

Allow me to introduce OneMorgan County (OMC), a non-profit organization that provides services for immigrants and refugees in Fort Morgan, Colorado. OMC helps newcomers adapt to life in northeastern Colorado by offering support and skill development, acceptance, and a welcoming environment. This organization works in partnership with community and immigrant-serving agencies, and a wide network of private and government funders.

Mission:

OneMorgan County facilitates, educates, unites and collaborates with diverse people and organizations to appreciate the mosaic of our community and strengthen the inclusive nature of our community.

Vision:

OneMorgan County embraces our cultures to foster cohesive, diverse, and unique communities while celebrating our similarities and differences.

OneMorgan County Guiding Principles:

- OneMorgan County upholds the basic principles upon which the United States of America was founded establishing equality for all people.
- OneMorgan County fosters a positive experience of integration for immigrants, refugees and the entire community.
- OneMorgan County promotes the shared responsibility to act with integrity and treat all of our neighbors with respect, decency and dignity.
- OneMorgan County embraces education as a tool to enhance multi-cultural awareness and appreciation.
- OneMorgan County dedicates itself to being responsive to the changing cultural needs of the entire community.
- OneMorgan County educates newcomers about local customs and laws and encourages them to become effectively engaged in this community.



This photo was taken during a "Holiday", a day of celebration with my new family...my new friend, Alem Abreha.

What I learned from OMC's Wayfinders Endeavor Project

1. ESL teaches global perspective

People have gained insight into different countries by traveling abroad. However, I learned overall global awareness by working right here in Fort Morgan! In particular, you receive first-hand accounts from students about their government and social systems. Because news coverage in the states can often be biased and spotty, I often feel that teaching ESL is like having access to unedited international news.

2. ESL breaks stereotypes

Living abroad challenges our established views of the world. But even simple exposure to a group of people through teaching can dispel wrong ideas. Growing up in an ethnically uniform community, I had little understanding of cultures and religions of the world. Teaching ESL allowed me to interact for the first time with different people. Some of my most meaningful experiences have been with Muslim students, and given current stereotypes about Islam, I'm grateful for this opportunity. I've met students from a range of countries with varying relationships to their religion. It dissolved my own

misconceptions, gave me more tolerance, and made me realize we can't judge others of our false ideas about them.

3. ESL teaches geography

I hate to admit it, but before I started teaching ESL, I never knew there was a country called Eritrea. Meeting students from different places expanded my world.

4. ESL challenges assumptions about immigrants.

For years, immigration has been an emotionally charged topic, and there is not a shortage of false ideas out there distorted for political effect. Teaching ESL to immigrants can be perspective changing in a positive way. In my own case, I've developed respect for immigrants' rights. I've been impressed with the level of commitment many have to learning English, integrating into American society, and contributing to their new chosen country. I'm also amazed at the hardships many suffer in transplanting themselves. My own experience with immigrants has made me wary of negative portrayals, and I have a more informed perspective to consider current issues.

5. ESL can make you a better communicator

Interacting with people from around the world encourages one to learn different language registers. Some cultures speak in a way that is more reserved or argumentative; some are more joking and friendly. This realization helped me avoid quick judgments about people based on how they express themselves. Moreover, it enhanced my teaching since I can now appeal to different students. This skill helps me in my personal life too. I'm better equipped in social situations. I can ruthlessly haggle down a price, have a philosophical conversation, and tell a raunchy joke all at one cocktail party.

6. ESL makes you a more inquisitive traveler

Teaching ESL in your own country introduces you to people from remote regions over the world. In addition to major destinations, I can't wait to see some of the small villages where some of my students grew up.

7. ESL supplies a wealth of trivia about the world

Finally, it's easy to pick up facts and skills from students, helpful to you in the most surprising ways. I've learned how to make the best cup of coffee from a family from Eritrea. And my knowledge about the world is expanding everyday.

Conclusion

In working with refugees from other cultures one is led on a journey that can expanded horizons without having to travel far from home. We are not simply teaching vocabulary, but about our own culture as well. I would recommend this experience to anyone. It has been rich and rewarding. Thank you.

References

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