
WINTER NEWS



Grateful for our team! Top, l-r: Angelika Wilk, Heidi Sawatzki, Cecilia Zorzin. Middle l-r: Lin Müller, Shahen Khashanw, Marilse Stahl, Marlene Foth. Front: Birgit Foth, Herman Stahl. Missing: Mia Stolzmann, Franziska Fischer.

Surprised!

The high demand for language support surprised us in the fall. Since all language support centers in the city were open again after the pandemic, we actually expected less demand. However, after the first few weeks of classes, enrollment continued to increase.

Then a whole group of Ukrainian refugees from a formal course in the city came looking for conversation opportunities. The challenge now was not only to accommodate all those who had registered but also to keep the groups small enough to foster relationships, which is a core value of the Peace House. In response, we started two conversation groups.

New additions to the team!

Just as we were grappling with the high demand, we received an email from a young woman, wondering how she could do something for refugees in LU. Lin Müller is now leading a conversation group on Wednesday nights.

We have also welcomed another participant to our team. Shahen is the daughter of one of our participants and is waiting to start an "Ausbildung" as a baker in Fall. She is providing homework help after students on Fridays. While she was reluctant and unsure of herself at first, she was teamed up with Franziska who has been a great role model for her. Now she has enough confidence to offer homework help by herself when Franziska can't be there.

Twaking what we offer

One of the courses we offered was support in the area of Grammar for participants who were somewhat more advanced in the German language. However, participation became quite inconsistent, with the group composition constantly changing from one class to the next. Also, quite a number of these participants were enrolled in official courses.

Consequently, we decided to change the approach to offering help with homework for adults attending official courses and generally responding to language-related questions with which people come to us. As a result, we often spend time helping students prepare for their upcoming language exams.

One such person was Ajda. Her oral language skills are very good as is her grammar. However, it became clear to us, that her extreme anxiety about the verbal part of the exam might well sabotage her success. In addition to the usual exercises and the practicing of exam questions, we invited two women who had recently taken the exam, to come and share their experience and walk Ajda through the process. Besides familiarizing Ajda with the process, they shared a number of their strategies on how they handled their own anxiety and spent a considerable amount of time chatting one-on-one with Ajda. Obviously, it did not take all of Ajda's anxiety, but today she feels that she did reasonably well and is waiting for her results.

A moment of solidarity

The topic in our conversation group on the day of the big earthquake in southern Turkey near the Syrian border was "Neighbourhoods and cities where we grew up". Sara talked about Aleppo, where she grew up, and said she wasn't sure if her neighbourhood still existed after the quake. Fedir, a refugee from Ukraine, told about the neighbourhood in Donetsk where he studied and worked. "But of course, everything is destroyed now," he concluded. At the end of our time together, we invited the group to take a minute of silence to reflect on the places and people who have experienced so much loss. There was a real sense of spirits uniting in this group which included people from Syria, Turkey, Pakistan and Ukraine.

Inter-religious dialogue

On February 11 we hosted an interfaith dialogue on prayer. Invited was anyone who was interested, including our participants. We had a short presentation from both the Christian and Muslim traditions, followed by a time for questions and dialogue. Although it wasn't particularly well attended, it ended up being a good opportunity to get to know each other. We ended by sharing a meal.