

LEARN ENGLISH HOLIDAY PROGRAM

September 2019

The September 2019 Learn English Holiday (LEH) program involved the largest number of participants we have yet hosted – 52 people from 10 different countries (Rwanda, Iraq, Afghanistan, Burundi, Syria, Tibet, Myanmar, Eritrea, Ethiopia, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo). Their length of time in Australia ranged from one month to 30 months, and their English language levels ranged from absolute beginner to advanced.

The program was held from 23-27 September at Immanuel Lutheran College who generously provided us with several classrooms, use of their facilities, and photocopied our learning materials. The Immanuel Worship Centre also provided us with wonderful facilities – the large open area where we held several activities, including the Multicultural Dinner, and every morning ate a delicious morning tea prepared and served by volunteers from the Church. One of our other partner schools donated their bus for our use in transporting our guests to and from the Sunshine Coast and from the beach to Wildlife HQ.

Program overview

The September LEH program built on previous programs and again, although there was some formal focus on learning English, we recognise that much of the learning of English comes from interactions in English within the classroom but particularly with homestay hosts. Over the last four years we have orientated the classroom program towards skills and understanding vital for adaptation to Australia – cultural awareness, water safety, the language of forms and of jobs, awareness of scams – although we do teach basic question and answer structures since we use these a lot through the week. On this occasion, in addition to 31 adults we hosted a large cohort of young people (6 x 6-10 year olds; 6 x 12- 15 year olds; 9 x 16-19 year olds). This required us to develop separate learning and fun activities for these groups, and we were grateful for the volunteers who stepped into leadership positions in these groups.

These volunteers were amongst a total of 55 involved in the classroom, including 14 senior students from Immanuel College, several volunteers who had taken part in previous LEHs, and others who answered our call for assistance through newspapers, the Bulletin, emails, Facebook and the radio. Additionally, Dr Jo Loth and five of her University of the Sunshine Coast drama students again helped us graphically illustrate some of Australia's cultural idiosyncrasies. We are very grateful to all those who contributed so much to the experiences of our refugee guests.

We particularly express our gratitude also to the 20 homestay hosts who opened their homes to our guests, providing them with food, insights into Australian family life, and entertainment. We anticipated that we would struggle to find sufficient homestay hosts and yet so many responded to our call. Thank you, all of you, we really couldn't run the program without you!

Interspersed with learning activities are the Multicultural Dinner and a half day at the beach followed by time at Wildlife HQ. We invited the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Stirling Hinchliffe, to 'launch' the dinner with a 5-minute talk. He drove from Brisbane specifically to do this, and after the launch he spent nearly two hours moving around the tables having in depth conversations with refugee guests, homestay hosts and volunteers.

Our refugees' fish and chip lunch at the beach was, as in April, paid for by the same kind anonymous donor, and Fisheries on the Spit gave us a significant discount. So too did Wildlife HQ, which was a real hit with this LEH group. Additionally, two September 2018 LEH participants (Ghenwa Asaad and Samir Elias) donated \$50 towards LEH costs.

In summary, without the interest and generosity and support of many on the Coast, including those who raise or donate funds for Buddies, the Learn English Holiday program would not be able to run. The next LEH will be in September 2020; the timing of Easter precludes our normal April program.

Lesley Willcoxson
for the LEH organising team

