

Building language skills



Organisation:

Volunteer South West

Website: volunteersouthwest.org.au

Focus: New Migrants



Maria* is a young mother from Brazil and worked as a music teacher and photographer in her home country. After arriving in Bunbury, she worked as a part-time cleaner in a local shopping centre. Unfortunately, she had some negative experiences in this role, as she was still learning English as a language and was not able to answer questions.

At this time, Maria did not feel confident speaking in English and preferred to communicate by writing in a translation app. After reading about the ENGAGE program on social media, she contacted Volunteer South West.

APPROACH

Maria was interested in volunteer roles that would help her connect with others and improve her English language skills. After meeting another Brazilian woman with better English language skills, Maria and her new friend visited the Volunteer South West office together.

After initial meetings, it was agreed that Maria needed to be matched with a supportive volunteer involving organisation that had a suitable role for someone with limited English language skills.

Milligan Community Learning & Resource Centre runs a community garden growing edible plants. The Centre also runs a garden club where people can catch up, learn about gardening, and plant or cook together – the perfect setting for new migrants to connect with each other and the rest of the community. As Maria enjoyed gardening, this was a great fit. Maria started a role with the garden club and a Volunteer South West staff member joined her for the first session to support her and introduce her to others.

Maria was also referred to Investing in Our Youth Child and Parent Centre. The family centre, renowned for having a multicultural clientele, was searching for a playgroup assistant who could play music with the

children. The position was perfect for Maria and she was again supported in her transition by a Volunteer South West staff member.

OUTCOME

Maria paused her volunteering for a few months when she found a full-time paid job as a cleaner. Her young family needed the financial support. After feeling isolated and not learning anything new in her paid role, she contacted Volunteer South West once again. The Investing in Our Youth position was still available and the volunteer manager was very happy to have Maria back.

LEARNINGS

- Considering the needs of both the individual and the volunteer involving organisation can create more rewarding matches.
- Where possible, be flexible in the volunteer roles you offer.
- It's a good idea to provide education to staff and volunteers on how to be inclusive and welcoming.
- Provide opportunities to learn and connect as a team to create a stronger sense of belonging.
- Give practical demonstrations on the job and encourage questions.
- Adapt the way you communicate to accommodate volunteers with developing language skills.