

Rationale



The project that I undertook with Hurstville City Uniting Church's English Conversation Groups (ECGs) is the creation of their 10th Anniversary Booklet. We asked both current and former students and helpers to share their favourite memories at the ECGs. We also sorted and included photos from the past ten years to be added into the booklet. The purpose of such a project is to reflect on how much the organisation has grown over the past ten years and to celebrate a big milestone for the organisation. The testimonies shared by those involved have also revealed the positive impact that the ECGs have had on the students' and helpers' lives and reinforces the value of volunteering and cross-cultural exchange. Whether the student or helper has been a long-standing member of the group or was simply involved with the ECGs for a few months, these testimonies reveal common experiences of self-growth and a sense of community within the organisation.

The main components of the booklet include a nine year photo timeline, a foreword written by the organisation's founder and coordinator, student testimonies, helper testimonies, and a few pages of photo collages. The purpose of the nine year photo timeline is to demonstrate how the group has changed over the years but to also recognise the long-standing members of the group. Unfortunately, group photos were not taken each year so from 2011 to 2013, substitute photos have been used that do not include all members of the ECGs that year. I also asked Ivy, the founder and coordinator of the group, to write a foreword reflecting on the ten years of the ECGs since its inception in 2010. Following the foreword is the main component of the booklet, which are the student and helper testimonies. The testimonies do not encompass everyone who has been involved in the group but former and current students and helpers who were willing to share their experiences and responded to our request for written submissions. We also went through old photos to find pictures of these helpers and students to include in the booklet alongside their testimony. The final pages include photo collages with group photos and photos of members of the ECGs who weren't depicted in the previous pages.

The reason why I decided to become involved in this project was because I was a volunteer of the ECGs myself. I was able to witness the value of the organisation first hand and felt a personal connection with the organisation through my own involvement. I felt that many of the students and helpers had stories to share and different reasons for coming to the ECGs. While this group only formed a small part of their routine on a Tuesday morning, it had made a significant impact on their lives more holistically. While the aim of the group is to improve students' English speaking skills through conversation groups, the underlying experiences of self-growth and cross-cultural understanding is something that is not recognised enough and is an important aspect to highlight when celebrating the ECG's ten year anniversary. I am excited for the ten year anniversary of the ECGs next year and my hope is that all students and helpers will be able to read this booklet, realise the difference that they are making and continue to work hard and be involved in such a worthwhile organisation.



HURSTVILLE CITY UNITING CHURCH'S

ENGLISH CONVERSATION GROUPS



TEN YEAR ANNIVERSARY

SINCE 20 APRIL 2010

2010



2011



2012



2013



2014



2015



2016



2017



2018



2019





Foreword

Wow! 10th anniversary of English Conversation Groups (ECG) on 20 April 2020!!!! It's definitely a milestone for ECG. Praise God for His mercy, peace, grace and blessings granted to all our ECG people including the current and former voluntary helpers and students! There have been 60-plus helpers and 134 students. Without God's help, guidance and provision in many areas, our groups would not have existed! Without all these wonderful and excellent voluntary helpers plus all these hardworking and intelligent students, our English Conversation Groups could not have taken place!

My name is Ivy Cheng. I'm the founder and the coordinator of English Conversation Groups (ECG). I come from a non-English speaking background and know how hard it is for English learners to have opportunities to practise speaking English. I was previously involved in an English class for more than 11 years (initially learning English there but later becoming a voluntary administrative team member). I felt it was God's calling for me to run an ECG with small groups of one to two students, rather than the usual English classes which have large numbers of students. I was able to establish the ECG on 20 April 2010 with a lot of help and support from the church.

The growth and the development of ECG has been very interesting and challenging! We started in 2010 with six students and six helpers from church. Our ECG gradually expanded with a lot more students and helpers. At one stage we had 26 students and 12 helpers – from Group A to Group L with one to three students in each group. There were about 12 people on the waiting list. In Term 4, 2019, when this reflection is being written, we are graciously having 17 students and 10 helpers who are all from outside

the church. All these years God has been taking very good care of our ECG in so many ways, such as when we were short of helpers, some (or even many) of our students could not come either. On some occasions, new helpers came aboard at the right time. Although the number of rooms or areas in the church complex that we could hold our groups became less mid last year, the number of students and helpers became less too.

There are some distinctive features of ECG. Firstly, I didn't want to compete with other English learning classes or groups so Tuesday mornings were chosen in 2010; secondly, something special has been created to make our ECG outstanding, for example, having a small number of students in a group; including morning tea and news from students; recruiting helpers from different cultural backgrounds and from different age groups. Managing so many different types of people requires lots of understanding, patience and flexibility. Other distinctive features include: a Christmas party which is held every year; special birthday celebrations of our ECG; Easy English Bible Study sessions for ECG students run after class by Rev. Dr. Matagi Vilitama.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge and appreciate the creative and marvellous work from Helper Davina who played an important role in making this booklet for our ECG's 10th anniversary. I also thank all those who contributed to the content of this booklet and who have helped our ECG in so many ways over the years. Thanks also to those who have come to learn English all these years.

May God continue to bless our English Conversation Groups and all those who participate in them!

10 years of...

learning English

We asked former and current students about when they joined ECG, their favourite things about learning English and any other memories they wanted to share.



Sophia

I am been coming to ECG more than three years. It is my friend introduced me to join. I like ECG, because there are many different level groups at here, and all of the helpers are excellent, many friendly classmates too. One of my helper is Andrew, in our first lesson, we talked about the movie star Leslie Cheung, a famous singer in HK, Andrew sang a song “Monica” and dancing in the class, it was an amazing memory of my ECG experience! I enjoy every moment in ECG, at the beginning, I cannot hear and speak, now my English is better, I can understand and brave to conversation to others in English. Thanks Ivy's work hard, she running the class not just one day, days and days, weeks and weeks, great and difficult job!

Elsie

I have been coming to English Conversation Group for over two years now. I joined this English group, because I live in Hurstville and I don't need to speak English in my living area. This group can give me an opportunity to learn and speak English with some friendly helper. One of my favourite memories is we had a friendly helper Norma, she was over 90 years old and also she was a positive and independent person.

Willa

I have been coming to ECGs for three years. Because I want to improve my English listening and speaking skills, I decided to join ECGs. ECGs is a very good English study place. One helper has only two to three students. So that students have more chances to practice English. The helper can correct mistakes that students make. That is why I like coming to ECGs. The helpers are volunteers. They are kind, patient and excellent. We not only study English, but also learn a lots of Australian cultures. We share special experiences each other. Many thanks to ECGs, my English listening and speaking skills have improved a lot. I am more confident to speak English.



Patty

I first came to ECGs in 2013 in order to improve the spoken English. [I liked coming to ECGs] because there are many excellent teachers and a responsible organizer Ivy. [My favourite memory was when] it was raining outside, the teacher told me that Australians said rain cats and dogs.

Jane

I have been studying conversation for eight years, and English has improved. I also know some good teachers and classmates, especially thank you [Ivy] for her help. Please also greet the oldest teacher Norma!

Grace

I have been the group more than 2 years. I would like to improve my English. I think learn more English can help me live in Australia better. I would like to say that in my memory everyday is specially. Christmas party is the best one.

Melissa

I have been come to the English conversation class since July 2014 by my friend introduce. I moved to Australia earlier, I needed to settle down and work hard. I didn't have the opportunity to learn English. Plus, my child always stayed with me, he was my little translator. Now the child grows up and leaves me. I was also retired. I have time. But I can't go out to deal with the Westerners alone. When westerners open the mouth to speak, I became nervous and have a blank in my mind. It limits my scope of activities. So I need learning conversation in English.

After a few years study in ECG, my situation of nervous has been improved. In this class, a tutor has two or three students and has more opportunities to listen and speak. Under the leadership of Ivy, it is stipulated that if you enter the church door, you can't speak your mother tongue. You must be speak English only. Although it is inconvenient, but it is very helpful for us to learn speak in English. This is reason for I like it.

Bess

I came about 8 years [because] I like studying English. [I like ECGs] because ECG can improve my English.





Helen

I have been coming to English conversation groups over one year. I want to improve my English. The English group like a family, everyone is friendly. I feel every week is interesting.

Yvonne

I have been in the ECG for two years. I want to improve my English. The volunteer teacher teach us very patiently. Every time I learn something. I love studying every time.

Lan

I have been to ECC for almost two years. I want to better flow into Australian society and improve my English independent. I like it very much because I have improved my English in ECC. The teachers are volunteers who are trying to teach us, I am very touched.



An Li

I came to ECG in June 2016 to learn, mainly to practice their English listening and speaking skills, in order to better live in Australia, I like the teacher here, face-to-face dialogue with their own teaching methods alone, I am most impressed. When I was learning to speak English, the teacher gave me warm and encouraging applause.

Elva

I first came to our ECGs in 2016 because I want to improve my english level. [I liked ECGs] because I felt comfortable and learned English well. I had a good memory at ECGs. If there is a chance, I would like to go back to learn English again. They taught me a lot.

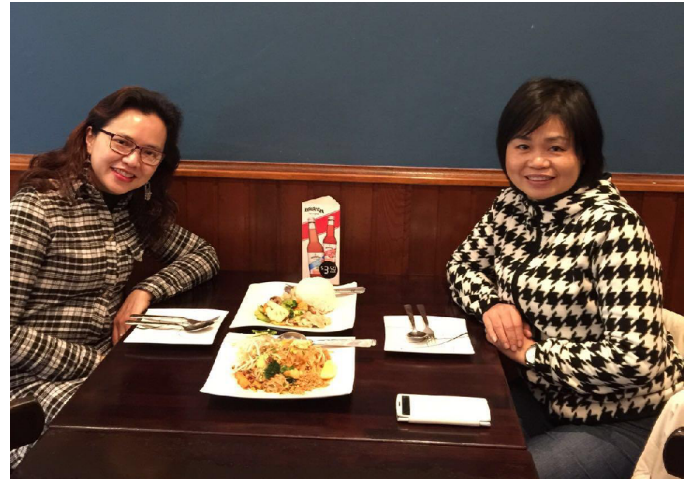
Jane

I came to ECGs in 18/10/2016. I want to improve my English speaking & listening skill here. I like the way we practice English skills as we have a small group - one helper for roughly 2 students, this is the best way to practice for me. Also, the class is well orgnised and all people here are very nice and friendly. I improved a lot at ECGs and made some really close friend here. Absolutely favourite memories.



Lisa

I have been ECG more than two years. I joined ECG for improving my English listening and speaking. I really like coming to ECG because I learnt something like Australia culture, food, idioms etc. from native speaker. The helpers are kindness. I remember last Christmas we prepared the carols by helping of a helper. I had a lot of nice time there.



Ester

Now I often recall in 2012 when I first came to Australia, I only knew a few simple English words. In 2013 by an accidental opportunity I came to ECG. I found all the helpers were very patience. You [Ivy] insisted that we should not speak Chinese in ECG. That is why I made some progress in English speaking. A favorite memory at ECG is at that time I often sent email to you [Ivy] and you [Ivy] corrected for me very carefully even a punctuation. That's very useful for me improve my English writing. Thank you Ivy. Thanks for all of you!

Chris

I come to ECGs at 2011 because I want to learn English. [I like it] because one by one English and improve English very fast.

Jenny

I came to ECGs 4 years ago to improve my English. Teachers and helpers are patient for teaching English. I met Ivy and she is a nice and responsible teacher.



Wendy

In 2014, I wanted to improve my English speaking and listening. Yes, I remembered something about ECG now. One volunteer one student was very good. One face to one conversation.

Janet

I join the ECG in 2017. because I have been in Austrlia for more than 20 years and I working in the factory. It is very difficult to improve my English. I heard from my friend that there are many helpers in this group who can help us learn English especially oral English. So I am very happy to be able to enter the ECG. In the morning tea time, Ivy organized the students to communicate with each other, which is my favorite. Ivy can be strict with everyone, so I am very impressed. I want to thank Ivy and the helpers.



Yu Jiang

Actually, I came to ECGs four years ago during the time 2015 to 2016. I joined in ECGs introduced by my good friend Elva. When I came to the church the first time, I remember Ivy gave me a warm reception. She is very nice and beautiful and I felt comfortable. Ivy arranged me to a suitable English group and I had good time with my team worker within one hour. During that time, I began to practice oral English more and more and would like to join ECGs from that time. I appreciate Ivy very much. I am a visiting scholar and my visiting time is from September 2015 to September 2016. The last time I went to the church, Ivy prepared a big meeting arrange all the English group members together and they gave me many warm regards. I appreciated all the people especially I appreciate God who give abundant love on me. Thanks to God.

Wen

I joined the ECG in 2017. It rarely can have some local volunteers to teach people who are from non-English speaking country oral English. Usually in other English classes, one teacher looks after several students who doesn't have adequate chance to practise. However, in ECG, one helper only has 2 to 3 students, which guaranteed the practice time of each student. As a result, students will improve quickly due to the small study group.

[In terms of why I liked ECGs] First, because it creates an English environment for student like me who usually complain doesn't have English environment to practise speaking. Second, all the helpers are extreme willingly to help non-English speaking students. They utilise whatever tools they can to make themselves clear. Third, students with different English levels can be arranged to different groups. Such targeted arrangement guarantees all the students receiving benefit from it.

My favourite memory was the last day when I made the farewell speech to every. Although I felt nervous when speaking publicly, I overcame my fear and made a short but successful speech. Thanks Ivy for giving me the chance to practise in front all the helpers and students.

George

I first came to the ECGs in 2010. I joined the ECGs to improve my English - especially on listening and speaking. I liked talking one-on-one or one-on-two in the ECGs. There were more practices of conversation in ECGs than in others English classes else. [My favourite memory was when] John who was a helper and I talked about the Sea Cliff Bridge then he drove me to visit the Sea Cliff Bridge the second day.



Pei Li

Since 2014, I have joined the ECGs group to learn English and improve my speaking ability.

Jimmy

I immigrated to Australia from China in 2013. The first thing I encountered was language problem. I need to learn English and practice. My friend introduced me to EGCs in 2014. I joined EGCs in the hope of communicating with local people to improve my English listening and speaking ability. I liked coming to EGCs because it had many helpers for the English class and breaks them into study groups to show us how to read English and then let us practice speaking English ourselves. I remember I was looking for a job but I didn't know how to write a cover letter. A helper let me learn to write it myself and then helped me modify it. EGCs is a good place. It help many new immigrants to learn and practice English.



Young

Ivy ran into our former student Young Yang on 19 October 2019. Young joined our groups in 2011. Due to his eye issues, he couldn't use a mobile phone or a computer so he wasn't able to contribute to the booklet of our English Conversation Groups' 10th anniversary. However, he congratulated on the special occasion we would be having and mentioned the celebration for the 5th anniversary of ECG when he was present.



10 years of...

teaching English

We asked former and current helpers about their memories of teaching English at ECGs.



Greig

I started as a helper at English Conversation Groups (ECG) towards the end of 2011, a few months after retiring. My wife had seen a notice in the Leader seeking volunteers to help Non-English Speaking Background adults improve their English and thought I might be interested.

I enjoy helping for a number of reasons:

- The students are so nice. They are eager to learn, polite and appreciative.
- I believe immigrants who want to learn English should be encouraged and it's rewarding to be involved in such a pursuit.
- It improves my own communication skills and knowledge of the English language and its many peculiarities.
- By being welcoming and supportive, I try to counteract the shameful behaviour of some Australian politicians and media commentators towards immigrants and refugees.
- I get to meet some interesting people. Some of the older students have lived through some of the most turbulent events of the 20th century.

The most satisfying aspect of ECG for me is developing the confidence of the timid students. Anxiety is a barrier to language development. Usually our students fear standing up and speaking in front of the whole group at morning tea and it makes me feel good when I can persuade any of my students to do so. Testing themselves in front of the assembly shows they are becoming more confident and on the right path to improve their English.

Andrew

I will have been involved as a helper for almost three years. The opportunity appeared in the local community newspaper at a time when I had recently retired from an academic position in law. Due to having suffered from a certain type of cancer, I left the university early and sought to continue teaching but in a very different context. Dealing with people who are willing to improve their spoken English has filled this gap. While maintaining my outlook that learning must be enjoyable, my classes are always full of laughter. This is very different from teaching Administrative Law. Although this remains a favourite area of mine, it would never receive the same level of fun as engaging enthusiastic students to improve their English at Hurstville Uniting Church.



Lorraine

When I retired nearly five years ago I was looking for something meaningful to do with my time. I came upon a request for volunteers in the local paper for teaching English at ECG. I enjoy teaching at ECG because I like to help people and make their journey through life easier if I can. I have met some lovely people and learnt a lot about their different cultures.

Colleen

Originally I attended a Volunteer Tutor Scheme run by the Adult English Migrant Program. This interesting course involved sixteen hours of free training and an interactive workshop run by a qualified TESOL teacher. For some time I visited students in their homes once a week, usually for a two hour session. After seeing an advertisement in the Leader I joined our English Conversation Group at Hurstville. The students are lovely and I like interacting with them. What I enjoy is when we fall about laughing at some joke. Usually this is initiated by Melissa who has a great sense of humour. I believe that volunteering is a very worthwhile activity.

Priya

I have been an ECG helper since November 2019 and it's been a great experience so far. Service is an important part of my life and through teaching, I'm serving. My love of volunteering and interacting with people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds started a long time ago during backpacking trips across Asia, Europe and South America. ECG gives me an opportunity to interact with and help students from such diverse backgrounds every week, be part of a community while making a difference.



Sylvia

I started volunteering at ECG almost 6 years ago. Next March 2020 will be 6 years.

My son who was 44 years old died suddenly Feb 2014. He had only been married 7 weeks. Myself and our family were devastated by this event. A very good friend who I meet many years ago during a TAFE 3 year course Advanced Welfare. My friend knew my family & myself very well. My friend insisted I needed to do something to ease the grief.

To cut a long story short I found it very difficult to start volunteering so soon after our son's death. Even though I cried for weeks travelling in my car to ECG I managed to hold it together during classes. I found the people who I was helping did actually help me.

So now after almost 6 years I still really enjoy the classes. I enjoy all the students I have had. Each one has been amazing in their wiliness to learn English. All students are wonderful people. I really admire the older ones still wanting to improve their English. All students have added so much to my life.

Norma

I started volunteering at ECG on April 20th 2010 to October 23rd 2018. I joined the ECG groups because I wanted to help people who weren't able to enjoy talking to their neighbours. I made some very special friends. I can't remember anything special but I have made long life friends and I say thank you for the opportunity to enjoy these friends and I say thank you to the ECG groups.



Wendy

In August 2013, I began as a volunteer English helper at The Uniting Church Hurstville City, with The Chinese Group. At the time I was already tutoring a class in English in Sutherland Shire and I wanted a more individualistic situation.

We would break into groups of 1-2 learners per helper and each have a separate room in which to tutor, so it was much easier and more rewarding to plan activities and exercises, than in the class situation. As the learners would be rotated with the helpers, we had a different perspective each session; I learned a little Chinese and hopefully improved a lot of English. We all got on very well and it was gratifying to be with people who were really keen to learn and had some very interesting stories to tell.

I left in December 2013, as I was going to be travelling extensively in Europe in 2014. I now live in Tasmania and I still volunteer tutor in class and individual situations, but I will always remember The Chinese Group with great fondness, especially Ivy and her bell, which she would ring to signal that morning tea was starting, ending, and when she wanted to get our attention to advise of any information. She was very well organised and had the place running like clockwork.

Christine

I was a volunteer for the Hurstville City Uniting Church's English Conversation Group from May to November 2018. The first reason I chose to volunteer is that I wanted to continue helping people improve their English speaking skills. Before volunteering, I was teaching English in Japan, so I wanted to continue that. Also, I've never taught English in an English speaking country, including my home country, the US, so I thought it would be a different experience for me. In addition, I wanted to be part of the Australian Society outside of my studies. When I found the posting online, I immediately applied and spoke with Ivy about the position. I was very lucky to be included in the groups and meet many people. Each week was unique because I was learning about Australian and Chinese culture simultaneously through the students I supported and the volunteers I talked with. I truly enjoyed my time there. I don't think I have a favorite memory because each time I volunteered, especially towards the end, I was able to watch many of them improve and become active and confident during conversations. At the same time, the feedback and support from Ivy were really great because I was able to understand what and how the ECG works. I want to say that the whole time with the ECG is one of my best memories of Australia.

Jim

I attended Ivy's conversation class several years ago and assisted her for 2-3 years. Ivy is an inspirational young woman that everyone respects. She ran the group with skill, tact and consideration for all. She assisted many people, primarily new Australians to better their English language skills. She has drive and professional nous that belies her years. In past years I have managed many employees, volunteers and people in general and it is no small statement to say I felt privileged to be part of her group.



Angela

I think it was in 2012 [when I started volunteering]. I saw an ad in the paper. I thought it would be an opportunity to try something new, relate more to people, and hopefully learn new skills from the experience.

I enjoyed getting to know people from different backgrounds that I would not usually have the occasion to speak to. I liked learning about where they came from and their life experiences and backgrounds. It made me feel more connected to people and the community. Everyone was friendly and supportive, the group is a wonderful concept.

I remember we had an occasion, maybe at the end of term, where everyone was asked to bring in some finger food for a party. There were a lot of different and interesting dishes from everyone and it was a fun day. At the end of the party Ivy gave each of the volunteers a gift, mine was a hand towel with a droplet print. I also remember that Ivy always wore interesting and fashionable outfits, including colourful gumboots.



Davina

I joined the ECGs in April 2019 wanting to do something worthwhile in my spare time. The best part was the interesting conversations I had with my students and the insight that I was given which helped me better understand my Chinese heritage and the experiences of my parents and grandparents. What I have come to realise is that while the ECGs is at first glance focused on language learning, at its core, its value lies in deepening cross-cultural understanding between those involved.

10 years and counting...





