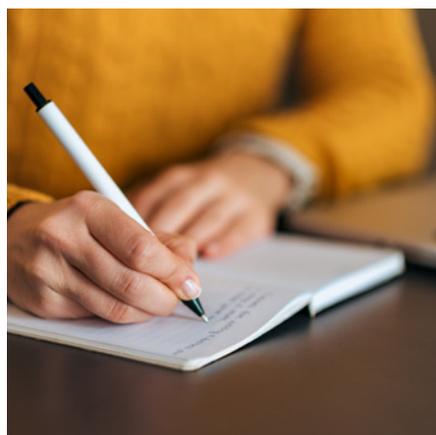
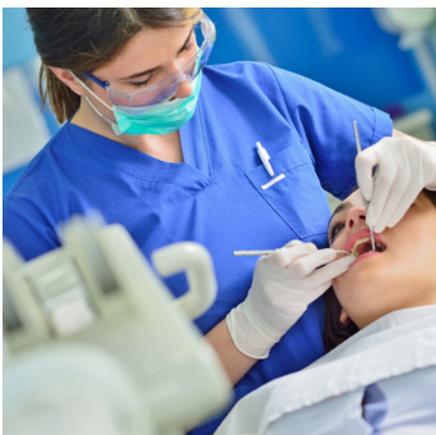


ESOL FOR REFUGEES: RESOURCES FOR NEW ARRIVALS



Farid

Background

Farid and his family arrived in the UK four months ago as part of the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme. He lives with his wife and three children age 19, 10 and 8. After fleeing Syria, the family lived in Jordan for six years.

Previous education and employment

Farid left school when he was 15 after completing nine years of basic education. Farid worked as a bus driver in Syria. This was to supplement the income that he and his family had from farming their land. In Jordan, Farid worked as a lorry driver so that he could pay rent and for basic provisions for his family.

Languages

Farid's first language is Arabic which he can read and write. He does not speak any other languages. On arrival in England he could speak a few words of English but not many: *'it was difficult to remember; it was a long time ago'*. He had learned some English at school so he was aware of the key differences such as the different direction of writing and reading in Arabic and in English. He also had some familiarity with the Roman alphabet. This is helping Farid to learn to read and write in English.

Early integration experience and access to ESOL

Farid and his family have had support in dealing with key agencies and attending formal appointments such as with GP surgeries or children's schools. Farid values the support offered but he is keen to learn the English language and have a better understanding of UK systems and his rights and responsibilities.

Farid, his wife and their 19 year old son were supported by their case worker to join an ESOL course and started attending three weeks after arrival. The course is aimed specifically at resettled refugees from Syria. Farid feels that he is making good progress and he has been told that he can move into Entry Level 1 ESOL. However, he is reluctant to do so as he prefers to stay in the same class as his family. His wife and son had to start 'from zero' and would not be able to move onto another course with him.

Digital technologies

Farid is able to use his smartphone for internet browsing and to keep in touch with support agencies. He uses WhatsApp and Facebook to keep in touch with friends and family. Being adept at using Google Translate is helping Farid to be independent in some situations. For example, he has used this to help him use a cashpoint. He uses the Duolingo app to help him learn English.

Future aspirations

Farid is aware that his family rely on him for communication and is supporting them to learn so that they can be more independent. He would like to progress his English language learning through every possible opportunity. He would like to work as a lorry or a bus driver again but he has not yet had an opportunity to explore how this may be possible and if he needs to pass another driving test.

Key message

Farid recognises the value in his son and wife learning some English before arrival in the UK, basics like 'hello', 'thank you' and similar. He also thinks that it is important to start learning as soon as possible after arrival.

Janna

Background

Janna is 28. She arrived in the UK 3 years ago. She lives with her husband and 3 children. After leaving Syria, Janna spent five years in Lebanon. She found life in Lebanon difficult. She kept busy looking after her family. Two of Janna's children were born in Lebanon.

Previous education and employment

Janna left school at the age of 18 after completing her secondary education. She achieved good grades and her aspiration was to become a pharmacist but the university was expensive and she and her family could not afford to pay. She has never been in formal employment.

Languages

Janna's first language is Arabic. She does not speak any other languages. When she came to the UK she knew few words in the English language such as yes, no and hello. She also knew that it is written from left to right and could recognise many Roman alphabet letters but could not write anything.

Early integration experience and access to ESOL

Learning English has been Janna's priority since arrival in the UK. She started to learn in a class for families and then moved to ESOL Entry Level 1. After three years of learning, she is in ESOL Level 1. She is also studying maths at Entry 3.

Learning English is very important for Janna so that she can be independent in different situations like going to the GP or communicating with her children's schools. Although she and her family had a lot of support after arrival, the support was reduced after one year. Thinking about a time when she no longer had a support worker Janna said: *'it was very hard for me. I had to ask different people about things but I was not confident to ask. I had to ask my neighbour how to pay my gas bill.'*

Digital technologies

Janna is confident in using the internet and different mobile phone apps. She has used the internet to learn English even before she joined the ESOL class. She thinks that the internet on its own is not enough to learn English although, having a smartphone makes it easier to manage difficult situations that require English language. She uses Google Maps to find places and Google Translate to help her when she does not understand.

Future aspirations

Janna said, *'My life in Syria was beautiful before the war... I miss it.'* She now wishes to make most of her new life in the UK. She would like to continue with education and train to be a pharmacy technician: *'This is my dream but first I need to learn English.'*

Key messages

Janna feels that there are not enough opportunities to learn and to practise English outside of ESOL class: *'It is easy to become isolated if you cannot speak English and if you don't understand things here'*. Learning about culture, such as timekeeping for appointments and queueing, can help to avoid difficult situations. People can get upset if they miss an appointment because they arrived 5 minutes late.

Bassem

Background

Bassem arrived in the UK 2.5 years ago. He arrived with his family, his wife and three children; the youngest was 2 months old at the time. He left Syria in 2011 and was a refugee in Lebanon for 5 years before being resettled in the UK.

Previous education and employment

In Syria, Bassem left school after completing nine years of basic education. He then trained as a stone mason and worked mainly in building industry hand-carving different types of stone used in buildings.

Languages

Bassem's first language is Arabic which he can read and write. He did not speak any other languages. Arabic script is written and read from right to left. Bassem was aware that the English language is written from left to right but he was not familiar with the Roman alphabet. He thinks this has slowed his progress in ESOL.

Early integration experience and access to ESOL

Bassem could not speak any English when he arrived in the UK. He was very worried about how he will manage his and his family's needs. After one month he started attending ESOL and has found this encouraging: *'Slowly, slowly I was starting to say some words and to understand a little. ...I started to chat with people and help my family a little'*. He is currently enrolled in two ESOL Entry Level 2 courses that he attends four days a week.

For a long time Bassem avoided shopping in places where he needed to speak to people – this has changed as he is able to say 'sorry I don't understand; please repeat'.

Bassem commented that it is difficult to know what to expect before coming to England because different people give you different information: *'This is difficult because we don't know our rights and duties and we are sometimes afraid of causing problems because we don't understand.'*

His cousin arrived in the UK some time before Bassam. He supported Bassam and his family with understanding how things work, where to shop and similar. This was very important for them, especially at the beginning.

Digital technologies

Bassem said that he can use the internet and mobile phone but he is not as confident as his wife. He and his wife have tried to learn together at home as much as possible from day one. His wife has made better progress in learning – she is in an ESOL Level 1 class.

Future aspirations

Bassem is eager to study as much as possible to improve his English language skills. He wishes to achieve ESOL Level 1 as this would enable him to access non-ESOL courses and to find work and support his family. He has not had a chance to explore the potential of using his stonemasonry skills in the UK. If that is not possible, he would like to work as a uPVC window and door fitter.

Key message

Overall, Bassem feels less worried and more positive about his future in the UK. It would be good for other people to understand that it is hard to learn English quickly. It is still a challenge for Bassem to understanding different accents and when people speak fast: *'sometimes people continue to talk even after I say that I don't understand'*.

Khaled

Background

Khaled arrived in the UK 6 months ago to claim asylum because his life in Egypt was not safe. He has a wife and two children in Egypt and he misses them very much. He spent two months in emergency accommodation in London and the Midlands before being moved to his current accommodation in the North East. His physical and mental health are poor.

Previous education and employment

Khaled has completed a university degree in Egypt and has worked for the government as well as run his own advertising business. He was able to support his family until a year ago when he was made redundant and was forced to close his business.

Languages

Khaled's first language is Arabic and he speaks some French. He has been exposed to the English language through his education and his work but has never studied it. He is familiar with the Roman alphabet and although he has not used it a lot in the past, it is helping him to learn to read and write in English.

Early integration experience and access to ESOL

Khaled is still waiting for an appointment for an ESOL assessment¹. In the meantime he has been able to join an ESOL course which he has been attending for 3 weeks now. Khaled thinks that it is too advanced as there is a lot that he does not understand and is not able to follow. However, he is glad to be finally learning and meeting other people. He has already learned some helpful words for shopping such as 'how much' and 'can I return and have a refund'.

What would help Khaled most is to have a better understanding of the asylum process and what will happen to him when he gets a decision. He has been given some written information about asylum claim which he has tried to translate but he is struggling to understand it. He shares accommodation with some other people who have helped him to find his way around the city. He is not using public transport as it is too expensive. He's been told that he may be able to get a bicycle from a local project.

Digital technologies

Khaled uses his mobile phone to access the internet but only if there is free WiFi. He can conduct internet searches in English and he uses online dictionaries and Google translator.

Future aspirations

Khaled would like to study politics at a university and he is hopeful that he will get accepted for a postgraduate course. Once he is allowed to work, his priority would be to find a job so that he can support himself and his family.

Key message

Khaled would like to study English every day and feels that this will not only help him to learn faster and better but will also help with his mental health: *'It is very difficult to sit in my room and do nothing all day. I like to be with other people and to learn'*.

¹ Khaled can use Government funding to supplement the cost of his ESOL classes. The Government provides a 50% contribution to the costs of English language classes for asylum seekers in certain circumstances (if an asylum seeker aged 19 or over has been legally in the UK for longer than six months and is still awaiting a decision on their claim through no fault of their own, or if they have failed in their claim but have been granted support under the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999).

Zareena

Background

Zareena is from Afghanistan. She arrived in the UK three years ago with her husband and her daughter who was two at the time. They were granted refugee status after 20 months. She is in her late twenties. She was relieved to hear that she and her family were allowed to stay in the UK.

Previous education and employment

Zareena left school after completing nine years of compulsory education. After leaving school, she stayed at home and helped her mother with housework. She got married when she was 18 years old. Although she moved to a city where her husband worked, she never had a job.

Languages

Zareena speaks Pashto which she can read and write. She can understand and speak Persian but not very well. Pashto and Persian use the Arabic alphabet which means that they are written and read right to left. Zareena was not literate in a Roman script until she started in ESOL class.

Early integration experience and access to ESOL

After arriving in the UK, Zareena was busy looking after her daughter and her husband who was ill. She had no knowledge of the English language and although her husband could speak English, because he was unwell, Zareena struggled with shopping, with health services and with the asylum process.

Her first experience of learning English was through a mothers and toddlers group. She enjoyed attending it but it was only for 1 hour a week and it stopped over the summer. After they received a positive decision, Zareena's husband's health got better so he was able to look after their daughter and she was able to join an ESOL course. She started at Entry Level 1 and is now in an Entry Level 3 class. She feels that she has progressed well and is much more confident to do things on her own. For example, when her daughter started school, she had some help from a friend from her ESOL class but managed the process without an interpreter.

Digital technologies

Zareena is confident in using her mobile phone. She has a laptop that she can use to access the internet and learn English online. She has an email account which she uses regularly.

Future aspirations

Zareena would like to work with children, preferably as a teacher. She has made enquiries at her daughter's school about volunteering and she thinks that she will be able to do a few hours a week as classroom support from September. She is also starting a maths course in September. When she completes ESOL Level 1, she is planning to start to train to be a teacher.

Key messages

Zareena said that it was very difficult for her to manage without the English language and with her husband being sick. They were worried about their future and felt isolated: *'I couldn't talk to people in shops or my neighbours ... because we had very little money we stayed in a house a lot.'* She feels that she would have made a better progress if she was able to access ESOL classes sooner with a creche for her daughter and that this would have helped to meet other people.

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