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# EVALUATION OF LEARN ENGLISH AT HOME (LEAH) SERVICES

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Year 1 Report - April 2021 – October 2022

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## Executive Summary

### Background

Learn English at Home (LEAH) is a charity working mainly across Kingston and Richmond to support vulnerable ethnic minority adults with very low levels of English in complex socioeconomic circumstances. LEAH often works with refugees, asylum seekers, migrants, and people that have experienced trafficking and modern-day slavery; many of whom have experienced a range of different traumas. The central focus of LEAH is personalised language support to allow their clients to communicate independently in areas of health, wellbeing, education, and work. The charity trains volunteers to provide English language support either online or in person. LEAH offers both 1:1 and classes and also runs trips/visits/walks for the clients.

The aim of the evaluation is to answer the following questions:

- To what extent do LEAH's services enable clients to
  - improve their English skills
  - better support their families
  - increase their confidence and participation in community activities
  - access local services, education and employment
  - improve their overall health and well-being
- Which of the LEAH's service features are particularly effective in achieving these outcomes?
- What are the challenges and barriers to reaching these outcomes?

### Methodology

This report is a part of a 3-year evaluation of LEAH's services and their contribution to the improvement of the lives of people who are learning English. The year 1 report looks at all quantitative data available between April 2021 and Oct 2022 that covers 1:1 support and community language learning classes. A more in-depth exploration of the classes is included in the report based on the qualitative data. The three types of LEAH classes are included: Communicating with Schools, English Language Community classes and In Work Progression English Language classes.

The evaluation uses a mixed methods research approach and draws on both a qualitative and quantitative approach to data collection and analysis. Four focus groups, 2 pair interviews and 1 individual interview involving 20 people who attended a range of LEAH classes were the main qualitative data source. The quantitative approach used secondary analysis of existing LEAH data available for a time

period between April 2021 and October 2022 containing background information about clients, their involvement with the organisation and the outcomes of the LEAH 1:1 and class support.

## Key Findings

The report provides strong evidence that LEAH's support for clients is very positive, and this is complemented by both quantitative and qualitative evidence of impact.

### **Improving clients' English skills:**

The analysis of the pre and post monitoring data collected during initial LEAH sessions and followed up at review sessions provides clear evidence for a range of improvements made in respect to the LEAH clients' English language skills. Clients experienced improvement in language skills on average in each of the four main areas of language (speaking, listening, reading and writing) and their skills in English on average went up a level after their participation in the project.

The qualitative data shows a range of examples of how the clients' English improved as a result of using the LEAH service. This is demonstrated in the range of places and spaces clients can now use English that they did not / could not do before, in the improved quality and length of their communications in English and their increased confidence to use English instead of relying on others.

This improvement in client's English has also indirect effects on local service providers, where for example health and education workers are better able to understand and communicate important issues about the clients and their children. It also takes the financial pressure off these providers to pay for interpreters.

### **Reducing clients' social isolation and increasing their confidence and participation in community activities:**

As clients' English language skills improve, they become more confident and independent in their everyday lives. The quantitative data suggests that most improvement takes place as clients learn about local services available to them and getting their needs (or those of their children) across. LEAH clients become more confident in phoning GP, schools and other local services to arrange appointments or to make an emergency call. LEAH clients evidently became more confident attending health services and their children's schools after their engagement with LEAH services.

There are **features of support from LEAH that are effective in leading to the above outcomes**. These include:

- One-on-one support which provides tailored support to the specific needs of clients, enables quicker progress and takes place in a supportive environment for clients who often lack confidence (or the ability) to join a class.
- The supportive learning environment provided by LEAH is key to the learning experience, both in terms of the increased confidence that this can give clients and also the increased quality of provision a trusting relationship encourages.
- Individualised support provided by LEAH services helps create a safe mental, and in some cases physical, space to learn English for LEAH clients who have experienced a range of different traumas and would not be able to learn in a traditional formal learning environment.
- The holistic, high quality support clients experience from LEAH staff and volunteer tutors, in terms of their both their learning experiences and the signposting to future provision.

- The enthusiasm and professionalism of LEAH tutors who give their time voluntarily to support others.

There were also **challenges and barriers** to reaching the above outcomes:

- LEAH support staff are incredibly busy and there are financial constraints on the service. As a result LEAH have been unable to provide some of the support they would like, for example longer or more frequent language classes or signposting clients to some alternative future provision.
- There was a sense that many clients weren't getting enough access to English outside of their lessons. LEAH have developed a series of social activities and clients are encouraged to watch English language media. However, for many clients their use of English while improving, remains limited.
- Ensuring clients and volunteer tutors are kept up to date with information about the LEAH services and how those are linked and what is available to what groups, as there were examples of respondents not being fully aware of the length of support and the work LEAH does to support clients to reach the next stage and the opportunities available.

## Recommendations

- LEAH to consider its main aims and **strategic development** and how diverse the services LEAH provides can be to keep the quality of language support.
- The **volunteers** need to receive **appropriate training** and also engage with ongoing CPD to keep the quality of LEAH services at the same level.
- The **number of available volunteers** also needs to increase if LEAH services stay diverse and broad.
- LEAH to look at how it **communicates** with stakeholders (such as referrers, volunteers and clients) to identify ways this might be enhanced further.
- While the **data** already collected by LEAH is of good quality and provides a lot of information about the clients and their journeys through LEAH 1:1 support services, there are some changes that would improve the monitoring and allow for a more in-depth evaluation of the services. All changes and additions/revisions to the data collection need to consider a balance between the amount and quality of the data and the resources needed for its collection and maintenance of the databases.
- **Next evaluation** should include data on volunteers to explore their profile, needs and experiences as well as the views of LEAH clients, administrators and volunteers about the in-person and online LEAH services.