

Learn English Holiday Program

April 2019

Report by Margaret Norris

This was the 7th course we have run totally ourselves and we believe that it was again a most successful week. The report highlights the numbers and range of different groups in our Sunshine Coast community who have been involved.

We had 26 participants from 5 different cultural/national backgrounds and they were hosted by 13 families on the coast. All participants, except one student from St James College, were referred by MDA and matching people with homes was done by Kayla Szumer. There were two children in the group this time.

Matthew Flinders Anglican College hosted the classes and we are particularly thankful for their generosity in opening up their school. The Rev Lizzie Gaitskell was vital in smoothing our use of the school's facilities, as well as recruiting a great crew of students to assist in classes.

Our teaching program was organised by Lesley Willcoxson, Margaret Norris, Ana Perez and Margaret Cameron. Over the week we had sessions led by other people, specifically Jo Loth (who with her USC drama students helped us explore Australian cultural behaviour), Chris Williams and Jan Kent (who involved us in Indigenous music and painting), Dr Ziena Al-Obaidi (who discussed adaptation to a new culture) and Kate Davies (who worked with individual students on their study and work pathways to the future). Experience is reinforcing for us that - beyond these few valued collaborators - we do not necessarily need many guest presenters or other experts to teach our classes because over the week we develop relationships with our students and these probably have a bigger impact than expert input on the quality of the learning outcomes.

On Thursday we went to the beach for the morning (the Spit at Mooloolaba), had a fish and chip lunch and then transferred to Wildlife HQ for the afternoon, where Kristi Nageli talked about and let us touch a snake, a lizard and a koala. Fisheries on the Spit gave us a great deal, and Wildlife HQ also give us a reduced entrance fee. As we run on a very small budget the support of these local businesses is most appreciated.

Every day our morning tea was organised by ladies from St Mark's, with extra fill ins from Buddies. The dinner on Wednesday night was also hosted by St Mark's, in Buderim. The relationship with the Church is most important as more locals get the opportunity to interact with our visitors. A first was the attendance of Cr Jenny Mackay, of Sunshine Coast Council and it was a wonderful night with the hall bursting at the seams. As our usual professional DJ was not available, Thorsten Kels

stepped in at the last minute to act as DJ, and included in the musical repertoire our guests' collections of music from their own countries.

Transport over the week for the group as a whole is provided by St John's College who lend us their bus and their school driver to bring our visitors from Brisbane and back again on Friday, and also to transfer the group from the beach to the zoo. Access to this bus enables us to have much more flexibility in what we do and eases transport issues. A team of other volunteer drivers assist host families each day to bring people to classes.

Our teaching program attempts to be responsive to the needs and language levels of our students. This is a significant challenge because we never know the specific needs and levels until we meet our group. A particular way we respond to our students is having a large number of volunteer tutors in the classroom so that at times each participant has one on one assistance. This enables people to be helped precisely as needed. This time we had 30 classroom volunteers, including 11 students from Matthew Flinders Anglican College.

A particular theme running through our activities is understanding cultural differences. We aim to help our participants both develop their English language skills and feel more comfortable with their new lives in Australia.

We hold a "graduation" on Friday afternoon and give each participant a booklet of memory photos.

We do a survey of our participants at the end of each course and several of our activities have been developed in response to feedback. Likewise, classroom volunteers, teachers in the program, and host families are all asked for feedback, and this feedback guides our subsequent programs.

Our costs are minimal: we pay the bus driver, our Indigenous presenter, our DJ (when this is our former LEH participant who was a broadcaster in Iraq), zoo entry, and we buy some classroom materials and fish and chips. This year a generous, anonymous supporter donated the cost of our fish and chip lunch at the beach, and for this we are most grateful.

The host school does all our photocopying – work booklets for students and volunteers, and a memory booklet – and we are appreciative of this help in keeping our costs down.

We anticipate holding our next course at Immanuel Lutheran College, from 23-27 September.