

# Learn English at Home (LEAH)

## Evaluation of LEAH Services

### Year 2

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Learn English at Home (LEAH) is a charity working mainly across Hounslow, Kingston and Richmond to support vulnerable ethnic minority adults with very low levels of English in complex socio-economic circumstances. LEAH 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 English language support that will enable their clients to communicate independently in areas of health, wellbeing, education, and work. The charity trains volunteers to provide this free English language support service, which is offered online or in person, in a community class or on a 1:1 basis.

## EVALUATION APPROACH

Following an evaluation of the impact of LEAH's services upon its clients in 2022-23, this second year of evaluation focuses on those volunteers who are critical to delivering these services. The aim of the Year 2 evaluation was to understand the profile of LEAH volunteers, their needs and interests, how they are recruited and trained, their experience of working with LEAH, and what challenges and barriers are faced that need to be addressed.

This evaluation uses a mixed methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative data to answer evaluation questions. The quantitative part of the evaluation made use of available administrative data collected by LEAH about their volunteers as well as LEAH's own monitoring data which includes client sociodemographic and assessment data. The qualitative part included interviews and focus groups with a range of volunteers.

## MAIN FINDINGS

Overall, there was very strong positive support from the volunteers not only for the work LEAH does and the service it provides to clients, but also for all the support it offers to its volunteers from the point of initial contact to ongoing support and development opportunities when they volunteer with LEAH.

**As the analysis of the Year 2 client data demonstrates and as evidenced in Year 1 report there are a range of positive improvements** seen for LEAH clients', both in improvements in their English language skills, but particularly in **their broader experiences of social integration**. The data showed clients experience improvements in their language skills in each of the four main areas of language (speaking, listening, reading and writing); their skills in English go up a level on the 1-4 monitoring scale after their engagement with LEAH services. Linked to the clients' improvement of English language skills they also become **more confident and independent** in their everyday lives.

The qualitative data from focus groups with volunteers also shows a range of examples of how their **clients' English has improved** because 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 the communication** in English, and their **increased confidence to use English** instead of relying on others.

The evaluation clearly demonstrated that there are **features of LEAH's support that are very effective in leading to the above outcomes. In all of these, volunteers play a central and significant role.** These include:

- Supplying a service very resource efficient that no other national or local more formal services could match.
- Tailored support to the specific needs of clients enables quicker progress and takes place in a supportive environment for clients who often lack the confidence (or the ability) to join a class.
- There is careful and considered matching of clients to volunteer tutors.
- For many volunteers and clients, the relationship formed between them has been key to the learning experience, both in terms of the increased confidence that this can give clients and the increased quality of provision a strong relationship encourages.
- The enthusiasm, commitment and professionalism of LEAH volunteers who give their time voluntarily to support others.
- The quality of the LEAH training programme for volunteer tutors. LEAH appeals to volunteers, particularly because of the high-quality training it provides, but also because it fits with volunteers' personal values and experiences.
- Volunteers enjoy their experience, and their motivation to continue increases. This enables their professional growth with the support from the established learning community of volunteer tutors, coordinators and trainers.
- The positive experience of volunteering with LEAH helps develop its reputation and continues to attract new volunteers.

There were **challenges and barriers identified** to reaching the above outcomes for LEAH;

- LEAH support staff are incredibly busy and there are financial constraints on the service. As a result, LEAH has been unable to provide some of the support they would like to support the learning needs of volunteers and their needs for teaching, particularly technology used for class teaching.
- While volunteers stay with LEAH for an average of 2 years, increasing the length of average engagement of volunteers would boost the number of clients LEAH could support. LEAH clearly supports volunteers well and has some approaches in place but could take a more sustained approach to volunteer retention.
- Ensuring volunteer tutors are kept up to date with information about the support they can access, as there were examples of respondents not being fully aware of what training and other support is available.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### DEVELOPING LEARNING COMMUNITIES OF VOLUNTEERS

This section focuses on the changes or developments that could be made to enhance LEAH's support of its volunteers, to enable the charity to better meet its aims and continue delivering high quality services. Based on the collated evidence, here are the suggestions for the LEAH team to consider.

#### *Volunteer Recruitment*

The diverse ways in which individuals learned about LEAH—through volunteer fairs, online platforms, and other volunteering organizations—demonstrate the importance of having a multifaceted approach to recruitment. It's particularly encouraging that potential volunteers have found the organization through various channels. Here are some recommendations based on this information:

- **Online presence and website:** Continue to prioritise and enhance LEAH's online presence, especially the website. A professional and user-friendly website can serve as a valuable tool for providing information, showcasing success stories of volunteers and clients, and attracting potential volunteers. Regularly update the website to reflect the organisation's achievements and ongoing initiatives.
- **Professional approach to impact:** Highlight the serious and professional approach of LEAH in recruitment materials and communication. Emphasize the impact the organisation is making and the importance of the work being done. This could be achieved by posting short annual impact reports. This can set LEAH apart from other volunteering opportunities and attract individuals who are committed to making a meaningful contribution.
- **Social media presence:** Leverage social media platforms to reach a wider audience. Regularly share updates, success stories, and relevant content to keep the online community informed and engaged. Encourage volunteers to share their experiences on social media platforms.
- **Testimonials and success stories:** Showcase volunteer testimonials on the website and in promotional materials. Real-life accounts from current and past volunteers can be powerful in conveying the positive impact of volunteering with LEAH.
- **Clear communication channels:** Ensure that information about volunteering opportunities and the application process is easily accessible on the website. Provide clear contact information for inquiries, making it simple for potential volunteers to reach out with questions.
- **Diversity in recruitment channels:** Maintain diversity in recruitment channels. While online platforms are crucial, continue to explore new opportunities and partnerships with community organisations to reach individuals who may not be active online.

## *Volunteer Motivations*

Understanding how volunteers find out about LEAH and what attracts them to the organisation is crucial for recruiting and retaining dedicated individuals. It's great to hear that LEAH emphasizes high-quality training, aligns with personal values, and provides personal benefits for volunteers. Here are some key insights that might help optimize the recruitment strategy for LEAH:

- **Training quality:** Continue to prioritise and enhance the quality of training programs. Volunteers appreciate organisations that invest in their development, making them more effective in supporting clients.
- **Alignment with personal values:** Emphasise and communicate the values of LEAH in recruitment materials. Highlight how the organisation's mission aligns with the personal values and beliefs of potential volunteers.
- **Life stage considerations:** Recognise and cater to the specific life stages of potential volunteers. If many volunteers are at a particular stage where they can commit time and see personal benefits, tailor messaging to resonate with individuals in similar life stages.
- **Appealing to personal benefits:** Emphasize the personal benefits of volunteering, such as the opportunity to make new friends, learn new skills, and contribute to the community. These factors can be powerful motivators for individuals considering volunteering.
- **Sharing success and challenges:** Share stories and testimonials from current volunteers and from the clients about their positive experiences with LEAH. Authentic testimonials can be compelling and help potential volunteers connect with the organisation on a personal level. For existing volunteers send them extracts or summaries from evaluation reports. Consider organise annual workshops for volunteers to feedback to LEAH and plan LEAH's future work together.

## *Training volunteers*

- **Existing volunteer insights as a bridge between training and reality:** Invite existing volunteers to share their insights and experiences during the training sessions. They can provide valuable context, real-life examples, and practical tips that align with the day-to-day realities of volunteering. This also could be a series of short pre-recorded videos to be available on LEAH's website. This sharing of experiences can serve as a bridge between the theoretical aspects covered in training and the practical challenges volunteers may face in their roles. This connection can help volunteers see the relevance of the training content in the context of their actual volunteering experiences.
- **Q&A bank:** Facilitate Q&A sessions or discussions where volunteers can directly interact with the team leaders and trainers. This allows volunteers to seek clarification on specific scenarios, gain additional insights, and build a stronger

connection with the team leaders and their peers. Have a Q&A bank on the website that can be updated or run by an AI bot after each training course.

- **Ongoing support mechanisms and feedback loop:** Encourage open communication between the volunteer coordinators and the training facilitators as well as volunteers. This three-way feedback loop can help refine the training curriculum based on real-world experiences and continuously improve its effectiveness as well as serve as an ongoing support mechanism. This could include regular check-ins, team meetings, or mentorship opportunities to address any evolving challenges or questions.
- **Collaborative training design:** Collaborate with the volunteer coordinators in the design or review of the training curriculum. Their input can ensure that the training content is aligned with the specific needs and expectations of the volunteers and LEAH.
- **Showcase success stories:** Incorporate success stories about clients, and volunteer experiences, from the volunteer coordinators and other experienced volunteers into the training materials. This not only inspires new volunteers but also provides practical examples of effective strategies and approaches. Can also be set as a series of shorter videos on 'best practice'.

### *Supporting volunteers – key considerations*

Key to the success of LEAH is attracting and sustaining the engagement of their volunteer tutors. It is very important that LEAH is able to support and nurture their volunteers, so they are able to support clients over a period of time and limit possible volunteer dropouts. Suggestions for possible consideration:

- **Continuous work on communication:** continue existing communication to volunteers to include information about resources volunteers could use with clients and where they can access the resources, for example on topic areas or tying in with cultural events. Reminder communication to volunteers about the online storage facility LEAH hosting resources and resend information about online resources and any training available.
- **Mentorship:** Consider implementing mentorship programs where experienced volunteers can support and guide newer volunteers. This can create a supportive environment for learning and growth within the organisation. This will also help give experienced volunteer tutors opportunities to develop and/or take on more responsibility, if they wish.
- **Professional development opportunities:** Acknowledge and leverage the existing qualifications and experience of volunteers. Provide opportunities for them to share their expertise with fellow volunteers or participate in professional development activities to further enhance their skills. Provide opportunities for all volunteers to continue their professional development
- **Specialised roles:** Identify specific roles or projects within LEAH where individuals with teaching experience can make the most impact. This might

include leading advanced language classes, providing one-on-one tutoring for learners with specific needs, or mentoring other volunteers.

- **Flexibility in roles:** Provide flexibility in volunteer roles where possible to accommodate the varied skills and interests of individuals. This can ensure that volunteers can contribute in ways that align with their expertise and preferences.
- **Peer learning communities:** Foster a sense of community among volunteers creating a platform or forum for them to collaborate, share resources, and exchange ideas can enhance the overall effectiveness of the teaching team. It will also provide space for volunteers to talk about their needs and bring any ideas for the service, growing on the opportunities currently presented by the LEAH. This will facilitate networking opportunities for volunteers within the broader education community. This can help them stay connected, share best practices, and stay informed about current trends in language teaching.
- **Continuous feedback loop:** Establish a feedback loop where volunteers can provide input on program design, curriculum development, or any other areas where their experience can positively impact LEAH services. It is essential to ensure that all volunteers receive regular updates on any changes or additions to materials.
- **Materials and resources:** LEAH could consider developing pre-prepared modules or sessions that cover key topics. These modules should be comprehensive and ready to use, requiring minimal customisation or preparation by volunteers.
- **FAQs and troubleshooting guides:** Review existing short video tutorials that walk volunteers through and address common issues or questions volunteers may encounter could be created and be available on the hub. Remind volunteers where they can find the videos.
- **Accessibility:** It is important to make sure that all materials are accessible, taking into consideration different learning styles and any potential accessibility needs among the volunteer group.
- **Exit interviews:** Systematise existing exit interviews for tutors, carried out when they leave LEAH. Improved processes could allow data from these interviews to be used in evaluations such as this one. This will help explore further ways to improve the retention of LEAH volunteer tutors.

It is recognised that, at the time of completing this evaluation, LEAH have already acted on and implemented many of the above recommendations.