we had researched and planned a group called 'Explorers' to meet in various locations across Leeds to help people get to know the city and practise English. We were also planning to run a group in a café with a play zone in an area where there are numerous refugee and asylum seeking women with toddlers. Both of these groups have been postponed for the moment, but we would love to develop them when it is possible.

The arrival of Covid- Meeting Immediate needs

“Covid-19 has been a major 'disruptor' of service provision across the sector. However, LASSN has exemplified resilience by adapting its service provision and responding adequately to the needs of service users especially those significantly impacted by the pandemic. LASSN continues to work effectively in collaboration with partner organisations to share learning and good practice to ensure best quality provision.” **Fidelis Chebe, Operations and Development Manger, RETAS**

Food Provision

From the end of March, the whole way in which we worked had to change, but we have sought to retain the values of LASSN at the centre of everything; making sure we support, empower and integrate refugees and asylum seekers through our work. The pandemic also had an effect on our staff, with Riley having to be put on furlough between April and September due to child care needs.

The pandemic has affected the whole nation, but unfortunately it is those in the most difficult circumstances who are hit the hardest in such times. At the beginning of the pandemic, our role became far more holistic in making sure that the people supported through LASSN were coping ok and receiving food and other necessities. We spoke with all clients to make sure they had the support needed, and made weekly referrals for families to receive food parcels from the Leeds Welfare Support Scheme, with this being around 40 families between March and May. However, as the situation evolved and funding restrictions were placed on the Council's response, we were limited in the number of food parcels that families could receive and had to seek other organisations able to help.

Through conversations with many other organisations, such as Leeds Food Aid Network, and by finding what other support was available, we were able to map the food provision in Leeds for our clients. This involved seeing where people lived, their specific needs, and then looking at the criteria to access different services and seeing which was closest and most accessible. For every person in need of a food parcel, we made sure they were provided with parcels that we referred them for until August and after that we put them in contact with the most appropriate organisation distributing food to empower them to make their own referrals. This has been more sustainable, with many of the families still receiving support for food from organisations such as The Hamara Centre, Give a Gift, PAFRAS, Neruka's Kitchen and Slung Low.

Technology and Data

Another massive need of the clients we support is technology and data. Isolated and unable to speak with loved ones at such a worrying time we have tried to connect all clients who have needed it. This meant LASSN provided 90 smart phones, 30 dongles to people and 3 months data to over 100 households needing to connect. For English at Home, since April we offered £5 a month top up so people could continue lessons via video call as well as

staying in contact with friends and family. Since May we made this £10 a month and will be able to give £20 for December.

Masks



When it became a requirement for people to wear face masks in shops and other areas, we sent a number of face masks to every client to make sure they had one if needed. We also included a note explaining the new guidance in learner's home languages as well as instructions on how to create your own mask.

We also felt that it was important to have key information to hand for learners produced in their home languages so they could be informed about how to remain safe and up-to-date with the new Government guidance. Due to this we created a [Home Languages](#) section on the website that we were able to direct learners to.

Emotional Support

The pandemic has had a massive impact on people's mental health. Most of the learners on the English at Home project were already isolated and the closing of face-to-face services has taken its toll. By checking in with learners far more frequently than usual we were able to ensure that people were supported and managed to provide extra support where needed. This has included making referrals to Touchstone, giving numbers to clients for Dial House and The Samaritans when needed and also speaking with Solace about shared clients for whom we were concerned.

Having a volunteer teacher able to contact them once a week has meant that people have not felt as isolated and many teachers have provided additional well-being support as other services have been reduced or unable to offer the previous levels of support. This has included volunteers delivering shopping when people were self-isolating, offering emotional support when loved ones passed away and helping take children out to the park (when this was possible) as the family had not left the flat for months due to the mother's fear of being out by herself.

During this period, two of the women we support have also given birth so we have been able to make sure they received information about the visit to the hospital with Covid

restrictions as well as making and delivering referrals of items needed from Leeds Baby Bank for the new child.

Due to these extra responsibilities on our volunteers we have run a safeguarding session specific to lockdown on 4 occasions, offering a place to anyone interested. This allowed us to discuss how to keep the learner and also volunteers safe on an emotional level in a stressful time for all.

Supporting the Volunteers/Seeing the positives

As mentioned, the role for which volunteers applied and trained compared to what they are now doing is substantially different. At the beginning of lockdown we spoke with all volunteers who were currently teaching to inform them that lessons would only be possible remotely for the foreseeable future. We had long discussions with each person about how they were coping with the changes and whether they felt that it was still possible to continue volunteering remotely. At this stage and also throughout the rest of the year, a small number of volunteers said that they did not feel that they wished to continue volunteering until it was possible to meet their learner face-to-face again. For some this was due to issues with technology while others it was a change in their personal circumstances and sometimes the difficulty of the pandemic on their mental health.

However, the vast majority of teachers and learners were happy to continue in some form and it has been great to see the creativity in how they have remained in contact, with people seeing the positives in difficult times. One particular barrier which has been removed over this time has been the geographical constraints. Due to this one of our teachers was able to attend training session while in Singapore! Another teacher has left Leeds but is continuing to teach remotely from London, while another teacher has moved back to China but maintained the relationship.

For some learners, the pandemic has removed the barrier of concentration and having time for lessons. Previously, a learner would be visited for an hour a week for lessons, whereas there is now more flexibility for lessons to be two half-hour sessions or even shorter, with the teacher setting tasks to do at a time suitable for the learner. This has proved very helpful for learners unable to concentrate for longer periods of time due to children or mental health issues and for some volunteers it has also been more manageable than teaching for an hour at a time.

For some volunteers, it has also been an excellent help for their own mental health. Being in such a strange time many volunteers have remarked that it has given them something to focus on.

"I never thought volunteering would have such a large impact on my life. I have anxiety and depression and I was new to Leeds when I first started, so I knew I would have to push myself out of my shell, to meet new people and gain more self-confidence. Whilst volunteering with LASSN I have felt thoroughly supported every step of the way, from expenses to training, the

staff at LASSN are all fantastic. I thoroughly recommend LASSN to EVERYONE!" **Emily, EaH Volunteer**

Training

As the role of volunteering as an English tutor with us has adapted, we have sought to make sure that volunteers have been supported as best possible to continue their role. From the beginning of April we began weekly sessions for volunteers to come and discuss how they were coping emotionally with all of the change as well as an opportunity to come and discuss resources they had used for teaching remotely. In these sessions the Volunteers Managers alongside Daniela from MDA College also shared their expertise and resources. These sessions were complemented by the LASSN team as a whole running a weekly drop-in for volunteers to receive support and discuss any issues they were facing over a very stressful period.

Over this time we also ran more formal online training for volunteers about how to safeguard successfully as well as giving teaching tips and resources for sessions online. As well as these we have run training sessions on teaching Grammar with volunteers able to bring questions and learn about how to improve their teaching on a variety of subjects.



To help support volunteers in their teaching we invested a lot of energy into making the LASSN website very easy to use and full of great ideas for teaching online. Part of this was creating a section called '[Teaching Remotely](#)'. To this was added [ideas and activities](#) that volunteers can use straight away to inspire them for their lessons.

Many of the teachers before the pandemic would use graded ESOL readers from the LASSN library. To make these readers available for all, we spoke with the publisher to gain permission and then one of our volunteers recorded the narrative alongside the pictures so they could be sent to learners. These are on our [Read Along](#) section of the websites.

We have also pulled together websites with very useful activities and directed teachers too these. You can see the full range of resources we have signposted [here](#).

As there is a lot of information and detail to consider when beginning teaching online, we also created an Online Teaching Pack which we have sent to all teachers and share when they begin with a learner.

Getting Creative

While teaching online has certainly been difficult and provided challenges, volunteers have managed to get very creative. In one instance, the learner was struggling with technology, so his teacher sent a learning pack in the post that he had created. The learner would then complete the activities and they would discuss the answers on the phone. The learner lived in shared accommodation, and when lockdown was eased and his teacher visited, it transpired that the learner had been sharing the resources with the security guard and they had been practising together!

Others have taken the opportunity to practise baking together. Najiba told her teacher that her children wanted to try English cakes, so her teacher sent a recipe and the ingredients needed. When they had their lesson, it focused on instructional language and they completed the recipe. As homework she asked the children to try the cake and say what they thought!

As a way of building positivity, Mark (one of our teachers) asked Rashid, his learner, to find 3 objects that he was happy to have during lockdown. They then played a game to discover what the objects were. Once revealed, Rashid had to state why he was thankful to have them over lockdown and how they had improved his life.

These are just a few of the ideas. Many teachers have made use of quizzes, images, videos, role plays, podcasts and much more to continue the learning and build the relationship. Richard, one of the teachers, recently stated, "I actually prefer teaching online. While you miss seeing the person face to face, technology has made the lessons more productive with a screen to share resources on."

Keeping Connected

LASSN have also been creative in keeping people connected through a variety of means. The Meet and Connect groups resumed online to help people continue to practise English and receive support. There were a few weeks over the summer when this was possible in person before having to return online. These have grown and also allowed us to meet other people in need of English at Home teachers.

We have tried to encourage learners to pursue passions, and have continued sign posting learners to a variety of groups and events. One of these was the Musicultural group, who learn English through music. We have made excellent links with the leaders of the group and encouraged a number of learners to join their online sessions.

Another link we have developed this year is with East Street Arts. They ran a Gift Exchange in Mabgate, Burmantofts and Lincoln Green where members of the local community we sent art materials to create a gift for someone else who lived nearby. We encouraged LASSN learners in this area to get involved and they all remarked that it made them feel more connected to the local community. East Street Arts are also running a local Zine, with residents contributing. One of the women we support from Somalia is writing a recipe for the next edition! Another LASSN client will also be involved with interpreting the Zine into Kurdish Sorani. One of our learners is an artist from Iran and has been volunteering with them and collaborating with other artists. We are currently discussing with them if it would be possible for him to become a trustee on their board.

One of our learners has been contributing to a nationwide research project called [COVID Realities](#). This project aims to capture learning from parents and carers on low incomes during the pandemic; to better understand the challenges that people face and ultimately to encourage policy makers to make better decisions. Our learner has been contributing regularly to blogs and zoom discussions – things that she would not have had the confidence to do a few months ago! This year we have been very aware of learners being at home often with numerous children and few resources or activities. On top of this, so many people connected with LASSN have done so many amazing things this year we have wanted to be able to say thank you in a unique way. The combination of these factors led us to run a ‘thank you’ card competition. We sent learners with children a resource pack of materials and asked them to design a thank you card as part of a competition. Everyone was thanked for their entries and the top 5 places received prizes as well as having their cards created in to physical cards shared to everyone LASSN needs to thank.

We have also remained connected with other organisations in Leeds, with a highlight of this collaboration being seen in the organisation of Leeds Refugee Week. This year was certainly unique as all events were online ranging from art exhibitions to theatre and podcasts. In lieu of being able to run the Football World Cup, we opted to run a football quiz with PATH Yorkshire and the Refugee Council instead, attracting around 40 refugees and volunteers. LASSN also ran a online discussion about the Channel 4 programme ‘Home’, discussing if what was portrayed in the show was true of the experiences of LASSN guests and volunteers in Grace Hosting.

The Need Remains

While the majority of classes are currently online from people’s homes, the need remains for the English at Home project. There are many refugees and asylum seekers in Leeds unable to access classes due to issues with technology and a lack of data, which we have been working to remedy. Also, even if it was possible to attend online classes, for many of

our learners it is still not possible. This could be for a number of reasons, include the timing of classes not being tailored around child care as English at Home is. Also, many learners with us suffer with depression or anxiety, making it difficult to focus for large amounts of time, so having a teacher who understands this and can work in a way that benefits them is essential. The lessons provided by our teachers are also completely tailored to the learner's needs, meaning lessons focus on what is essential for them to complete tasks of significance.

The difference made

During a difficult year, we wanted to share a few stories reflecting the amazing achievements of our English at Home learners.

At his initial match meeting nearly 8 months ago, Prakash very clearly knew that he wanted to get to Building College and become a carpenter. This was his number one priority. Since then many obstacles have been in his way. He didn't have the required English to attend College, he has difficulties with both physical and mental health and then Covid struck meaning College was closed. However, last week was his first day at College! He has studied extremely hard to improve his English through online lessons with his teacher and now is taking the next step to becoming a carpenter and fulfilling his ambitions. In a letter he wrote to us, he said "After the first day at College finished I crossed the road to look at the building to see what I had dreamed of for so long. Leeds is now a much more beautiful place to me."

It is always a pleasure to receive emails from different companies requesting references for our volunteers who have secured a job. I was delighted though in September to receive a reference request for one of our learners from the NHS for a role as a childcare worker. Zainab had a teacher with us for a few years as she was unable to get to college due to child care. Over that time she worked extremely hard and was always looking for ways to improve her English and give back to the community. This led her to volunteer at her daughter's school when possible. Last year she finished with her English at Home teacher as she could now attend classes, so it was a delight to get the request for a reference having not seen her for a number of months. I spoke with her and she was so happy to be starting work.

Below are a few questions we asked one of our learners for the LASSN Annual Review.

Why did you want a teacher?

I had a lot of difficulties in understanding and speaking English. It was a huge trouble to make appointments for GP and even explaining symptoms was impossible and an interpreter was not always available. I couldn't ask bus driver the prices of tickets while travelling on public transport. Going for shopping and grocery was so frustrating too.

I wanted a Teacher to learn English so I can make my life easier.

How has having a teacher helped?

It has made a massive difference in my life I can't even explain my feelings how confident and happy I feel when I can easily travel and I can buy bus tickets myself.

I can make my doctor's appointments without any hesitations and shopping has made so much easier as I can ask prices of the things that I want to buy. I used to have an interpreter to help me but now I don't need one!

I have not enough words to show my appreciation and gratitude for my teacher. The techniques she used to teach me were so friendly and useful that I started learning without any problems.

I have learnt a lot from her although she was a lot younger than me still she treated me with so much respect. Because of her motivation I always finished my homework and I was eagerly waiting for Thursday(my lessons day)so I can meet my teacher and learn.

I thank my teacher and LASSN who have made a great positive difference in my life.

Moving forward

This year we carried out a project evaluation, which, while coming at a very strange time, has helped to give us focus for the future. One aspect of this evaluation was a focus group of clients to find out what is working well and what needs adapting. We selected 6 different learners based on a variety of factors, such as language, ability and how long they have had a teacher to try and give a more rounded picture of the service. The session was then facilitated by an Arabic speaking female who is highly skilled in facilitating groups. We varied the responses to give both quantitative and qualitative data. The key findings were that 100% of the participants felt the service was what they had expected and all were happy with their teachers. However, 100% also preferred lessons face-to-face much more than lessons online as it "is more comfortable in person" and "more lively and fun" when they meet. It also reiterated the fact that a lack of data was an issue with online lessons (50%) and that using technology also was (50%).

We were able to use the feedback to inform training by sharing learners' thoughts about what makes a good teacher and also good lessons, as well as tips for the first sessions online and how to make it as relaxed an experience as possible. The feedback in the session also helped shape what we tell learners before they meet their teacher, such as "tell your teacher exactly what you want so they can help you" and the desire for the teacher to share more about themselves such as likes and dislikes.

Over this period we also carried out the LASSN Volunteer's Survey, having extended questions for those volunteers on English at Home. Of the 109 volunteers to respond, 97% felt that the induction training was just right. In terms of support given by Volunteers Managers, 98% felt it just right. We were also very pleased to see that 98% of volunteers felt that the English Teaching Resources were just right, over 30% more than a few years ago

showing the impact the new style of the website and the added features such as resources for teaching online have had.

With regard to volunteering, since the pandemic 60% of volunteers say it is harder than it used to be, and the same amount saying reliance on technology is a major factor in this. However, only 4% felt that when their current match ends they would want to finish volunteering with LASSN.

Taking the comments from learners and volunteers into consideration, it is clear to see that moving to technology has been difficult. However, this looks to be a necessity in the current climate and for the foreseeable future. One way of tackling this that we are considering is partnering with another organisation to offer greater IT support, and investing more in technology for people LASSN support. This will make it easier for learners to connect and also learn to use the technology so that lessons and communications with their teacher become more straight forward. Along with this, we will also continue to offer data every month to learners to remove the barrier of the cost of data.

With regard to moving forward with matches, at the start of October we began carrying out the induction training online. This involved making many adaptations to the previous training to make it as accessible via Zoom as possible. Some of this has involved sending materials for sessions and also extra one to one discussions over the phone between training sessions to allow us to get to know volunteers better before matching them with a learner. Once all of the induction training is finished we will evaluate it in and continue to use online training in January for the next round of volunteers.

As we began training again we have been able to open to new referrals. Within 3 weeks of opening the referral system we had 22 new referrals so will be looking at matching them remotely as soon as possible with volunteers once they have completed the training.

With lessons being online and learners having far more limited opportunities in the week to practise English, there has been a growing demand for extra work between lessons. This has led to us adapting training to spend more time looking at resources and considering work which can be set between lessons. Moving forward, we aim to continue adding to the online resources section of the LASSN website to make it as useful as possible.

We will continue to support volunteers through monthly skill-shares to help provide ideas and resources on a range of issues. Also, we are currently creating a defined volunteering role for a ESOL teacher to provide 4 sessions throughout the year on different teaching topics. In addition, we are investigating being able to create a number of modules for volunteers to complete on teaching via Google Classrooms, which will enable them to improve their teaching skills to help them in their role with LASSN as well as in current/future careers. This will mean we can improve the standard of the lessons our volunteers provide.

As Government regulations and restrictions change, we aim to look at offering a hybrid model of teaching English in the future. As noted, most learners and teachers would prefer to meet face-to-face when that becomes feasible. However, for some learners and teachers

this may not be possible in the near future, if at all. Continuing to use technology allows us to engage with learners and volunteers in this situation and also helps us involve people it might not have been possible to reach before. Also it gives an option of continuing lessons over school holidays remotely for some learners who could only do a short session due to children at home or for learners who do not feel up to a visitor but who might be able to do a short remote lesson. We hope to be able to use what we have learned over this period and use the benefits to improve the service we can offer.

"In the past few years, I have had conversations with David Skivington of LASSN, when we have had clients in common and it was helpful to compare notes and pass on information in the best interests of these clients. Also, our combined efforts seem able to bring about change which would otherwise be highly unlikely. Our recent attempts to have a vulnerable married couple, who are at risk, rehoused by the Home Office is an example of this. It seems that our individual attempts were just ignored, but when we both put on pressure at the same time and reminded them of their responsibilities, something finally happened. This couple are still to be rehoused but this now seems to be about to happen."

Nick Edwards, Pain and Trauma Therapist, Solace

"Many of the clients I support at PAFRAS are keen to learn English, they are aware that a lack of language can prevent them fully engaging in the community they want to be part of. The recent referrals I have made for my clients to English at Home are for many and varied reasons, some cannot access college as classes are full and there are long waiting lists, for others it's family commitments, for some health difficulties and others, a fear of the unknown and a need to take things slowly and carefully. Limited access to technology, Wi-Fi and data creates a situation where many of our clients miss out on online learning opportunities and some social activities too. This has been hugely exacerbated during Covid-19 restrictions where most of life moved onto Zoom! Our clients are now more ready than ever and so desperate to get into a routine of learning and to have structure to their day, English at home for some is such a brilliant and accessible way to give people the one to one support they need to get them started!" **Sharon Browne, Mental Health Support Worker, PAFRAS**

"My teacher is friendly and helpful. She is like a member of the family" **Khadija, Syria**