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Active Citizenship and English (ACE) project 2013 - 2015

Final impact assessment report



Judy Kirsh, July 2015



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1. Introduction

Active Citizenship and English (ACE) was a two-year European Integration Fund (EIF) project which used a range of innovative approaches to teaching and learning to support the successful integration of Third Country National (TCN)¹ women. Led by Learning Unlimited, this holistic, multi-strand project was delivered in partnership with **Blackfriars Settlement (BS)**, **Working Men's College (WMC)** and the **Institute of Education (IoE)** from September 2013 to the end of June 2015.

ACE extended and added value to the successful model of supporting integration developed through the 3 year EIF funded *Welcome to the UK* project, also led by Learning Unlimited. The prime objective was to support the successful integration of 216 TCN women into the UK through a contextualised, integration-focused programme of direct teaching, capacity building training for teachers and volunteer befrienders, materials development and research.

It should be noted that the concept of 'integration' is not unproblematic; there are a range of meanings attached to the notion, as indicated by Ager and Strang's (2008) observation that *'the concept of integration is used with widely differing meanings'*. However, for the purposes of this report, we refer to the European Integration Fund's definition which, in accordance with the Common Basic Principles for immigrant integration policy in the European Union², points out that *'Integration is a dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents of Member States'* and that *'Basic knowledge of the host society's language, history, and institutions is indispensable to integration; enabling immigrants to acquire this basic knowledge is essential to successful integration'*.

This impact assessment for the ACE project recognises the importance and value of a dynamic two way process in supporting integration and that all those involved in the work of the project, including teachers, volunteers and wider stakeholders, have an important contribution to make to the impact assessment process. The purpose of the research element within this project was to investigate the overall impact of the project using a variety of quantitative and qualitative methods and approaches to explore perspectives about the project's impact for learners, volunteers and partners:

- for ACE learners: to find out how participation in the project has impacted on their skills, knowledge and confidence in relation to:
 - their English language and literacy skills
 - becoming full and active members of UK society
 - applying for British citizenship/ILR
 - their involvement in volunteering and community activity
- for partners, teachers and volunteers: to find out how participation in the ACE project has impacted on their skills, knowledge and confidence in relation to:
 - working with and supporting TCN women settling in the UK
 - materials development and research
 - cross-cultural understanding
 - volunteering and befriending

An overview of the whole project is provided in Section 2, with inputs/outputs/project activities summarised in Section 3. The outcomes and impact of the ACE project identified through the evaluation and research process are described in Section 4, and recommendations are summarised in Section 5.

For further information about the Active Citizenship and English (ACE) project or this report, please contact Karen Dudley at Learning Unlimited (karen.dudley@learningunlimited.co).

¹ It is a requirement of European Integration Funding that the main beneficiaries are Third Country Nationals i.e. non-EU nationals.

² http://www.eesc.europa.eu/resources/docs/common-basic-principles_en.pdf

2. ACE project background and overview

ACE was a holistic multi-strand project which aimed to:

- make a demonstrable positive impact on the successful integration of TCN women to the UK through:
 - direct teaching
 - capacity building training for teachers, trainers and volunteer befrienders
 - materials development and research
- develop models of good practice in:
 - teaching, learning, training, support, capacity building and materials development
 - the exchange of experience, good practice and information
 - promoting cross-cultural understanding, interaction and co-operation through befriending, capacity building training, work placements and volunteering
 - using a range of innovative approaches to teaching, learning, training and materials development, specifically tailored to local needs
- develop a sustainable model of good practice, teaching and training materials which could be shared with other providers and programmes replicated elsewhere in the UK
- establish a strong research base and assess and evaluate the impact and value of this integration programme
- build on and receive added value from the expertise, knowledge and models of good practice developed through the previous EIF project, *Welcome to the UK*

The project specifically addressed the needs of TCN women by:

- addressing capacity issues in respect of language and literacy learning
- developing processes and programmes that would help new migrants in general and specific targeted groups of disadvantaged migrants to become full and active members of UK society
- enabling newly arrived non-EU women to fulfil the criteria for citizenship, and
- developing programmes that provided opportunities for TCN women and members of the receiving society to interact with each other through voluntary and community activity and befriending.

The Learning Unlimited team led and managed the project and appointed a part-time ESOL co-ordinator to support the delivery of the project. Blackfriars Settlement and Working Men's College partners each appointed qualified and experienced ESOL tutors to deliver the part-time ACE ESOL courses, organised the additional 'tasters', short courses and termly events. They also appointed part time ACE administrators.

The ACE ESOL team and tutors were provided with a range of opportunities and support as part of their induction and during the project. These included:

- ACE project induction training
- regular support meetings to share ideas and resources
- 1:1 meetings and ad hoc support

Additional training opportunities for the ACE team included the *Teaching Basic Literacy to ESOL learners* course and a workshop on the new 'Prevent' strategy.

Approach and methodology

The ACE project's Year 1 interim report³ used the main strands of the project as a framework for carrying out a rigorous but supportive evaluation, which identified the main strengths and challenges of each strand of the project. Taking each strand in turn, we considered how well it had met its objectives, the strengths to build on and areas for development in Year 2, which informed project planning for the second and final year.

The approach to this research was informed by previous research undertaken by the Learning Unlimited team on other EIF projects, i.e. *Welcome to the UK, Teaching and Learning English* and *Parents' Integration through Partnership*. Findings from *Welcome to the UK*, for example, showed that the participants themselves defined integration as feeling 'part of a place' – and the importance of language, communication, confidence, and local knowledge and relationships in this. We also drew on other recent research which explores integration as a dynamic process which can be facilitated and explored through participatory approaches to language learning, e.g. *Whose integration?* Bryers D, Winstanley B. and Cooke, M. (2013).

'Theory of change' also formed part of the evaluation framework for the research. As stated in Ramalingam's Research Report *Integration: What Works?* (2013)⁴, 'A theory of change is a simple account of what a project is, what it intends to achieve and how it will do so. Among other things, theories of change can help initiatives (including those operating on a small scale) to understand how their own activity contributes to wider policy goals.' He stresses the importance not only of measuring how much has been learnt through a project or initiative but also of how the knowledge is used. 'A learning-based approach to evaluation can also help amplify the value of data not generally appreciated in evaluation processes, such as personal testimonies, small-scale figures and best practices from the field.'

Throughout the project, Learning Unlimited engaged learners, teachers, volunteers, partners and the project team in regular evaluative and reflective activities. This process served to evaluate the project and provide recommendations for the project partners, other providers and funders in relation to future work with the target group.

The ACE project had 6 main strands of activity over the two-year period.

Strand 1: Active Citizenship and English (ACE) ESOL programme

This was the main strand of the project which aimed to engage and support eligible TCN women on free, graded programmes to help them develop ESOL, literacy and citizenship skills and work towards fulfilling the criteria for citizenship. They were also offered a taster and short course programme to help develop additional relevant skills, and also encouraged to achieve qualifications and progress to further learning, training and volunteering. Travel costs were reimbursed (up to a weekly maximum limit) and a number of free childcare places were provided to enable mothers with pre-school children to attend the main programme. Volunteer befrienders offered learners additional support.

³ http://learningunlimited.co/files/ACEYr1_impactassessmentreport.pdf

⁴ http://www.strategicdialogue.org/Integration_Report.pdf (2013) *Integration: What Works?* RESEARCH REPORT by Vidhya Ramalingam, Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2013

Strand 2: Befriending

A number of female volunteer befrienders were recruited and trained to support many of the TCN women at each centre, particularly the lower-level learners. They were given free full DBS checks and matched with suitable learners. On-going support and termly *Keeping in touch* (KIT) meetings were provided by two part-time befriender co-ordinators.

Volunteer befrienders were also given the opportunity to become involved in optional practitioner researcher training and/or materials development (see Strand 5).

Strand 3: Opportunities to engage with local people, local communities and local support and facilities

This strand enabled TCN women engaged on the ACE programme to build links with the local community through interaction with volunteer befrienders, taking part in trips and visits, and by participating in events linked to integration themes, the local community and local services.

Many of the destinations for the trips were chosen by the ACE learners in collaboration with their teachers, which provided rich language-learning opportunities as well as cultural and educational learning experiences.

Higher-level ACE learners were also offered the opportunity of undertaking volunteering placements. In some cases this was arranged through the local volunteer centre; in other cases, learners were supported to find their own placements or volunteered at centre events.

Strand 4: Capacity building training and support

Free/subsidised capacity building support was offered to staff from FE colleges, community and voluntary organisations working with non-EU national women. This provided an opportunity to share good practice in developing and running innovative integration and active citizenship programmes.

LU's nationally-acclaimed *Teaching basic literacy to ESOL learners* course ran 4 times. CPD workshops included dissemination events which promoted awareness-raising and skills development, and supported ESOL professionals, partners and stakeholders who were working with non-EU nationals planning to settle in the UK.

Strand 5: Add value to the skills and experience of TCNs and volunteers

This strand provided added value in two ways:

(a) Training and support was provided for some of the volunteer befrienders to become 'practitioner researchers', collecting impact assessment data from TCNs on 'befriending'. The IoE led on this research into befriending and produced a report of their findings (*see supporting IoE ACE Befriender research report*).

(b) Volunteer befrienders and their learners were invited to participate in the 'Literacy for Active Citizenship' project – developing, piloting and publishing a series of graded readers written by learner/befriender pairs.

Strand 6: ACE project impact assessment

Throughout the project, Learning Unlimited engaged learners, volunteers, partners and the project team in an on-going process of review and evaluation in order to build up a detailed picture of the project's impact. This process has served to evaluate the project and provide recommendations for the project partners, other providers and funders in relation to future work with the target group. This report is the output for the 6th project strand of activity.

3. ACE project delivery

Strand 1: Active Citizenship and English (ACE) ESOL programme

Course content

The project target for this strand was to engage and support 216 eligible TCN women on free, graded ESOL programmes. Between September 2013 and June 2015, a total of 275 learners from 38 different countries were engaged in graded ESOL classes at each partner centre. 48 ACE ESOL courses took place – four groups at each centre (ESOL Entry 1, Entry 2, Entry 3, Level 1/2), two sessions per week. IT sessions were included at each centre as part of the curriculum.

Of the learners engaged, 227 'completed', i.e. attended at least 80% of their course. Those who completed were presented with a copy of the 'Life in the UK' study guide and a Certificate of Attendance.



(1)



(2)

ACE learners receiving their copies of the 'Life in the UK' book at (1) BS and (2) WMC

The ACE ESOL courses were designed to run on a termly basis. Citizenship themes were embedded within the courses to enable learners to become more confident and more involved in their local communities. Topics included, for example, women in politics, equality, home safety, British culture, traditions, crime, life in the UK, volunteering, shopping, healthy eating, and supermarkets. Many topics were linked to visits, trips and the termly events. Tutors were also encouraged to include 'befriending' in their scheme of work, and to negotiate and adapt the content in discussion with learners, to ensure the courses were responsive to the interests and learning needs of the learners. Learners were encouraged to work towards appropriate accreditation, particularly Entry 3 Speaking and Listening which was required in order to meet the language requirement for settlement or ILR applications.

Tasters/short courses

The project target for tasters and short courses was 24 and 25 took place over the two years. In year 1, 12 short courses and taster sessions were offered, such as baking, CV writing, Life in the UK, yoga, cake decorating, ESOL exam practice. In Year 2, there were 13 tasters/short courses and 75 out of 135 learners (56%) attended at least one of them.

Tasters and short courses were organised based to a large extent on learners' preferences and identified needs. Literacy was a key concern, particularly for lower level learners who had weak literacy skills in their home/first language. Therefore, in year 2, several literacy short courses were put on at both centres to address this. The first WMC literacy course attracted 19 participants, with high levels of attendance at subsequent courses. At BS, there were two literacy short courses, also well attended. This demonstrated the need for additional reading and writing support for learners, particularly at lower

levels. Learners reported that they enjoyed the tasters and short courses and found them useful, particularly the Year 2 'Preparation for volunteering' course at BS which had 13 participants.

Year 2 tasters and short courses:

- Basic literacy short course
- CV writing taster
- Tour of Camden lock taster
- Developing reading and writing skills short course
- Improving basic literacy short course
- Developing reading and writing skills short course
- Improving basic literacy short course summer
- Volunteering short course
- Literacy short course
- Reading and writing short course
- Everyday life in London speaking/listening short course
- Zumba
- Yoga



Yoga class, Year 2 (BS)



Baking class, Year 1 (BS)

Accreditation

The overall target was for learners to achieve 160 ESOL qualifications and they were given the opportunity to take exams at the most appropriate level, i.e. Entry 1, Entry 2, Entry 3, Level 1 or Level 2. Most wished to gain an Entry 3 Speaking and Listening qualification which was the minimum qualification needed to meet the 'Knowledge of language and life in the UK for settlement and naturalisation'⁵. Awarding bodies included Cambridge ESOL, Edexcel and English Speaking Board.

In Year 1, 107 learners gained accreditation, either internal or external. In Year 2, out of 43 learners taking 82 exams at Blackfriars Settlement, 90% were successful; at Working Men's College, 39 learners took 80 exams. At Level 1 and Level 2, the success rate was 100%; unfortunately, the rest of the WMC results were unavailable at the time of writing although, based on Year 1 results, we would expect an overall achievement rate for external accreditation of around 90%.

Many learners have progressed onto further learning, training, volunteering and work placements. For example, some continued or will continue with a higher level ESOL course whilst others have enrolled on vocational courses such as childcare or hair and beauty. Learners have volunteered in a range of settings like charity shops, schools and community centres. Some learners, particularly at the end of Year 1, left the project to take up employment, for example, in a supermarket or a children's centre.

⁵ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/182545/statement-of-intent-koll.pdf

Attendance and retention

Some learners had excellent attendance whereas others did not attend as regularly. In some cases this was due to family commitments, pregnancy and responsibilities such as children being ill, or learners' own health problems. Each year several learners had to leave as they had babies although some returned soon afterwards, one just a couple of weeks after giving birth as she did not want to miss her classes!

Travel and childcare costs

Travel costs were reimbursed up to a maximum of £20.20 per week per learner (the cost of a weekly bus pass). For many learners, this enabled them to travel not only to and from their ACE ESOL courses and to go on visits/trips but also to become more confident in travelling around London at other times.

48 free childcare places were available each week for pre-school children and all places were taken, either at a nursery or with a registered childminder. Demand was greater than expected for childcare places throughout the project which meant that some women on waiting lists were unfortunately unable to be offered a place on the project.

Free courses and the reimbursement of travel expenses were of crucial importance for many as it enabled participants to attend regularly and to go on trips. One tutor believed that many women in her class would not have been able to attend as their husbands were not prepared to pay for the course, travel or childcare.

'If I didn't get that help, I might not be here' (ACE learner, WMC)

'The most important thing it's free and I get travel money because I am not working at the moment.' (ACE learner, BS)

The provision of free childcare places (nursery or registered childminder) for learners with pre-school children enabled mothers to attend courses which they would otherwise have been unable to attend.

'the course is very good for women as there is a crèche ... helps them to come and learn ... before I learnt English then I had to stay home with the baby for 3 years, I forgot all my English ... now I can speak English and I'm confident. Crèche is most important for women.' (ACE learner, BS)

'the most important thing for me was the childcare for my child' (ACE learner, BS)

Due to the high cost, it was not possible to offer childcare provision for the tasters or short courses which meant that some women who would have liked to attend were unable to.

Progression for learners

Supporting learners in exploring and taking up current and future progression opportunities was a priority for the ACE project in Year 2. As part of the project, some learners participated in the 'Preparing for volunteering' short course and met volunteer centre support workers. Others took an active role volunteering at other events at Working Men's College and Blackfriars Settlement. Some learners with no previous experience of work identified some vocational goals and others with entry level jobs such as cleaning expressed different vocational goals such as becoming a teaching assistant.

Evaluation and feedback

Regular and meaningful learner, tutor and partner evaluation and feedback were a priority for the ACE project in order to ensure that the courses were meeting learners' needs and interests – as well as the

overarching aims and objectives of the project. Learners were asked to complete an individual evaluation form at the end of each term and a final one at the end of Year 2 (see Appendix 3).

Regular tutor and partner meetings and reviews ensured that the project was on course to meet its aims and objectives. Feedback was also captured in a range of ways which did not always require learners to complete individual feedback forms, including focus groups and interviews.

Strand 2: Befriending

The ACE project aimed to recruit, train and support 60 female volunteer befrienders to be matched with up to 100 learners. In Year 1, 40 volunteer befrienders supported a total of 48 learners; in Year 2, a further 25 women were trained and several continued from Year 1, making a total of 37 befrienders (22 at BS and 15 at WMC). Some volunteer befrienders were supporting 2 or 3 learners at the same time and a few supported their learners throughout the two years.

Recruitment was stronger in Year 2 at WMC when the ACE programme was more established. A wide range of women were engaged in the befriender volunteering strand and all were required to undertake DBS checks. Many of the volunteers were speakers of other languages and had experience of settling in the UK themselves as adults. They included some ACE (or former ACE) learners who also felt able to undertake volunteering, single parents, mothers working full or part time, some volunteers who were actively involved in community campaigns in their areas and some who were studying/undertaking training.

The majority of learners who had befrienders were in the lower-level ESOL classes as they wanted more opportunities to practise their English and many successful befriending partnerships were set up. Those involved found it rewarding and a few long-lasting friendships developed. In some cases, however, the befriending relationship did not develop well or ended quickly. Not all learners fully understood the concept of befriending which was difficult to convey to learners with very little English.

In total, 5 ACE befriender training courses took place. The training programme included:

- Information about the project and the role of the volunteer
- What does it feel like to be newly arrived in a country?
- ESOL awareness – what does it feel like to have little access to the dominant language?
- Effective communication – what makes for effective communication?
- Literacy awareness
- Barriers to learning
- Boundaries of role
- Reporting any issues which suggest there may be a danger to an adult or child
- Importance of confidentiality
- Planning first meeting with ACE learners
- Problem solving
- Evaluation

Two LU specialists were recruited from the Learning Unlimited team to co-ordinate and support the ACE volunteer befrienders following the successful completion of the training programme at each centre. They offered on-going support and held regular keeping-in-touch meetings.

The volunteer befrienders supported the ACE learners in a wide range of ways such as:

- meeting regularly to practise speaking English
- keeping in touch through WhatsApp and Skype as well as text, phone and face-to-face meetings
- signposting and providing local information, e.g. on housing, local services, banks
- going out with their learners, e.g. to the park, coffee shop, library
- supporting class trips, e.g. to Houses of Parliament, Kew Gardens and London Eye
- encouraging and supporting ACE participants to attend termly events
- support with exam preparation
- participating in 'coffee and chat' mornings at each centre

Regular 'coffee and chat' sessions were run at each centre and were an opportunity for learners and volunteers to meet up informally to chat in general about what they had been covering in class and to have additional exam practice.

As part of the ACE project, volunteer befrienders were also offered the opportunity to become involved in two additional projects (part of Strand 5 below):

- the development and production of 'Literacy for active citizenship' materials/readers, and
- the 'befriender research strand' led by the Institute of Education - *see supporting IoE ACE Befriender research report*).

Strand 3: Opportunities to engage with local people, local communities and facilities

The project targets for this strand were:

- Interaction with 60 volunteer befrienders
- 26 visits, trips and events to support integration
- 50 women to undertake supported volunteering opportunities

Interaction with volunteer befrienders

Overall, more than 100 learners were supported by volunteer befrienders at some point during the project. The befriending relationships varied; some were very successful and others less so. In some cases, learners and befrienders had frequent contact both in person and by phone, skype or email and became good friends whereas others were happy to communicate by texting and meet occasionally. Sometimes a befriender and her learner only met once or twice and did not continue for a variety of reasons. Befrienders often accompanied their learner(s) on a trip or visit, or came to events, which provided an additional opportunity for interaction. The befriending relationship is explored in detail in the IoE research report (*see supporting IoE ACE Befriender research report*).



ACE volunteer befriender and learner on London Eye trip

Visits, trips and events

The target for this aspect of the programme was 26 visits, trips and events over the two years. To enrich the learners' experience, promote language development, cultural awareness and integration, the class

visits, trips and events were organised by each centre with the support of the ACE team. Teachers were encouraged to integrate the topics and use them as an opportunity to develop language skills and cultural awareness relevant to the theme of the trip/event.

ACE class visits were extremely valuable in providing language learning opportunities, promoting independence and group support as well as providing opportunities to learn more about London and the UK. Some learners had never been out without their husbands or been on the underground before. In the focus groups and interviews, learners said they had enjoyed the trips and found them useful for learning more about London and the UK. Bringing their children was an added bonus as they were able to enjoy these experiences together.

In Year 1, six events on the themes of 'Citizenship', 'Local community' and 'Progression' took place (3 at each centre) and tutors and learners organised 25 different trips, ranging from a visit to a local supermarket to a Christmas market, London walks, libraries, Tate Modern and the Houses of Parliament. The end of year trip to Kew Gardens was attended by more than 100 ACE participants, including learners' family and befrienders.

In year 2, there were 11 visits and trips:

- poppies at the Tower of London
- the Geffrye Museum in Hoxton
- Houses of Parliament
- Kenwood House
- Borough Market
- William Morris Museum
- River Cruise on the Thames
- Millennium Bridge
- British Museum
- London parks
- end of project trip to the London Eye



(1)



(2)

ACE trips for learners (and their families)

(1) to the London Eye (2015)

(2) to Kew Gardens (2014)

At the end of Year 2, the trip to the London Eye was described as '*amazing*' by one learner. They loved the views of London and could see all the landmarks: '*I liked London Eye trip because I enjoyed the landscape of London*'

Year 2 themed events included:

- Keeping safe/safety at home
- 'Talking politics'
- Progression



(1) Keeping safe event, WMC



(2) Talking politics event, WMC



(3) Progression event, BS

Each termly event was based around a theme which provided an opportunity for learners to develop their language skills and knowledge, at the same time as breaking down barriers, promoting community cohesion and integration. Learners were able to engage with local/community organisations and, by the same token, organisations were able to learn more about the ACE learners' and their needs. Teachers were encouraged to include the themes in their schemes of work and to prepare learners with key language to help them make the most of each event.

In Year 2, the first events were on the theme of 'Home safety' with the Police, Fire and Ambulance Services invited to give talks and demonstrations. The ACE 4 (highest level) classes at each centre took responsibility for organising these events. Supported by their teachers and the ACE project team, learners worked together to draft and send emails, prepare publicity, visit other ACE classes to tell learners about the event and encourage attendance, organise translation support from befrienders for the lower-level learners, plan the programme, prepare a PowerPoint presentation and liaise with the centre. The events provided an excellent opportunity to promote integration as participants were able to learn more about the emergency services and interact in a relaxed and informal way with them, and the police, fire and ambulance personnel were able to meet members of their local communities.

There were more than 60 participants at WMC and over 30 at BS. Feedback was very positive. *'It was interesting, useful and fun'* was how one learner described the event at Blackfriars Settlement. At the WMC home safety event, 96% of respondents rated it as 'Excellent' or 'Good', and 95% rated it as 'very' or 'quite useful'. Comments ranged from *'Well planned and run. Fantastic work ACE4!'* to *'everything is good and helpful'*.

At the BS home safety event, 100% found the information useful, particularly *'Understanding more about police and 999 or 101'* and *'How not to make myself vulnerable and how to keep safe'*.

The 'Talking Politics' events in March 2015 were well-attended, popular occasions. They took place shortly before the 2015 general and local elections and were therefore a good opportunity to introduce learners to British politics and the electoral system. More than 50 participants attended each event (WMC and BS). A few learners (those from former Commonwealth countries) were able to vote so this was particularly relevant for them. Local politicians were invited to participate in a 'Question time' style event and ACE learners prepared questions for them. Visiting politicians were:

Working Men's College:

- Will Blair (Prospective Conservative parliamentary candidate for Holborn & St. Pancras)
- Dr. Belinda Brooks-Gordon (Lib-Dem candidate for Cities of London & Westminster)

- Dr. Rebecca Johnson (Camden Green Party candidate for Hampstead & Kilbury)
- Sir Kier Starmer, KCB, QC (Prospective Labour parliamentary candidate for Holborn & St. Pancras)

Blackfriars Settlement:

- Councillor Neil Coyle (Deputy Mayor of Southwark and prospective Labour parliamentary candidate for Bermondsey and Old Southwark)
- Councillor William Lavin (Green Party candidate for Bermondsey and Old Southwark)
- Lord Mike Storey (Lib-Dem spokesperson on education, families and young people, House of Lords)
- Momtaz Rahman (Project Manager, Migrants' Rights Network)

At WMC and BS, 100% of learners who completed evaluation forms found the event 'quite' or 'very useful'. Comments ranged from *'I learn how to vote, get new experience'* to *'We had answers about some topics and more information about different politics'* and the usefulness of learning about *'Main issues in Britain and what manifestos of each party'*. All learners felt they had gained a greater understanding of British politics.

The final project events on the theme of 'Progression and celebration' were held in June. A wide range of local and national stakeholders gave information about their services and the support and opportunities they offered. These included: the Volunteer Centres in Camden and Southwark, the British Council, the Ruth Hayman Trust, Trinity College, KMEWO (Kurdish & Middle Eastern Women's Organisation), the British Museum, the Museum of London, Southwark and Camden libraries, Hopscotch (a Camden organisation), and the Mary Ward Centre. Additionally, learners from the Hair and Beauty course at WMC gave a nail art demonstration and information was provided by the project team about NARIC and 'Learning Circles'. Nearly 30 learners and befrienders attended the event at Blackfriars Settlement with the vast majority finding the event *'very useful'*.



(1) BS Progression event



(2) WMC Progression event

Supported volunteering opportunities

The target for this strand was 50. 31 women took up a volunteering opportunity in Year 1 and a further 55 took part in Year 2.

To help learners prepare for a volunteering opportunity, teachers covered the topic in their classes and made contact with the local volunteer centres. At Blackfriars Settlement, the ACE3 and ACE4 classes visited the Southwark Volunteer Centre where they were encouraged to complete on-line applications. At WMC, the Camden Volunteer Centre arranged individual appointments for learners interested in volunteering and supported them in completing their applications. This was very successful and resulted in some learners gaining volunteer placements, for example, as an 'explainer' at Kenwood House,

Hampstead, as an IT teacher at a South-American Women's Centre, as a support worker in a children's centre and working in a charity shop.

Some higher level learners volunteered as befrienders and took part in the befriender training. They went on to support lower level ACE learners.

Other volunteering experiences included supporting ACE events and other fund-raising events at WMC and BS, for example:

- LGBT event, WMC
- Christmas Fair, WMC
- Blackfriars Settlement AGM
- World Aids Day, WMC
- International Women's Day, WMC
- World AIDS Day, WMC

Strand 4: Capacity building training and support

The target for this strand was to provide 4 *Teaching basic literacy to ESOL learners* courses for a total of 48 ESOL teachers, 6 CPD workshops for 60 participants and 2 dissemination events with over 100 attendees. In total, these events were attended by more than 260 individuals.

Teaching Basic Literacy to ESOL learners courses

52 teachers participated in the four courses run over the two years, including four of the ACE ESOL teachers. This course met an identified need for training to teach basic reading and writing skills to ESOL learners, which is an area not covered by the vast majority of standard ESOL teacher training courses. Many TCN learners have limited literacy in their home/first language and therefore specialised literacy teaching is required. Feedback from the courses was very positive, e.g. *'The most useful training I have ever attended since completing my MA' 'This was a fantastic course!'*

CPD workshops

A range of workshops were planned which were designed to meet the identified needs of specific target groups. Participants ranged from college or volunteer centre staff to ESOL teachers working with TCN women, and individuals from voluntary organisations.

In Year 1, 38 participants attended the following workshops: *Language/ Literacy awareness for front line workers; Introduction to teaching basic literacy to ESOL learners for ESOL teachers; Developing innovative EIF projects*. In Year 2, 37 people attended workshops on: *Language and literacy awareness for front line workers* and *Pronunciation for integration* (x 2).

The CPD sessions received very positive feedback – 100% 'Good' or 'Excellent' - and were identified as helping to build the capacity of staff and volunteers in supporting the needs of women who were settling in the UK and did not have English as their first language.

'The whole event was useful.' (Staff member, WMC, Language Awareness CPD workshop)

'To remember how it felt when I started to learn English. Thinking about strategies to use to keep communication effective with students of other languages.' (Staff member, WMC, Language Awareness CPD workshop)

'Excellent material; practical tasks we can take to adapt directly - v helpful.' (ESOL teacher,

Pronunciation CPD workshop, NATECLA conference)

'Interesting input on how to teach pronunciation to higher levels.' (ESOL teacher, Pronunciation CPD workshop, NATECLA conference)

Dissemination events

The dissemination event which took place at the end of Year 1 was attended by 55 participants; the event at the end of Year 2 entitled 'Immigration, integration and ESOL' attracted more than 80. Organisations participating in this event included Migration Matters Scotland and Integration up North, with the final session providing a 'Question time panel' with guest speakers including Neil Coyle, newly elected Labour MP for Bermondsey and Old Southwark.

Participants at the events found them interesting and many rated the Year 2 'Immigration, integration and ESOL' event as '*Excellent*'. The day began with a presentation by learners and befrienders who explained how they had benefitted from the project. This was followed by guest presentations by Sophie Mamattah from Migration Matters Scotland and Bill Dennis from Integration up North who talked about how their EIF projects had supported integration in their areas. There was a choice of workshops during the day on topics such as befriending, integration and participatory ESOL. The afternoon's 'Question time' panel with representatives from Migrants Rights Network, Trinity College London and Neil Coyle, MP provided an opportunity for lively discussion.

The event closed with the book launch of the 'Literacy for Active Citizenship' readers.

Strand 5: Add value to the skills and experience of TCNs and volunteers

The target for this strand was (a) for 20 volunteer befrienders to be trained to become 'practitioner researchers', collecting impact assessment data from their learners on 'befriending' (led by the IoE), and (b) for volunteer befrienders and their learners (who wished to do so) to participate in the 'Literacy for Active Citizenship' project.

Institute of Education 'befriending' research

The IoE led on this strand, training and supporting 21 volunteers overall. The befriender researchers worked with learners to collect data on befriending in both Year 1 and Year 2 of the project, which resulted in some rich data on the impact of volunteers in supporting the integration of non-EU national women - see supporting IoE ACE Befriender research report.

Literacy for active citizenship materials

Several volunteer befrienders and learners were involved in the 'Literacy for Active Citizenship' project - developing, piloting and publishing a series of graded, illustrated readers, written by learners/befrienders, designed to help learners develop their literacy skills by reading about some funny, personal and less typical aspects of everyday life in the UK. The story writers were supported by a member of the ACE project team and met regularly to discuss and write their stories, which were based on true life experiences. The final stories were then edited by ESOL specialists to create two versions of each story - one at Entry 1 and the other at Entry 2+. In total, 20 readers (based on a core of 10 stories) were written, illustrated, edited, piloted and published. The supporting activities, developed by the ACE project team, are now available to download from the Learning Unlimited website⁶. The readers have

⁶ <http://www.learningunlimited.co/resources/publications/acereaders>

been very well received by ESOL practitioners as there are very few suitable materials available at this level.



The befrienders involved felt that the books were a ‘great success’ and that this strand provided an excellent model for scaling up and/or for future projects. It also gave them a valuable experience and an opportunity to ‘upskill’.

The ACE ESOL project was shortlisted for the British Council 2015 ELTons Awards 2015 in the ‘Award for Local Innovation’⁷ category. These annual awards celebrate innovation in English language teaching (ELT) from around the world. ‘An innovative idea for learners and volunteers to create readers’ (Judge’s quote)

Strand 6: ACE impact assessment

This report evidences the evaluation of the ACE project through a range of methods:

Learners	On-going feedback; whole group feedback; individual evaluation forms; focus groups; 1:1 interviews.
Volunteers	On-going feedback; whole group feedback; individual evaluation forms; focus groups; 1:1 interviews.
ACE tutors	On-going feedback; whole group feedback; focus groups; 1:1 interviews
Partners	On-going feedback; regular partner meetings; partner focus group and project review meetings
Tutors attending TBLEL courses	Focus groups; individual evaluation forms; 1:1 interviews
Partner staff attending ACE CPD workshops	Individual evaluation forms; partner feedback
LU ACE team	On-going review; team meetings; team review meetings.

⁷ <http://www.britishcouncil.org/organisation/press/british-council-eltons-awards-2015-shortlist-announced>

To gauge the impact of the project on learners, information was captured in a range of ways including regular learner feedback in classes, end of term feedback, focus groups, 1:1 interviews, tutor and partner feedback and exam results.

4. ACE project impact and case studies

The overarching objective of the research element in the final year of the project was to investigate the overall impact of the *Active Citizenship and English (ACE)* project on participants and stakeholders. Through a number of focus groups, case studies and 1:1 interviews, this qualitative research used a variety of perspectives to investigate the project's impact on learners, volunteers and teachers over the life of the project.

Overall, the ACE project was very successful and met or exceeded all of its targets and outputs, within budget and on time. The evaluation process identified many critical success factors in relation to the ACE project's impact for women, volunteers, partners and the project team. These are addressed separately in this section.

Impact for learners

Overall, by the end of the project, there were significant reported increases in relation to learners' skills in English, their confidence, their knowledge of different aspects of living in the UK, involvement in the local community and in gaining volunteering or work experience. It was difficult to separate out these elements as they were so closely intertwined – increased language ability led to greater confidence and thus more interaction with others and involvement in local activities.

At the end of Year 1 and Year 2, 100% of learners agreed with the statement 'The project helped me feel part of the UK' and more than 90% agreed 'I am more confident about living in the UK'.

English and integration

'The key to integration is language' (Partner, WMC)

For those who began in Year 1 with minimal English, the project had a huge impact and made a tremendous difference to their lives. As their language and communication skills gradually developed and improved, their levels of confidence and ability to interact and engage with the people around them also increased.

'I've improved my English as I have opportunity to talk to people, teacher can correct me ... biggest change for me is improvement in English.' (ACE3 learner, BS)

'Now I feel more confident, I can speak with other persons, I can do more for myself ... go to the hospital, doctor ... before I can't do it ... everything is new for me ... now I feel better ... everything in my life has changed because of this project' (ACE3 learner, BS)

'Before when I came here I couldn't speak English ... now I can anywhere ... if I don't know, I ask for help. I speak to people. It's easy for me now ... English class most important ... in class, teacher, classmates, we all can help each other' (ACE3 learner, BS)

Learners' feedback each term was mostly extremely positive and always reflected a positive shift in perceptions of their skills and confidence in coping with daily life in the UK. This can be seen in the analysis of the evaluations returned at the end of December 2014 (see below) in which the vast majority of learners felt that their English speaking and listening skills were improving, that the course was helping them with everyday life in England and that the additional short courses/tasters were useful. It was also clear that teachers played a crucial role and that having a befriender was an advantage. There

was a greater focus on speaking and listening throughout the course as most learners were working towards gaining an Entry 3 Speaking and Listening qualification which, as stated previously, was a requirement for settlement applications.

Year 2, end of term 1 learner evaluations – key feedback

Statements	% of learners agreeing with the statement
My English listening is improving	93%
My English speaking is improving	93%
My English reading is improving	88%
My English writing is improving	61%
The tasters and short courses are useful	99%
I like visiting places in London	80%
My lessons help me with everyday life in England	97%
My teacher helps me a lot	99%
The worksheets and activities are good. They help me learn English and about England	92%
I have a befriender	54%
My befriender helps me with my English and understand life in England	98%

For one learner, the course had made a tremendous difference to her life. Her improved English, particularly in speaking, and her increased confidence meant that she was able to help her with her son who had a speech problem. She was now able to take him to speech therapy and talk to his doctor and the school. She enjoyed coming to class and meeting her friends. *'We are all foreigners, we all speak different languages and we have to speak English which helps us to improve'*. She had stayed at home for three years when her son was a baby and she had forgotten all her English. Now she could speak English and was much more confident.

In answer to the question *'What do you like best about the ACE project/your ESOL class?'* learners responses at both centres demonstrated how much they valued their learning in terms of both their English language skills and British culture, for example:

- *'Course excellent, nothing to improve'*
- *'I really like ESOL class for Listening, talking, reading, writing and watching TV.'*
- *'Learnt more about London and England, its cultures (diverse) origins and traditions. Improved my english and boost my confidence, in speaking. Improved conversation skills.'*
- *'The learning, the challenges: events, posters, leaflet, presentations, trips'*
- *'I have chance to visit many places and learn and know more about UK'*
- *'I like learning about the British culture'*

- *'Before I took this class I didn't know much about UK history or politics or community'*
- *'I like the teacher and have made many friends'*
- *'I can use computers, internet ...'*

Feedback from learners indicated that they appreciated the citizenship focused content that was embedded within their ACE ESOL courses as well as the trips and visits which enabled them to develop their skills, make new friendships and to feel more confident living in the UK. The impact of the class in reducing social isolation and helping women to create a new network of friends was a common theme too, echoed by their teachers.

ACE learner case study 1 (Blackfriars Settlement)

Lucy⁸, a young Chinese woman, came to the UK to join her husband in 2012. She had learned a little English, left school at 17 and worked in an office. When she came to England she was so shy that she didn't try to speak English to anyone. When she joined the ACE project in September 2013 she was assessed and placed in ACE2. In Year 2, she moved up to ACE3. She passed the Entry 3 Speaking and Listening exam (and the 'Life in the UK' test) and sent her application for settlement to the Home Office.

Lucy took up all the opportunities offered by the project – she attended class regularly and made excellent progress, passing her exams, participating in trips and events which, she felt, were a good way to meet different people and a useful way of learning more about London and the UK (even if she sometimes found it difficult to understand people like the politicians). At one event, she found the information on housing particularly useful and passed on this information to classmates who couldn't attend. Lucy did most of the tasters and short courses offered, including the preparation for volunteering course, and she felt they were all useful. She had a befriender who spoke the same language, who she saw regularly and who helped her not only with English but also with local knowledge: *'she became a good friend and she help me a lot, especially with English'*.

As a result of her involvement with the project, Lucy made huge gains in her confidence in speaking English. She understood far more about living in the UK and felt the course had helped her integrate. She can now speak fairly fluently and understands quite well: *'I speak English at home sometimes with the family ... I couldn't do that before.'* She shared what she learned with the family and said *'My mother-in-law says she can take me to new places now'*.

Lucy is now a confident young woman who intends to continue studying and improving her English. She has a part-time job in a Chinese restaurant which she enjoys as she can chat to customers. Eventually, she would like to do a childcare course and work with children.

Increased confidence

To explore the project's impact in more detail, two focus groups were held at WMC and BS. In response to the question, *'What has changed for you as a result of being part of the ACE project?'* learners all commented positively on the impact of the ACE project on their lives ranging from improvements in their English skills to feeling more confident in coping on their own, gaining qualifications, making friends, learning about the UK and volunteering:

ACE4 group (WMC)

⁸ not her real name

1. *'Before I had a fear of going out of the house ... biggest change in my life is the confidence I have in communicating'*
2. *'I'm more confident than before ... I learned a lot about life in the UK ... history'*
3. *'Now when I go anywhere I can go myself – doctor, anywhere. Before I had to go with my husband or father-in-law'*
4. *'the best thing for me was making friends from different countries ... I'm more confident in speaking ... I think I improved my knowledge about Britain in general'*
5. *'For me, the opportunity for volunteering which improved a lot my confidence in speaking'*
6. *'Biggest change for me is improvement in English and taking exam'*
7. *'Going to Westminster was a really good learning opportunity because I could see history'*
8. *'Now I got the confidence to have friends ... I'm much more confident to help someone ... now I feel more integrated, I want to have some more courses so I can do more things. ... this course has given me confidence to look for part-time work'*
9. *'I wanted to get another job when I started this course. I knew I needed to improve my English to get a better job and get qualifications. This course has given me that ... opportunity to improve my speaking, reading, writing. I've made friends and had opportunity to volunteer and then I got a job. The course helped me integrate into British society ... learn about customs, society, history, culture, British life.'*

ACE3 group (BS)

1. *'When I started two years ago, my English is very bad but now I'm feeling more confident'*
2. *'Now I feel more confident ... I can do more things for myself ... go to market, hospital ... before I can't do it. Now I feel better. .. all parts of the project helped'*
3. *'Lots of things ... improved my English ... I feel more confident ... I can get certificate for visa ... I can meet other people from other countries'*
4. *'I can talk with other students, learn about other cultures, everything ... use computers and internet'*
5. *'Before I started 2 years ago my English is very bad but now I'm feeling more confident. I can go to GP and hospital myself'*
6. *'Before when I came here I couldn't speak English, I didn't speak ... now I can go ... anywhere. If I don't know, I ask for help, I speak to people. It's easy for me now. English class has been most important'*
7. *'it was useful to get information from events ... for life, for family, for job'*
8. *'I improve my English ... before I needed my husband ... I have confidence now, I speak on the bus, speak everywhere ... I go to different places ... I learned a lot about UK'*
9. *'Before I started my course I can't speak English anything ... now I feel better'*

The impact on learners' English was also demonstrated through a wide range of activities and events that ACE learners were involved in. These ranged from participating in tastings and short courses to supporting fund-raising, information and awareness-raising events at their centres including, for example, a Christmas Fair, World AIDS Day, LGBT awareness day and International Women's Day at WMC to supporting the Blackfriars Settlement AGM.

A further impact of the project was that learners who were mothers of young children felt that they were better equipped to help their children with their education. One learner said that the course had helped her to communicate with her daughter's school and she could also help her daughter with her homework.

ACE tutors' perspective

ACE tutors all commented that their learners were very engaged and motivated – more so than the 'average' ESOL learner at their centre - and they were keen to go on trips and to learn about British culture and history. A key observation was that the *'ACE project gave women opportunities they would not otherwise have had'*.

The tutors noted that the most significant change they had observed in their learners was 'confidence' – all agreed that their learners had improved their language skills, become more independent and gained confidence.

They also observed learners building strong friendships and a strong sense of a 'social group' in class - learners were very supportive of one another and happy to learn about other cultures. Tutors felt that some women had felt isolated before starting the course but now they had made friends, were happier and had gained confidence.

In some classes, women shared recipes and brought in food; in others, tutors set up a Facebook page or WhatsApp group so that their learners could communicate outside class. At WMC, one tutor paired up her learners as 'study buddies' at the beginning of the course and encouraged them to meet regularly and communicate outside class. Learners met up on Saturdays to practise speaking, bringing their children with them. The tutor reported that it 'worked very well' and was 'very successful'.

Increased confidence for learners was a key positive change reported by learners, their teachers and partners. The majority of learners reported increases in confidence and feedback from teachers reinforced this:

'Learners' huge increase in confidence can be seen in their body language, the way they talk to one another and to the teacher' (ACE tutor, WMC)

One tutor reported that one of her very quiet learners had been expected to do all the domestic chores and cook for 15 people every day. Following a lesson on domestic abuse, women's rights and equality the learner went back to her family and told them that she was aware of her rights and was no longer prepared to do all the work. Things changed and she became much happier and more vocal in class and her English improved.

The ACE tutors, with support from the project team, played a key role in the success of the project and learner feedback frequently made reference to the teacher as a person, their teaching style and the activities they included:

'the teacher is Excelent help me with my life in England help me with my next visa, when learner about london and England.' (ACE learner, WMC)

'I like my teacher and I like my class and my classmid I like speking. reading. writing. I'm improving.' (ACE learner, BS)

'my classes were fun interesting and I like my teacher' (ACE learner, WMC)

ACE tutor case study (Working Men's College)

Yasmin⁹, an experienced ESOL tutor at WMC, was involved in teaching an ACE class throughout the project. She felt a sense of personal satisfaction in seeing her learners develop and being part of their journey. She could identify with them as she had come to the UK as a student herself many years before but hadn't had the support of an ACE project!

Yasmin felt the learners had 'boosted confidence, boosted their self-esteem' and that the project had 'changed their lives'. In her opinion, it was a 'life changing course ... a life support system'. One learner who had been suffering from depression became a student representative, which greatly helped her gain confidence and feel better. Learners were highly motivated, more so than other ESOL learners she taught, and worked very hard to pass exams. They met outside class to practise, in a park or cafe. The trips and visits were particularly helpful and helped motivate learners further. Learners had progressed well, some to the next level ACE ESOL class or to vocational courses like childcare or hair and beauty.

Yasmin observed that her ACE ESOL learners were very dedicated did not want to miss any lessons or leave the course: one woman attended class on the day her baby was due! Another, who had just received her British passport, burst into tears when told she had to leave the course.

In terms of personal and professional development, Yasmin's involvement in the ACE project had enabled her to experiment with her own teaching style, she had a better understanding of integration and how to incorporate relevant topics into an ESOL course and a better understanding of the issues facing women migrating to the UK.

Undertaking a volunteering opportunity

'The ACE project gave women opportunities they wouldn't otherwise have had, like volunteering' (ACE ESOL tutor, BS)

'What changed the most for me was opening up the opportunity for volunteering which improved my confidence.' (ACE4 learner, WMC)

The majority of learners took up a volunteering opportunity, even if it was just on one occasion. At WMC, teachers noted that learners enthusiastically supported events at their centre and were keen to volunteer to help, for example, with fund-raising events. As one learner noted, volunteering provided an opportunity to practise speaking, extend her vocabulary and knowledge and make new friends.

For some higher-level learners, it was an opportunity to link what they were learning in class to their volunteer role. One learner who volunteered as an 'explainer' at Kenwood House was able to link her voluntary role with what she had been learning:

'To play this role, I had to learn the history of the house, also the history of Britain which helps me understand even better the lessons here about history and culture. So I started to linking the history, the examples, the trips here on the ACE project, helps me to link the dots.' (ACE4 learner, WMC)

Volunteering also provided an opportunity to experience a British workplace as well as take up training and gain a reference. In at least one case, the volunteering role led to a job offer.

ACE learner case study 2 (Working Men's College)

⁹ not her real name

Anna¹⁰ is in her mid-20s and comes from South America. She went to university but did not complete her degree in Chemistry. She got married, came to the UK a few years ago and had her daughter. She then got divorced and was working as a cleaner in a school when she joined the ACE project in September 2013. Anna was not happy, very shy and lacked confidence. She was keen to improve her situation and find a better job. The free travel was a great help as she was a single mother and would have found it difficult to pay.

Anna started in ACE3 and then moved up to ACE4 in Year 2. She worked hard to develop her English skills and took advantage of the opportunities the project offered her. She gradually became more confident, made some good friends and took an active role in organising the 'Home safety' event, participating in the presentation. She passed her exams, which also boosted her confidence: *'Before I felt shy'*. Her writing improved a lot too, which was important to her for work, and for people to understand her better. Now her relatives say *'I can understand what you say'*. Anna felt she learned a great deal about life in the UK: *'I don't feel behind ... I know more about celebrations and politics now ... and I have lots of nice friends. I'm happy now'*.

Anna wasn't happy working as a cleaner as she wanted to develop a career working with children. Through the ACE project's volunteering strand, Anna gained a position as a part-time voluntary worker at a local children's centre, which she really enjoyed. A few months later, the centre advertised a vacancy for a support worker, which Anna applied for. *'There was a vacancy. I went for interview even though I didn't have the qualification. They know me and they give me three months trial. They like how I worked and they offered me the job.'* Anna was then sent on some short courses to help her develop her new role. She loves the job and is going on to do a Level 2 Childcare course at college in September.

Overall, the project had a life-changing impact on Anna – *'it has helped my dreams come true'*.

Impact for teachers on the 'Teaching Basic Literacy to ESOL learners' courses

Feedback from all four courses was very positive. In Year 2, 65% rated the overall course as 'Excellent' with 35% rating it as 'Good'. 100% rated the training as 'Excellent' or 'Good'.

'I found the whole course extremely interesting and useful. It has given me a lot of ideas and confidence in teaching lower level literacy learners. I have familiarised myself with different approaches I was not aware of.' (Course participants, Year 2)

'The course has made me more aware of how my lessons could support the integration of my learners in the UK and it has been very useful in terms of the strategies I can use and the ways to present information to my learners.' (Course participants, Year 2)

In the focus groups, participants highlighted various aspects of the course as being significant to them, from learning new techniques to reinforcement of knowledge, opportunities for discussion and learning from peers. Participants also commented on factors related to integration, such as the importance of being aware of cultural differences and recognising that they needed to think more carefully about context:

'It's flagged up to me some of the things that happen in our culture that we take for granted, like birthday cards. It's made me think more about context, bringing out students culture ... similarities, differences. Recognise that integration isn't easy'

¹⁰ not her real name

'Being with other professionals was really important for me ... gives a sense of community.'

'I found the book and the trainers input was really helpful ... The training sessions have been spot on'

'I really liked the emphasis on using what the learner already knows'

'This course allows us to enable learners to access everyday society ... builds bridges from classroom to outside world'

The course also increased participants' confidence in teaching learners at this level. Comments from the Year 2 Wednesday course participants included:

'It's made a huge difference ... most of my students have literacy needs. Now I feel more confident and that I know what I'm doing'

'It's been really good to meet and share ideas with everybody'

'This course has been very, very helpful'

Impact for volunteer befrienders

The impact of the project for the ACE volunteer befrienders was also significant as it offered new opportunities and experiences for the women involved. The programme was an extremely successful strand of project activity; feedback from the training programme revealed that more than 90% of participants rated it as 'Excellent', with the rest rating it as 'Good'. Volunteer befrienders recognised and appreciated the challenges and barriers which some women faced, as well as the value of support. Comments included:

'Empathy with people who don't speak English or don't understand the British culture'

'I will support people who are new to the country because they need what I needed when I came here'

'It will help me understand how they feel and what they may need to be made aware of and most of all how to support them in whatever help they need living in a new country and community'

The volunteer befrienders also appreciated the interactive, person-centred and participatory approaches used in the training programme and how these helped them to develop their understanding of the different types of support they could provide:

'Doing role play gave me more ideas how to address and make the person feel comfortable'

'it was the activities we did in class that gave me the chance to experience how it must feel to be new to the English language'

The benefits of the ACE volunteer befriender training and the opportunity to undertake supported volunteering was identified as being a key impact within this strand. Opportunities and outcomes of being involved in this strand identified by the volunteer befrienders themselves included the following:

- doing something new and interesting and with value for other people
- building their own skills, knowledge and confidence in relation to supporting other women
- building their self-esteem and confidence in general
- meeting new people
- learning about and sharing experiences of different cultures
- improving their own English (in some cases)

- developing important skills and experience which will help with current or future work, training or education.

Becoming an ACE befriender provided women with the opportunity to do something new and interesting and which they perceived as having significant value for other people and, at the same time, offering them an opportunity to develop their own skills, knowledge and confidence in relation to supporting other women.

'I feel I have made real friends. They talk about their lives and aspirations. I am always happy to meet and help when needed, encourage and praise as necessary.' (WMC befriender, ACE Year 2)

The bendifenders were able to observe the benefits of their support and the impact on the ACE participants. One befriender described the importance of practising for exams, another helped her learner find information about jobs and a third felt the 'coffee and chat' morning really helped those that came: *'they learn new words and how to pronounce them'*.

The value of the befriender training and the support of the befriender co-ordinators was very important in giving the bendifenders confidence in themselves to carry out their role. They felt the regular KIT (Keeping in Touch) meetings were important and they were usually well attended.

The bendifenders enjoyed the opportunity to meet new people – learners, teachers, other bendifenders, ACE project staff as well as getting to know the centre staff better. The reported how much they valued the opportunity to learn about and share experiences of different cultures through the different aspects of their volunteering role and activities.

The continuation of befriending post-ACE project was explored by four of the volunteers who discussed the possibility of setting up a 'Learning Circle'¹¹.

Further details of the impact for bendifenders and their learners can be found in the supporting research undertaken by UCL Institute of Education.

Impact for partners/centres

Partners and centres were very positive about the value that being part of the ACE project brought to their organisation. The practical aspects of partnership working had been a huge benefit to both centres which had formed productive relationships with each other and with Learning Unlimited. Both managers and teachers had found it useful to have the opportunity to meet regularly and share ideas and resources. The ACE project had introduced them to new materials, such as ESOL Nexus and volunteering guidance, which had been shared more widely with other members of staff at their centres. Moreover, being involved in the project had widened horizons: inviting local organisations to events, engaging with the local community, meeting new people.

An important element of the ACE project was that centres were able to enrol learners who were not eligible for SFA-funded provision and who would therefore have been excluded from the mainstream ESOL provision. It had been interesting to learn more about the needs of TCN women learners and to view them more holistically. One partner felt that the ACE project had 'revitalised' the whole ESOL department and reminded them that ESOL was not just about learning English and passing exams; it was far more – culture, confidence, communication, etc.

¹¹ <http://www.englishmyway.co.uk/learning-circles>

Partners observed that the ACE learners had been very active and involved in all the different activities on offer, more so than their general ESOL learners. The trips had been '*immensely useful*' as they provided an opportunity for learners to see London; follow up learning in class augmented the learning experience. Going out, getting to know the local area, travelling and visiting new places had all helped learners become more independent, especially ACE1 learners.

The taster courses were an innovative way of being able to offer different things and the termly events had raised awareness of the topics not only for the ACE learners but also more widely within their centres. They were very successful and well attended, particularly in Year 2.

The partners felt that it had taken a while for befriending to become embedded. It was a new concept and took time to become effective. Where it worked well, befriending helped integration as learners met their befriender outside class. The befriender co-ordinators had been very helpful.

The ACE ESOL teachers had enjoyed being part of the project in spite of the challenges. Some initially had reservations as it was different to their usual ESOL teaching - they had to incorporate more 'citizenship' topics into their teaching and support the different strands of the project. However, by the end of the project, all the teachers felt it had been a successful experience.

5. Recommendations

The following recommendations are intended to help inform future projects, similar projects, programmes or interventions with a similar target group, i.e. TCN women who have come to settle in the UK.

For learners

- a. Learners greatly value the opportunity to develop their skills in English and frequently ask for more contact than is being provided. It is important to work with funders and providers to try and identify how much contact is possible (through tutors as well as volunteer support such as befrienders and informal 'coffee and chat' sessions), within the budget available and informed by learners' availability.
- b. It would be useful to provide similar programmes which could include refugees and EU nationals.
- c. Crèche /child-minder support for pre-school children is essential.

Courses, content and delivery

- a. Graded termly courses enable learners at each centre to be placed according to level so that their learning and achievement is maximised.
- b. Provision of additional ESOL 'basic literacy' courses is essential for learners with no or very little literacy.
- c. Trips, visits, bolt-on short courses and tasters provide additional, wider learning opportunities and enrich the learning programme.
- d. It is important to build information about befrienders, events and trips into learners' induction programmes.

Partners

- a. All staff (including administrators) at each centre should be introduced to the project, its objectives and its team before it starts in order to get maximum buy in, input and feedback.
- b. A tutor/partner guide should be provided at the beginning of the project/programme to clarify the tutor's role.
- c. Build awareness of the programme with other teachers and centre staff.
- d. Centres need to be involved in marketing and promoting the programme, for example by including information on their websites.
- e. It is important to keep project record-keeping and reporting to a minimum.

Tutors

- a. Induction programme and regular meetings are important to ensure all ESOL tutors understand the aims, objectives, approaches and opportunities for the programme.
- b. Tutors are key in encouraging learners to participate fully in all aspects of the programme.
- c. It is important for tutors to meet, plan and make resources together in preparation for each course. Dropbox can be a useful tool for sharing resources.
- d. Resource and skills sharing between ESOL tutors at different centres is very valuable.

Volunteering

- a. Volunteer befriender training courses and on-going support are essential.
- b. Befrienders can have a huge contribution to make which is hugely beneficial to the learners, the project or programme and the setting as a whole.
- c. Identifying and supporting other volunteering opportunities for learners can have significant benefits for their language development, confidence and feeling part of their local community.

6. Conclusions

The ACE project was a very successful project which met and/or exceeded all of its targets. It engaged 275 learners, 65 volunteers and, in addition to the 12 staff at Blackfriars Settlement, Southwark and Working Men's College, Camden, a further 262 individuals from a wide range of settings across London, and other regions in the UK attended the TBLEL courses, CPD workshops and dissemination events. The impact for participants, volunteers, partners and other professionals working with the target group, was identified as being significant.

ACE learners came from a wide range of non-EU countries across the world, and had varying degrees of previous education ranging from little or no previous formal education to some learners having degrees or other professional qualifications. For some, their current lives in the UK present wide-ranging challenges such as depression, being a single parent, having children with learning and/or physical disabilities and the pressure of passing exams to gain citizenship. Learners, volunteers and partners all acknowledged the value and impact of the project for these learners in reducing isolation, building skills and confidence, awareness-raising, providing support and advice, and both sign-posting to and learner take up of, centre-based and externally provided services e.g. volunteer centres.

Feedback from learners clearly illustrated the significant and positive impact of the ACE programme in their progress in English, their confidence and well-being, and their increased involvement in the community. In addition, the impact of the project in reducing social isolation and enabling learners and volunteers to build new friendships and social networks was significant.

The multi-strand elements of the ACE project were very successful in maximising the impact of the project, and creating and/or building important links between partners/volunteers, centre staff and other service providers.

The main challenge initially was the recruitment of learners who could meet the eligibility criteria and provide all of the required evidence for funders at WMC. This resulted in small classes and a delayed start to the befriending strand of the project at WMC. However, by the beginning of Year 2 there was a waiting list as word of the project had spread.

ACE tutors and partners actively engaged with the overarching aims and objectives of the project and used a range of creative and effective approaches to course content and delivery. Most learners expressed a desire for more than two classes per week and concern about how they could continue to learn English when the ACE project finished. The provision of childcare/crèche was essential in order to remove a key barrier for participation.

Partners recognised the value of the project in engaging 'hard to reach' women and supporting them in developing their skills, knowledge and confidence and in accessing services, support and opportunities they had not previously known of and/or accessed. The positive impact of the project was also recognised more widely, for example, through feedback at ACE project CPD workshops, training and dissemination events and by the British Council ELTons 2015 Awards when the ACE project was shortlisted for the Award for local innovation.

All stakeholders were actively involved in reviewing and evaluating the ACE project and this process has resulted in suggestions and recommendations for future work with ESOL learners, thus maximising the project's sustainability and impact.

Sustainability and progression for learners was a priority for the project and has been achieved in several ways:

- The volunteer befriender training and support has left a low-cost model for volunteer input and support as well as 'coffee and chat' sessions which partners can use and replicate with little or no budget.
- The free ACE CPD workshops for centre staff developed skills, knowledge and confidence in relation to communication and support for ESOL learners.
- The *Literacy for Active Citizenship* readers and supporting activities are a valuable resource for all ESOL and low-literate learners:
<http://www.learningunlimited.co/resources/publications/acereaders>
- The findings and recommendations from the impact assessment process will be used to inform the design and content of future project proposals and delivery.

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APPENDIX 1: ACE project research questions summary

Aim: To find out how participation in the ACE project has impacted on participants' skills, knowledge and confidence in relation to:

- their language skills
- engaging with life in the UK
- volunteering
- achieving qualifications
- developing additional skills

Focus: Participants' perceptions of the changes in their lives as a result of being part of the ACE project. Based on 'Theory of change' - see http://www.strategicdialogue.org/Integration_Report.pdf

Possible questions

Learners:

- What difference has ACE made to your life?
- Do you feel more part of life in the UK? How?
- Do you feel more confident when communicating with other people? In what ways?
- How has ACE helped that process?
- What else could have helped if it had been available?

ACE tutors:

- What difference has being part of ACE made to your teaching?
- Do you feel learners have made progress in developing their English language skills? In what ways?
- Are learners more confident in their learning?
- How has ACE helped that process?
- What else could have helped if it had been available?

Partners:

- What difference has being part of ACE made to your organisation?
- Do you feel your organisation has become more able to:
 - support the integration of learners settling in the UK?
 - support learners in improving their English language skills?
 - help learners feel more confident?
- How has ACE helped that process?
- What else could have helped if it had been available?

Other ESOL professionals (TBLEL and CPD workshops):

- What difference has this course/workshop made to your teaching?
- Do you feel more able to support the integration of learners who are settling in the UK?
- How has ACE helped that process?
- What else could have helped if it had been available?

Format: Case studies; focus groups; semi-structured interviews; 1:1 interviews; evaluation forms

APPENDIX 2: ACE project research consent form



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ACE (Active Citizenship and English) Project 2013-2015

Research consent form

We would like to invite you to take part in our research about the ACE project.

Your views are very important.

We want to find out if the ACE project has been useful for you – and how.

- We would like you to take part in a group discussion and/or interview and talk about your experiences of the project.
- Your views and opinions may be audio recorded.

If you are happy to take part, please read and tick (✓) the statements, and sign below.

I understand and agree that:

- I am happy to take part in the research.
- the group discussion or interview may be audio recorded.
- what I say, in a group discussion or 1:1 interview, **will be anonymous and confidential.**
- what I say may be used in a report or article.
- my photograph may be taken and used as part of the research report or publicity.
- if I change my mind about the researchers using my contribution, I need to let Karen Dudley or **Judy Kirsh** know before **1st June 2015.**

Name (**BLOCK CAPITALS**):

Signature:

Date: Centre.....

As the research team, we confirm that we have explained to the participant named above the nature and purpose of the research to be undertaken.

LU researcher(s):

Signature: Date:

Signature: Date:



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Appendix 3: ACE project final evaluation and feedback form (learner)



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Active Citizenship and English (ACE) - Year 2 end of course student evaluation

Name	<i>(optional)</i>			
Centre	<i>(please circle)</i> Blackfriars Settlement	Working Men's College		
Course	<i>(please circle)</i> ACE 1	ACE 2	ACE 3	ACE 4

Please tell us what you really think.

Tick ✓ your answers

	☺☺ strongly agree	☺ agree	☹ neutral	☹☹ disagree
My course and teacher				
My course was what I wanted				
My course was well planned				
My course was the right level for me				
I learned a lot on this course				
My English speaking is better				
My English listening is better				
My English reading is better				
My English writing is better				
I learned what I wanted to learn				
The worksheets and activities were good and helped me learn				
My teacher helped me with the things I needed to learn				
I liked learning about London and the UK				
My course helped me with everyday life in the UK				
My class started and finished on time				
My centre, short courses and 'tasters'				
The classrooms were light				
The classrooms had enough space for lessons				
The computers helped me to learn				
The short courses/taster courses were good and helped me learn new things				

	😊😊 strongly agree	😊 agree	😐 neutral	😞 disagree
Support				
Publicity and information were good				
Childcare was good (<i>if you used this</i>)				
My befriender was helpful (<i>if you had one</i>)				
The project helped me feel part of the UK				
Events, visits and trips				
Termly events were interesting and useful				
Visits and trips were interesting				
My progress				
My teacher told me about my progress				
I am more confident about living in the UK				
My English is better				
I am more confident in my learning				
I am more able to talk in a group				
I have made new friends				
I have made friends outside the class				
I am not so worried or stressed				
It is easier for me to talk to people, such as my neighbours, doctor or my children's teacher				
I can progress to the next step				
I have a better chance of getting a job or a better job				
If you disagreed (😞) with any statements, please tell us why:				
What would make the course (even) better for you?				
Did you volunteer or have some work experience? (<i>please circle</i>) YES NO If yes, please give details:				

What did you like best about the ACE project/your ACE ESOL course?
How will you use what you have learned on this course?
What other classes would you like in the future?

What are you planning to do next?

Study more English at this centre		Work as a volunteer	
Study something else at this centre		Use what I learned to help me find a job	
Study at a different centre or college		Use what I learned to find a different, or better job	
Learn on my own		Use what I learned to work for myself	
Share my learning with my family		Stay friends with people from the course	
Other (please tell us)			

Is there anything else you would like to tell us? (If you need more space, please turn over)

Appendix 4: Questionnaire for participants



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ACE project semi-structured questionnaire for participants (learners)

Name (optional) date of interview

Interviewer

1. Background

- Age
- Nationality
- First language
- Other languages
- Education – highest qualification
- Other (e.g. country travelled from, family background)

2. Involvement in project

- How long did you attend ACE classes for?
- Did you participate in any events?
- Did you go on trips/visits?
- Did you attend any tasters/short courses?
- Did you have a befriender?
- Did you volunteer? (details)
- Did you do anything else at home/outside as a result of the ACE project (e.g. internet (ESOL Nexus website), questions with family/husband, do anything independently (visit places)?

3. Looking back over the past year/2 years, what is the biggest change for you as a result of being involved in the project?

Possible follow up questions:

- *From among these changes, what do you think was the biggest change of all?*
- *What did you do?*
- *What skills did you use?*
- *What did you learn?*
- *Did any particular experience contribute to this change?*

- How did these changes happen? (refer to specific activities, achievements, facts, figures, stories, etc.)
- Has being involved in the project ...
 - increased your knowledge of English Yes/No. How?

 - Increased your confidence in speaking/listening to/reading/writing English? Yes/No.
How? (*give examples*)

 - helped your understanding of life in the UK Yes/No.
How?

 - helped you/will help you to integrate into life in the UK Yes/No.
How?
- What else could have helped it if had been available?

4. Implications

- What effect has being involved in the project had on your future plans?

5. Other comments



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