

## Action Foundation and Linguacuisine (Erasmus+)

### Introduction and background

Action Foundation is an award-winning charity based in Newcastle upon Tyne providing support to disadvantaged refugees, asylum seekers and other migrants across Tyne and Wear. Through our three supported housing projects and two English language schools we aim to plug a gap in existing provision and enable vulnerable migrants to; avoid homelessness and extreme poverty, access vital services, increase their skills and employability, access legal support, integrate and live independently. To do this we work closely with local and national organisations including the British Red Cross, North East Law Centre and West End Refugee Service. Our work with these organisations has enabled us to arrange family reunions and secure legal support for our beneficiaries with no recourse to public funds amongst a range of other support provision.

Action Foundation's link to Linguacuisine came through our teaching project, Action Language. Action Language provides free English classes in our schools in Newcastle and Sunderland city centres. Our aim is to provide ESOL classes to refugees, asylum seekers and other migrants unable to access mainstream classes in a supportive environment. All our free classes are taught by qualified (CELTA or above) volunteer teachers and supported by enthusiastic and motivated volunteer classroom assistants. From a summer school in 2008, we began regular weekly term time classes, and now run over 30 free weekly classes across the two schools, attended by approximately 300 learners per week from absolute beginner through to advanced level.

### Initial benefits of Linguacuisine

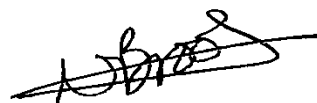
By becoming a Linguacuisine partner, we were able to offer some of our learners the opportunity to participate in something different. They all expressed an interest in cooking, which prompted them to volunteer to join the participant group. They also wanted to improve their digital skills, which were varied, and their English language, which ranged from A2 (elementary) to C1 (advanced). Another key issue was working with native English speakers, as many of our learners struggle to find opportunities to do this outside the classroom, and to become involved with a prestigious British university. Some participants had been involved in academic life in their own countries, from undergraduate to PhD level, but others had never been in any higher education establishment. All of them faced a variety of barriers to entering education in the UK, especially at university level, due to language, finance and immigration status. Linguacuisine allowed them access to the university and to become a valuable part of a real academic project.

### Impacts of Linguacuisine

Over the course of the project, there were developments for the participants themselves and for our organisation. By working with the iPads and on desktop computers, it was noticeable that their confidence in using the software increased, and their self-assurance that when something went wrong, it could be fixed and wasn't their fault. From the basic action and vocabulary logging in, to video editing and word processing, learners expressed pride in their achievements. This encouraged Action Foundation to partner with another local organisation to help other language learners enrol in basic IT courses at the local library, which have had similar results. We are now also offering links to improvers courses, and both are proving popular.

Participant confidence also increased in terms of presenting and communicating, both on and off camera, as they collaborated to create the video sections for the recipes. The fact that this was in a university setting was also valuable, as mentioned above, and one participant has since presented at another local university. Being able to use their own recipes to introduce their cuisine, culture and language to the wider participant group was a new experience to many, and putting them in a position of authority as they switched between languages and explained themselves to others also brought about increased self-confidence. Many participants also valued the chance to mix with the group from the WEA, even going to extra sessions at their base in South Shields (around an hour away by public transport).

Being a partner in Linguacuisine has opened doors for Action Foundation as a charity, not least in our partnership in another Erasmus+ project running from 2017-2019. One of the key values of both is the creation of something which will be accessible and useful to people outside the project, long after the projects are over. The Linguacuisine app is a tool which we have shared with a wider group, encouraging them to try out recipes before adding their own. This includes not only other learners within the Action Language schools, but their friends and families, and residents from our housing projects; Action Foundation also provides accommodation to refugees and asylum seekers, which will in future include training in cooking and healthy eating, and the app will be a useful addition to encourage residents to continue cooking together. We will also continue to promote the app to other organisations and their beneficiaries both locally and nationally, from West End Refugee Service (Newcastle) to the NATECLA network (National Association of Teachers of English and Community Languages). The Linguacuisine project will have lasting benefits for Action Foundation, our participants and many others.



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