

Volunteers required for Edinburgh College's home learning scheme



Edinburgh College is looking for volunteers to teach English in people's homes, as part of a scheme to support people who cannot get to a classroom.

Edinburgh College's Home Learning Scheme opens up public life for refugees, immigrants and asylum seekers by giving them a better grasp of the English language and UK culture. Volunteers give weekly lessons over a period of nine months to students who cannot get to community-based classes for reasons such as health, childcare or working hours.

The Home Learning Scheme is run by the college's English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) department, which provides English lessons at all levels within the college and out in the community.

One of the longest-serving volunteers at the college is Ruth Macnamara, who has been working as a home tutor since 1979. In that time she has tutored 30 people from around the world, from Pakistan, Turkey, Thailand, Hong Kong, Bosnia, Portugal, Vietnam and Israel.

Ruth's current student is a young mother from Pakistan, Naima, who had some English skills when she came to Scotland but was unprepared for dealing with the Scottish accent. They have worked together for three years and Naima has subsequently passed her driving theory test and the English language test necessary to apply for citizenship. Lessons have included a baking session and a field trip to Waverly Station, John Lewis and Jenners.

Ruth said: "Over the years the tutor scheme has given me a great deal of pleasure and I can think of few other opportunities to help people in such a direct fashion. The scheme benefits the students, the tutors and the whole community in a wide range of ways. I have met many lovely people, learned a lot about places I have never visited and eaten a fantastic selection of dishes. I would urge anyone with a little time to spare to give it a go – it is often the most rewarding thing I do in a day.

"I recently bumped into a former student, a Thai lady, who was excited to tell me that she now has her own business. When she arrived in Scotland, she had almost no English and she was full of praise for the ESOL scheme and the opportunities it gave her."

Naima said how much she is enjoying her lessons: "I feel much more confident talking to my children's teachers and going to the doctor. I can explain what the problems are. I am very happy that I can now apply for UK citizenship. There are no English classes in my area so home lessons with Ruth are very important to me."

Jean Howat, the Home Learning coordinator and ESOL lecturer at the college, said: "Learning English with the Home Learning Scheme not only helps our students become more involved in the community and reduces their possible isolation but may also help them to move on to ESOL classes, to employment or to vocational courses.

"The volunteer ESOL tutor role would suit those who have an interest in language and good communication skills. Teaching experience is not essential but can be useful, and it is certainly a good way of gaining teaching experience."

Volunteers are fully trained by the college's ESOL staff. They receive initial training and follow-up training days, and ongoing support throughout the scheme from a qualified

lecturer. Training includes practical teaching tips, advice on intercultural communication and awareness of cultural sensitivities and the feelings of an adult student. Volunteers also gain ESOL teaching experience and will be given references after six months of successful tutoring. This initial training can be completed in 20 hours followed by weekly lessons for around nine months, or 33 lessons.

To find out more about becoming a volunteer tutor and to book a place at the next information session on 16 or 30 January, please contact Caroline Battes on 0131 535 4630 or email caroline.battes@edinburghcollege.ac.uk. These information sessions will be held at Edinburgh College's Sighthill Campus.