A decorative graphic on the right side of the page features three overlapping circles in shades of blue, arranged vertically. Two thin blue lines intersect at the top left and extend diagonally across the page, framing the circles.

# **“Malaysia, Our Home, Their Hope” Refugee Literacy Programme**

International Service

**Rotaract Club of HELP University  
College**



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## **Time Line**

Volunteer programmes are offered year-round. Volunteers usually teach for 3 months. Two workshops and training sessions are mandatory prior to the teaching.

## **Objectives:**

- Students will be able to speak confidently and effectively in everyday survival situations.
- Students should gain the ability to read basic texts thoroughly.
- Development of basic writing skills.
- Listening comprehension. Students should be able to understand basic ideas, especially spoken slowly, clearly, and plainly.
- Students should know the vocabulary for describing basic ideas, especially pertaining to themselves (address, phone number, family members, etc.)

## **Budget/ Funding Sources**

NGOs are not allowed to raise fund on behalf of the name of UNHCR due to our country's policy. Hence, our club has been looking for ways to alleviate the plight of refugees with projects that do not involve even a dime. This literacy project is the result of our thorough deliberation which unbelievably, and yet is true, does not involve any significant expenses. The only expenses was for the publicity purposes ( posters, token of appreciation for speakers etc) which cost less than RM20 and was covered by our school's Department of Student Affairs funding.



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## **The Story**

“Literacy is the ladder out of poverty” - Morgan Freeman.

For nearly 100,000 refugees and asylum seekers in Malaysia, literacy indeed, meant more than *just* a ladder out of poverty. Our biggest project of this term – “Malaysia - Our Home, Their Hope Refugee Literacy Programme” is a programme aiming to foster a positive attitude toward communication in/use of English among refugees. This is a programme that recruits college students to serve as English teacher, or more specifically reading mentors to the refugees.

English is important for the refugees not only for their current life in this country but also crucial for their future development. The ability to communicate in English is crucial for refugees in three main areas:

- Protection
  - If a refugee is stopped by an immigration or police officer, it will work to their benefit if they can explain their status as refugee and this could possibly help them to avoid arrest, detention or other harassment. In this way, *ability in English empowers the refugee*.
- Employability
  - Many refugees have skills and abilities which they are not able to turn into a livelihood because they lack of the ability to communicate the extent of their competencies.
- Resettlement
  - Many of the resettlement countries (UK, US, Canada, Australia etc.) are English speaking. Knowledge of and competency in English is Important for adjustment to life in the resettlement country.

We started this project by meeting up with the Community Development Unit of the UNHCR. They loved the idea of getting student’s involvement in refugee’s community services and they were at the same time struggling to look for volunteers as English teachers for the refugees. We came to an agreement to have an English literacy programme with HELP University College as the bridge to connect and recruit the volunteers.

However, things did not go as smooth as we first thought. We’ve come to the realization that we were all very inexperienced people. We didn’t have the time, we didn’t have the energy, resources, knowledge, anything. It took us 4 months to recruit volunteers around our school. There’s no way we could have done it. We had to have the fire inside of us in order to get everybody else out there motivated. That was why it became so hard. We were okay, but we had to go out and keep pushing the people that were saying ‘ I don’t know if this is going to work.’ It was like a brushfire. It kind of started out slow, and what we really got this blazing was the law department caught on. By meeting up with the Law Student Council’s president and promoting this project from lecture halls to lecture halls, we were finally on business. At the



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end of the day, we have successfully recruited more than seventy volunteers consists of the Psychology, Business, Mass Communication, Matriculation, A-level and Law Department student.

Two workshops were held prior to the kick start of the project, namely “How to become a volunteer for the refugee” and “Working as an English Literacy Teacher for Refugee”. Attendance for both of this workshop was promising.

At present, we have 5 students teaching in different community schools around Klang Valley. Although our initial plan was for this to be strictly for refugee adults, but once people started we have had classes consists of many, many children, and we decided that, why not? If they want to do it, it's a *good* thing, not a bad thing. We ended up having this literacy programme for as many adults as young people.

## **Conclusion**

People have been dealing with the fundamental rights of refugees in this country for a long time, and we felt like, obviously we didn't completely alleviate the devastating living conditions of the refugees, and we never planned to, but the fact is that for that 80 plus people, we at least did something. It's really good thing to know you've been doing what you should do and you haven't just been complaining, which is easy to do.

We started this project out of pretty small scale. However, our ultimate goal is to get the ripple effect of all this activity to be extended to all the colleges. The best part would have to be the fact that, in life, we can walk away and say that we know we made a difference in at least one person's life. We touched someone else. we feel like I gave something that no amount of money could give. And they gave us something. You can't buy the feelings that we got - being able to work very hard for something we believed in with all my heart. To be able to have the opportunity to do that was just wonderful.

Reported by,  
Rotaractor  
Jocelyn Xie Hui

President  
RY2010/2011



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Wow.. 100% concentration...



So teacher, what are we going to learn today?



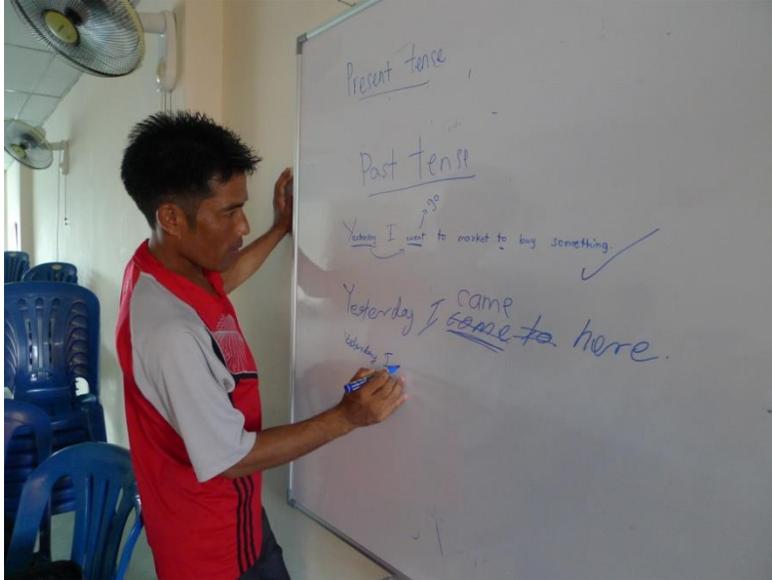
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Picture is our medium when we are not speaking the same language



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Er... the answer will be...



Haha.. my turn now!



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Discuss discuss... In English, not Burmese!