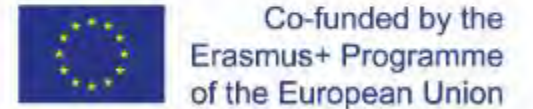


Learning through Lockdown – Volunteers, English Language Learners and Conversation Clubs (VELLCC)

Alex Stevenson, Head of Essential and Life Skills
National Learning and Work Institute, UK

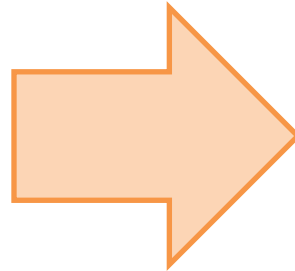
EBSN Annual Conference
Malta, 28 October 2021



Policy Context

Policy

- £21.6m invested by Government in **Community-Based English Language** provision 2013-19. 93,000 adults supported. L&W RCT evaluation helps secure the case for investment.
- Government's *Integrated Communities Action Plan* (2019) announced actions to **boost English language provision** – including developing support for conversation clubs.
- New £5.1m **ESOL for Integration Fund** for 20/21, targeted in 30 local authorities. Includes £1.27m for social clubs and activities e.g. conversation clubs, face-to-face or online.



VELLCC project aims:

- to produce **a model and guidance** for setting up and running English language conversation clubs
- to **create a range of products that provide advice** for individuals and organisations on appropriate roles for volunteers in English language learning, as well as **support materials for volunteers**.
- **Ensure quality** of non-formal English language provision

Background

Evidence Base

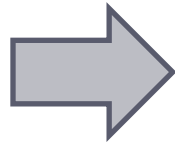
L&W's research and engagement with the wider English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) sector suggests:

- **Community-based English language programmes can be effective** e.g. in boosting language proficiency and supporting social integration.
- Learners benefit when **effective local partnerships** co-ordinate the local offer of formal ESOL and informal provision – e.g. to boost **access and participation**, create **progression routes**, and **respond to diverse local needs**.
- Whilst recognising the **benefits and longstanding contribution of volunteer-led provision** to English language learning, there is a need for its **role and remit** to be properly understood, and to **support volunteers** to carry out appropriate roles effectively.

Research (Early 2020)

Initial research

Rapid literature review



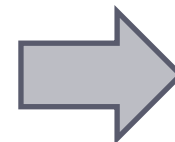
Main research stage

Interviews with conversation club volunteers

Focus groups with range of English language volunteers

Interviews with project leads and volunteer coordinators

Structured observations of conversation clubs



Testing draft resources

Testing in the field by volunteers

Expert ESOL readers

Critical reading by volunteers and project leads

Research Findings

- **Diversity of volunteer roles and backgrounds.** Retired teachers a key group, others motivated by empathy or experience.
- **Diversity of informal and non-formal English language provision** – conversation clubs, activity groups, home tutoring
- **Diversity of participants** - asylum seekers, refugees, economic migrants and others excluded from eligibility for funded formal learning

Research Findings

- **Challenges for volunteers**

- cultural awareness and consideration
- lack of spaces, appropriate resources and other volunteers
- prior educational attainment of participants, including different levels of English language proficiency
- attendance and turnover of participants

- **Challenges for organisations**

- Time and resources to manage volunteers and support effectively
- Practical considerations: safeguarding, DBS check, risk assessments

Research Findings

- **Benefits for volunteers**

- Sense of achievement when participants learn and progress, or achieve other outcomes e.g. making social connections
- Opportunity to meet new and different people, from different countries and cultures
- Learning new skills
- Supporting own mental health and wellbeing

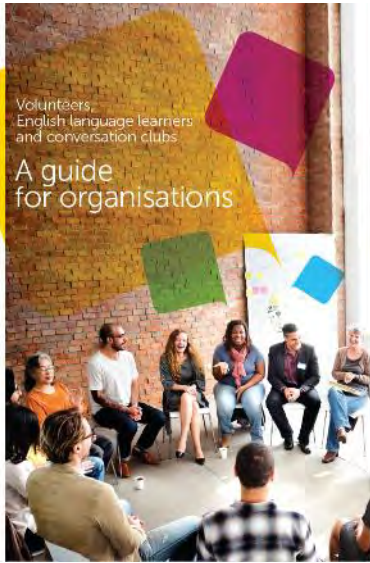
- **Benefits for organisations**

- Enable projects to run effectively – often with limited resources
- Diversity of volunteers contributes a range of expertise and experience

Implications

- **short units**, suitable for volunteers at all levels of experience – with extensive guidance
- **no worksheets** – no printing or photocopying needed
- **adaptable** to needs of different learners and contexts
- focus on **interactive, dynamic activities** for language practice (*not* teaching)
- focus on **practical, useful language**
- **freely accessible** to all

Overview of the resources



- 4 supporting videos and a research report.
- Launched with webinar series July 2020

Responding to Covid: Research Findings (Mid-2020)

Despite the challenges, **many organisations continued online activity**, even when face-to-face sessions become possible again.

- **Zoom and Whatsapp** emerged as popular platforms
- **Practical benefits** of online conversation clubs e.g. travel, venues
- **Language learning benefits:**
 - Ease of **grouping learners by language level**
 - Focus on **conversation**
 - Opportunities for **creativity and innovation** – e.g. guest speakers, sharing home-based activities, participants from far and wide
- Opportunities for participants and volunteers to **learn new digital skills**

Additional considerations for organisers and organisations

- Selecting **accessible technology** and platforms, tailored to low English language and digital skills – and providing support
- Addressing issues of **low digital skills, digital exclusion and poverty**
- Enhancing the participant experience, including **safeguarding and privacy** issues
- Enhancing the volunteer experience, including **support and training**

VELLCC Online



Impact

- *“These are brilliant resources!”* – Regional Strategic Migration Partnership
- *“I’ve just watched the conversation club webinar ... It was very interesting and gave me some good ideas. We are hoping to start a conversation club around health and well-being with our local Roma community.”* – Conversation club organiser
- *“I am so glad the resources have been converted for online use, it’s exactly what we all need!”* – Conversation club organiser



10,000+ unique views
of resources webpage



The VELLCC Model

Conversation club resources guidance



- Key principles and good practice
- 15 topic-based units
- Mind maps
- What to include in a conversation club session - model
- Guidance on using the units

Conversation club model

Welcome	<p>A warm, personal welcome for each participant. If required, participants sign in or you record attendance on a register.</p>
Opening chat/ circle time	<p>Introductions for anyone new. General chatting. Anything to follow up or report back on from the previous session? Any news from anyone?</p>
Getting started	<p>Introduction to the topic. One or more warm up activities linked to the topic. Questions to get the conversation started and find out which aspects of the topic participants are most interested in talking about.</p>
Conversations	<p>One or more main conversations linked to the topic, possibly from several perspectives and with supporting activities.</p>
Closing chat/ circle time	<p>Feedback about today's topic and conversations. Discussion around ideas for any follow up action or research for taking the topic further, e.g. discussing the topic more, arranging a visit to a local place, inviting a speaker in, etc. Sharing ideas and agreeing the main topic for the next session. Information and reminders about any important dates/events coming up.</p>



Topics

1. Shopping



2. Home



3. Family and friends



4. Culture and creativity



5. Health



6. Education and skills



7. Nature and the environment



8. Travel and transport



9. Training and work



10. Local history and landmarks



11. Food and cooking



12. Money



13. Having fun!



14. What's new?



15. Technology



Nature and the environment



Getting started

- Are you more of a city person or country-side person? Why?
- What ideas and tips do you have for being green and reducing waste?

Skills

- What skills can you learn, or teach others, to help protect the environment?
- Are there any outdoor skills you have (like gardening or farming)?

The local area

- What do you know about recycling in this area?
- Which local green spaces do you like going to?

Around the UK

- Is the UK doing enough to help protect the environment?
- What natural areas in the UK have you visited or heard about?

Around the world

- What do you know about Greta Thunberg?
- What are the biggest environmental issues we face and how do you feel about them?

Staying safe

- What are your ideas for practical everyday action to help the environment?
- Are there any dangers to be aware of when you're enjoying nature (talk about anywhere you know)?

Useful apps and websites

- Local council's website for information on parks and recycling
- <https://uk.freecycle.org/>

Taking the topic further

- Visit the local recycling centre.
- Invite a speaker to your club or centre, e.g. 'zero waste' expert or a representative from the Green Party or Extinction Rebellion.
- Go to a local green space or park together.

Social / Community

- Agree some action you can take individually.
- Agree some action you can take at your centre.
- Agree some action you can encourage your friends or family to take.

Our rights and responsibilities

- What are our rights and responsibilities as citizens to help protect the environment?
- Is it everyone's individual responsibility to protect the environment or do we need strong rules from governments?

Personal view

- Where are your favourite nature places?
- What are your favourite plants, trees and flowers? Why?

Unit guidance

Nature and the environment

Unit 7



Introduction to the topic

This topic gives participants the opportunity to discuss personal views and issues relating to nature and the environment including places in nature, local parks, natural objects, recycling and how recycling works in their area.

Session ideas at a glance

Welcome	If required, participants sign in or you record attendance on a register.
Opening chat/ circle time	Introductions for anyone new. General chatting. Anything to follow up or report back on from the previous session? Any news from anyone?
Getting started	Remind/tell new participants what the topic of the session is: Nature and the environment . Choose one or more warm up activities linked to the topic. See next page for ideas on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nature (using natural objects and photos of natural places) • Alphabet list • City or countryside? Ask some questions to get the conversation started and find out which aspects of the topic participants are most interested in talking about. (See mind map and next page for ideas.)
Conversations	Plan to have 2 or 3 main conversations linked to this topic, possibly with supporting activities. See next page for ideas for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal view: Places in nature • The local area: Improve your local park! • Social/Community: Recycling and waste If you have a large group, divide participants into small groups or pairs for each activity/conversation. Finish each conversation with the whole group reporting back and discussing further together.
Closing chat/ circle time	Feedback about today's topic and conversations. Discuss any ideas for any follow up action or research for taking the topic further, e.g. discussing the topic more, visiting a local park or recycling centre, inviting a speaker in. Share ideas for the main topic for the next session. Any reminders or important dates/events coming up?

Level of English: There are activities in this unit for participants with different levels of English. For lower levels, use the park pictures to check vocabulary that may be new and for participants to do picture-word matching activities.

Things to consider: There may be very different levels of awareness about recycling and environmental issues among the group.

Nature and the environment

Personal view: Places in nature (questions)

Unit 7



Places in nature

Task:

- Work in pairs or small groups.
- Find some pictures to help answer each question.
- Tell each other your answers for each question.

Questions:

- Hot places and cold places.**
Which do you like best? Why?
- Mountains, flat countryside and seaside.**
Which do you like best? Why?
- Places you would like to live.**
Why?
- Places you wouldn't like to live.**
Why not?
- Places you would like to visit on holiday.**
Why?
- Places you wouldn't like to visit on holiday.**
Why not?
- Places you think are in the UK – and not in the UK.**
Which ones? What helped you decide?
- Places you have lived in or visited that look like these pictures?**
Where were they? Describe them to your group.



Photo: Shutterstock

Nature and the environment

Social and community: Improve your local park (images)

Unit 7



Photo: Shutterstock



Photo: Shutterstock



Photo: Shutterstock



Photo: Shutterstock



Image: Shutterstock



Photo: Shutterstock

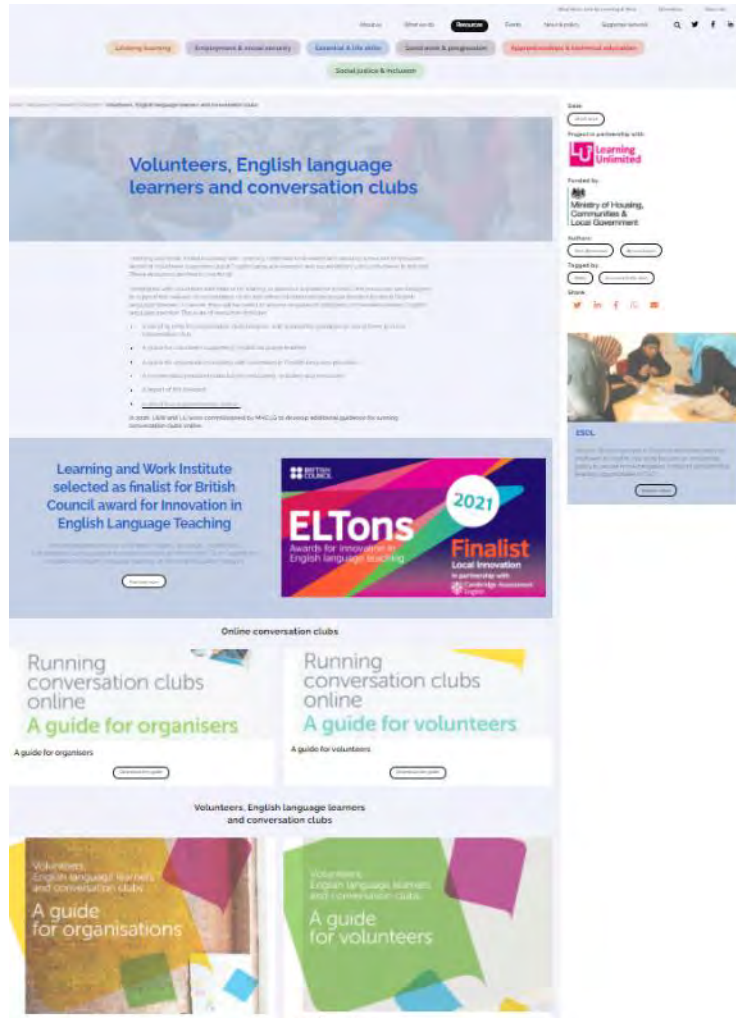
Nature and the environment

Social and community: Improve your local park (matching words)

Unit 7

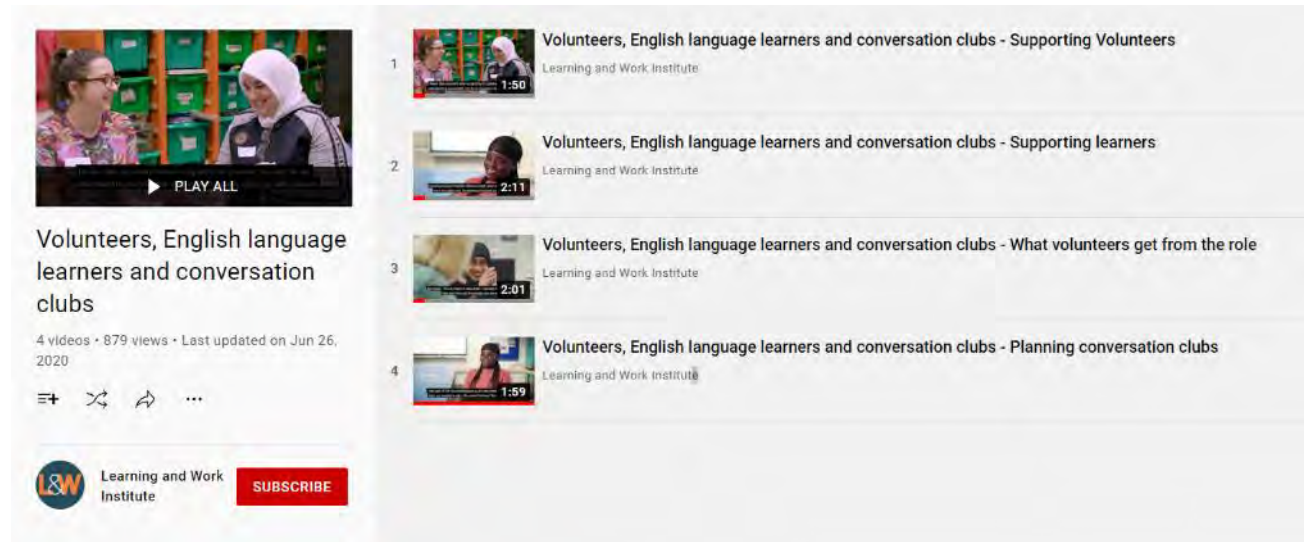
comfortable seating	picnic area / cafe
dog friendly	sports area
lake or pond	children's playground
trees and flowers	entertainment area
skateboarding area	

Find out more



Webpage

<https://learningandwork.org.uk/resources/research-and-reports/volunteers-english-language-learners-and-conversation-clubs/>



YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLmZbrFRJFfyPgDaa5DKwA5wayFVMdUsGd>