Volunteer English teaching transforms lives in the Midlands

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In just 18 months TimeBank recruited and trained 144 volunteers to teach practical, everyday English to 1,571 Birmingham residents – empowering them to play a greater part in British life and making a vital impact on community integration.

The volunteering charity's Talking Together project was primarily aimed at women in Birmingham and Leicester, who, research has shown, make up the largest proportion of non-English speakers and who are consequently among the most isolated in our society.

It was funded by the Department for Communities and Local Government to bring English language learning into the heart of the community.

An external evaluation of the project by Hilary Barnard of HMBC, launched at the House of Commons yesterday (October 19), commended the Talking Together model as an efficient and cost effective approach to supporting pre ESOL learners and aiding their integration into British society. It called for local networks, including the statutory and private sector, to review how similar schemes could be funded, launched and sustained.

850,000 people in the UK have no or poor language skills and at the start of the courses, many of the women who took part were unable to do routine things like talk to a teacher about a child, visit the doctor or check their children's online activities.

The evaluation found that learning English increased their competence in dealing with everyday issues and to take their next steps in education, training and employment. It strengthened their parenting around children's education and healthcare and increased their confidence to take a greater part in community life.

For the volunteers too, the experience was a pathway to training and employment as they gained new skills and teaching experience.They reported that volunteering had given them a strong sense of personal fulfilment, increased their confidence and provided a highly rewarding experience which encouraged them to engage in other voluntary work.

Helen Walker, Chief Executive of TimeBank, said: “Being able to speak English transforms lives – it's the glue that holds communities together. Talking Together was an extensive volunteering project and I'm so proud that we delivered it on time, to schedule and under budget.”

Ends

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A full copy of the evaluation report is available at: www.timebank.org.uk/talking-together

•TimeBank is a national volunteering charity, started in 2000

•It recruits and trains volunteers to deliver mentoring projects to tackle complex social problems and also works with businesses to engage their staff in volunteering

•TimeBank believes that great volunteering can transform the lives of both volunteers and beneficiaries by building stronger, happier and more inclusive communities. For more information take a look at www.timebank.org.uk

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