

Glasgow Clyde College: ESOL 16+ Programme

Introduction

Unaccompanied young people aged between 16-20 years old have been arriving in Glasgow for the last 12 years. This group of young people have generally had little education or a disrupted educational journey. They are mostly young people claiming asylum as a result of either civil unrest in their countries (e.g. Afghanistan, Sudan and Somalia) or because of other human rights abuses. Such abuses include involuntary conscription and imprisonment in Eritrea and fear of the death penalty for their religious or political beliefs in Iran, Iraq and Kurdistan.

This exemplar describes one college's approach to working with young unaccompanied asylum seekers and refugees in a post-traumatic stress context. The ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) 16+ Programme is delivered to young people with refugee status or who are unaccompanied asylum seekers. All of the young people participating in this programme will almost always have fractured or interrupted education. It is a very mixed group compared to a group of young people from EU countries. This group has different needs and educational experiences which need to be taken into account.

It is a full time course that runs five mornings a week and over the course of the academic year. The programme runs two classes for two different levels (SCQF level 2 and level 3) in terms of English language. Each class accommodates 20 learners but far more are referred to the college and placed on other programmes and levels. The programme takes a topic based learning approach using other disciplines such as creative arts, outdoor learning and technologies. There is a focus on identifying strengths and talents of the young people and taking a nurturing and peer group approach.

Who is a refugee?

International law recognises refugees under the 1951 UN Convention. When we talk about refugee status we mean someone who has been recognised under the 1951 Convention. The UK is a signatory to the Convention and has international obligations to recognise refugees and provide a place of safety for refugees who are in the UK.

Article 1(A) 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees states that a refugee is a person who: "owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it."

Who is an asylum seeker/person seeking asylum?

A person seeking asylum is a person who has made an application to the Home Office to be recognised as a refugee under the 1951 UN Convention. They are awaiting a decision on their application.

Demographics of the young people on this programme

Over the last ten years since the programme has been running, the make-up of those attending has changed. Initially the programme met the needs of mostly young men from Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia and a smaller percentage of young women usually from Somali or West African countries. Currently we have numbers of trafficked young people from China, Vietnam and young people seeking asylum from Eritrea, Ethiopia and Sudan as well as Afghanistan, Iran and Iraq.

Gap in Provision

In terms of educational opportunities one of the most important is the chance to study ESOL.(English for Speakers of other Languages). Many unaccompanied young people have insufficient language levels to access a school curriculum at National 5 or Higher level, or to study at NQ/NC level. Some may not even be literate in their own languages. Therefore, gaining a level of competency in English is a priority. Before they can begin to think about future vocational studying or higher education they need to gain both confidence in English and SQA qualifications.

As well as being able to access ESOL courses, these young people need to learn with their own peer-group. Not only is this pedagogically appropriate, but it also gives the young people an opportunity to build social relationships and connections with each other. Given their level of vulnerability and need, this group also require extensive guidance and support as well in an age- and context- appropriate curriculum. Learning and teaching resources in ESOL traditionally focus on adults and conventional teaching resources for young people are targeted at specific types of young people such as English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners from European countries such as France and Spain.

The 16+ ESOL programme was developed in response to these needs. In the last 12 years we have created a curriculum that tries to address the specific needs of this group of young people. Firstly, young people are directly referred to the college from major agencies that support them such as Glasgow Social Work Department, British Red Cross and Scottish Guardianship and Legal Services Agency. Information is continually shared about the young person's well-being, attendance and progress. As the young person is seen by teaching staff more regularly than any other agencies, teachers are in a unique position to notice any changes in behaviour or any other concerns. Thus, the young person is supported in the most holistic way possible. This model is similar to that of a guidance teacher role in secondary schools. The level of on-going trauma that this group of young people might face is considerable. They may be dealing with multiple levels of grief and loss of family members, friends, culture and their future dreams. They will also be in precarious situations in terms of their uncertainty about their asylum status

and the fate of family and friends in their own country. Many young people may have been victims of torture or witnessed torture, and suffer from PTSD, depression and anxiety. A number of young people are accessing therapeutic services from Glasgow Anchor Psychological Trauma Team and Freedom for Torture counselling services. The need to be educated with members of their own peer-group who understand the complexities of their lives and experiences is therefore essential.

There was a need to accommodate not just language learning, but also areas of personal and social development. This has included team building, planning for the future, coming to college prepared, study skills and good study habits. For some this kind of programme can act as a bridge between school and college but most young people do not come from school. Those delivering the programme continuously look for relevant resources for this particular age group and their circumstances.

Using creative arts to explore personal and social development themes

Choosing Your Own Motto is an example of where language learning takes place using creative arts. This helps to introduce young people to the idea of taking responsibility for their own learning and acknowledging that sometimes it will be difficult to “keep going” and they need to have something like their own motto to remind them to keep trying. This is done early on in the programme to help establish trust and acts as a way for young people to get to know each other

3D Identity Boxes is a craft project that asks “what do you want people to know about you?” as they are always being asked to tell their story. It gives an opportunity for the young people to tell their story out with the context of the asylum claim process. It can include something about the young person’s background but also their hopes and dreams about the future.

Design a Suitcase is a craft project which shows what the young person has brought with them. It is a celebration of their things including what they have been taught and the games they have played. This topic gives the young people space to show where they have come from and who they are.

Exploring Bridges and Journeys is a field trip to explore all the bridges in Glasgow as a basis for talking about the young person’s journey to Glasgow – this could be adapted to different places in Scotland.

Working with others

Guidance and pastoral care feature heavily in this programme because of the nature of the group and their circumstances. There is a need to liaise with a number of external agencies who are involved in the young person’s life in some form. These agencies could include:

- social work
- accommodation advisors

- guardians
- psychological services

What does it mean for practitioners?

You need to want to work with young people.

You need to be creative in your approaches to working with young people.

You do not have to be creatively inclined. Other approaches you could use could include technology.

You have to be prepared to liaise with other agencies – which might be unusual if you have never done this before.

Practical considerations for planning a similar programme

To run this kind of programme, there needs to be a group of young people. A class can be run for between 10 and 20 people.

Because of the peer group approach, the young people would need to be of a similar language level.

All young people are assessed using an adapted version of the [national initial assessment guide](#) comprising speaking, listening and writing assessments and a small selection of reading texts. The assessment needs to be unthreatening and as simple as possible.

The impact of trauma can be underestimated, and this should be taken into account in terms of the impact on young people and their rate of retention, their ability to concentrate and their ability to process and retrieve information.

Liaising with other agencies is necessary to understand and identify who is going to support the young person and other factors which might affect their attendance on the programme. Young people might have other appointments with other agencies related to their personal circumstances.

These agencies will include:

Social work – if the young person is unaccompanied and under 18, the social work department will need to be kept informed of the young person's involvement in the programme and for social work to make the course tutor aware of any relevant issues which might have an impact. For example, the health and well-being of the young person would be useful to know at the point of initial assessment.

Accommodation providers – this could vary depending on how the young person is being housed for example, a children's home, a children's residential unit or foster family for those who are under 18.

Scottish Guardianship Service – they have a legal responsibility to support young unaccompanied asylum seeking children with their asylum claim. If their asylum claim is refused, this can have a negative impact. Liaising with this service will be helpful in being aware of any developments in relation to this.

Psychological services – any contact from these services with the course coordinator is itself a useful indication of the young person's circumstances.

Cultural Assumptions

There is also a cultural assumption around independent study and homework. For many young people coming from a background where everything is communal being alone to do anything, including learning, is an alien concept. Additionally for this group of young people the question "What do you want to do in the future" can be difficult if not impossible to answer. They have no idea what is possible for them to do and how long it may take for them to get the necessary skills and/ or qualifications. Often young people will say they want to be doctors, pilots etc. This may be because it has been a long held ambition or a family expectation. It can also be one of the few jobs that they are familiar with. Realistic guidance is a very important part of the provision for this group of young people.

What happens to the young people when they complete the programme?

Some people will leave and there is no follow up in terms of what they have gone on to do. This is likely to be due to the next stage of progression being too high for them.

Some people leave and get a job.

Some people move onto an NC or higher course including university.

Key points to consider if planning a similar programme

The programme needs to take a **holistic approach** to involve all agencies that are working with the young person.

The programme is delivered using a **peer group approach**.

The programme has to include **different types of learning** for example outdoor learning and creative arts as a way of looking at issues such as identity. This is a big issue because they are adolescents. It also gives young people a chance to show what they are good at and it is done in a way where conventional adult ESOL classes might not have given them the opportunity to do this. Glasgow Clyde College worked in partnership with the **John Muir Trust and the Forestry Commission** to give young people on the programme an opportunity to learn about nature in Scotland and how to access public places. This learning gave them an opportunity to show what they already knew about botany and animals because some of them came from

rural backgrounds. This learning and use of prior knowledge would not have been possible in the classroom setting.

The programme is planned to take account of the circumstances - that these are **young people who are displaced**.

The programme should be delivered so that it offers them **stability** and to be able to stand on solid ground. The programme should be a stable safe place where they can make friends and build relationships with each other

How the 16+ ESOL Programme is continuing to evolve

Health and Wellbeing

Clyde College continue to identify ways and partners to develop young people and build their capacity. A Seasons for Growth group (www.seasonsforgrowth.co.uk) - a peer-education project on grief and loss, was run with 10 young people for the first time in 2016-17. Two members of staff trained have now been trained as companions for this programme and one more will be attending training in 2017-18.