

Exploring the Botanical Gardens

Everyone has their own learning style—some are visual learners, others do best through listening, still others learn most via action and doing. But what all people have in common is that everybody loves taking a break from lessons to go on a field trip, and sometimes our teachers and their students get the chance to do just that! The volunteers at IRWP have come up with some creative ways to get their students out of the house to take advantage of fun and educational extracurricular activities around the St. Louis area. This has included everything from trips to the Arch to going to a new part of town to get gelato.



Salimar Be and No Jan Be

This holiday season, when all was cold and grey, IRWP volunteer teacher Irene Kalnins had the great idea to take two of our students to the lush and living indoor displays at the Missouri Botanical Gardens to break up the winter doldrums. Irene collaborated with another teacher to make the trip with their students, No Jan Be and Salimar Be, friends who are both from Burma and live on the same street nearby in the Tower Grove neighborhood.

The excursion was both a chance for the students to go to a new place in their city as well as to use their English skills. At the special holiday exhibit teachers and students discussed the model trains and houses on display as well as naming the colors of all the flowers that were featured prominently. In the Climatron conservatory, which houses tropical plant landscapes, the students showed their teachers plants native to Burma and noted how much bigger they grow in their home country. The teachers in turn attempted to answer questions about the inner workings of the Climatron's artificial waterfall!

Field trips are another way that students and teachers build their relationship, practice newly learned skills, get a chance to expand their education by experiencing new settings and by observing others. With St. Louis offering many educational activities for little to no cost, there are many different learning opportunities just waiting for them to explore.

A Volunteer's Perspective

"There is no better education about the world and its trouble spots than learning the stories of refugee families, especially refugee women; stories of war, dangers, persecution and escape make me aware of the strength and resiliency of refugees from Afghanistan, Burma, Bosnia, or Iran. Along the way, they have taught me about Muslim traditions and holidays, about love and marriage Afghan style, about rural life in the Burmese mountains, and certainly about wonderful food from the skilled hands of Afghan, Burmese, Iranian and Bosnian cooks and bakers. I have learned about the stresses of readjustment and the ache of homesickness which sometimes impede learning our very tricky language successfully. I have been inspired by the rapid progress of students with almost no previous schooling, who just fly through their lessons with the greatest of ease. Universally, all my students have exhibited a deep appreciation of their new country, and the willingness to work and sacrifice so that their children may have a good life here."

— Irene Kalnins, IRWP Volunteer Educator since 2002. Irene and her family immigrated to the United States as post-WWII refugees: "While I picked up the language and culture with little effort, as only a preteen can, it was a struggle for my parents."

From the Director

Our mission is

to increase the independence and reduce the isolation of immigrant and refugee women by teaching them basic English and practical living skills in the security of their own homes.

This year at IRWP we have again seen an increase in both the number of students learning in the program and in the variety of countries from which they originate. As you can see from the demographic list in this newsletter, our women this year come from nearly 30 areas. Changes in policy for populations being admitted to the United States has brought new groups of immigrants and refugees resettling in St. Louis and subsequently to our program. With these shifts we see a greater variety in the language, culture, and educational history of our students. While the proportion of our students that have never attended school has shown to be steady over the past few years at around 30% (and around 15% for those having had less than 6 years of formal education), each student has a very unique set of skills and challenges. Personal, in-home tutoring proves to be an invaluable bridge for these women living in a new country and wanting to learn English and essential life skills. For some, it is their first opportunity for literacy in any language and gaining this knowledge is empowering.

In conjunction with the efforts and feedback of our wonderful volunteer educators, we strive to continue to meet the ever-changing goals and challenges of our students. While some student goals may be bigger, such as becoming a nurse, we recognize that reaching small goals along the way are just as important. A volunteer recently shared that her student greeted her with great enthusiasm. For the first time, she had been able to read a storybook to her daughter that week all by herself. Her joy, pride, and sense of accomplishment were at a level her teacher had never seen. We celebrate her success and look forward to her reaching many more of her goals.

IRWP not only positively impacts those we directly serve but strengthens families throughout our community. Many people are on our waiting list, wanting to reach their goals. Won't you help us make their dreams come true?

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Famous Words

"The art of teaching is the art of assisting discovery."

—Mark Van Doren

A Little Help Goes a Long Way

This winter, IRWP received some special donations from two groups of students - the children of Mrs. Newman's 4th grade class at Westchester Elementary School and the young ladies of the Sista Girl Club at Robinson Elementary School, both of the Kirkwood School District.

Mrs. Newman's class collected boxes of office supplies and personal items for IRWP and its students before the winter holidays. Additionally, every member of the class sent along a personal note to IRWP - "I am thankful for

what I have, so I want to share with you. I hope you like America." "Today is my sister's birthday. I have a dog. She is black and white. Welcome to St. Louis!"

The Sista Girl Club, led by Robinson Elementary School teachers Barb Sondermann and Shayla Graves, is a group of 4th and 5th graders whose activities include helping the community through service learning projects. The dedicated girls of the club used their recess time to sell hot chocolate at 25 cents a cup in order to raise their goal of \$200. Sondermann and Graves then used these funds to purchase and donate supplies critically needed by IRWP.

The children of Mrs. Newman's class and the Sista Girl Club have shown a caring and inspiring spirit and prove that anyone can help to make a difference in the lives of others. Their gifts have gone far in helping our students and our program this year.



The Sista Girl Club

Together We Are ... Making a Difference

Some students at IRWP may not be new to the United States and may have even picked up language skills by living in our country, yet language barriers still cause self-consciousness and keep them from fully participating in our community. One remarkable student, who is from Vietnam and has lived in the U.S. for 18 years, came to our program with the ability to speak and understand English and U.S. citizenship that she achieved through self-study.

Still, her worries over being able to communicate fully held her back. Her goal has been to increase her skills in understanding and speaking to others and she has been participating in the IRWP program for almost a year. Recently she was hospitalized and her teacher shared that her student was more comfortable communicating with the nurses and her roommates because of our lessons. The nurses even commented on how impressed they were with her English and that it helped them better attend to her medical needs.

Keep up the great work, ladies!

There is a Latin proverb that says "By learning you will teach; by teaching you will learn." This is certainly true when it comes to the relationships between our students and teachers. One recent example: When a student expressed frustration at the cost of the bottled water that she and her family drank as tap water bothered her stomach, her teacher explained that she had other options such as using a pitcher type water filter. This was quite exciting to her student, and through double coupons and a sale, the two were able to find a Brita for under \$10.

Conversely, the student, a skilled Bosnian baker, gave her teacher a lesson on making her amazing homemade phyllo dough (which she uses in her many foods and pastries that are always sent home to her teacher's family!) When the teacher attempted to make the dough at home, she found out that it was much more difficult than her student made it look to roll out the dough into such thin sheets. When explaining her baking trials and seeking counsel from her student-cum-instructor, she was given the simple advice she likely learned from her English lessons: "Practice, practice, practice!"

Thank you to all our wonderful supporters who made it possible to open new doors through English education for 120 students in the last year!

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If you would like to learn more about volunteering or our services, request that your donation remain anonymous, receive news via email, or remove your name from the mailing list, please contact us at 314-771-1104, email director@irwp.net, or write us at 3672B Arsenal St., St. Louis, MO 63116.



Recycle Today & Help A Student

In the past year, IRWP has begun collecting donations of empty inkjet and laser printer cartridges as well as used cell phones to recycle as a fundraiser. We have received donations from teachers, supporters, and area groups that we were then able to redeem for cash for the program.

For example, IRWP would like to recognize the community spirit of employees of The Coffee Cartel—"St. Louis' Biggest and Best Coffee House"—for their efforts in collecting recyclables for IRWP. Through their "Cartel Cares" donation box, many people donated valuable recyclables and helped raise funds for our programs.

IRWP continues to participate in the recycling program and in addition to the funds we receive through donated items, we can also raise funds through referrals to other groups who are interested in participating. If your business, school, non-profit group, or church would like to set up your own recycling program, or would like to host a donation box for IRWP, call Sarah at 314-771-1104 or stop by at 3672B Arsenal Street.



Save the Date

Festival of Nations, August 28 & 29, 2010
 Visit us at Tower Grove Park on Saturday or Sunday

Trivia Night, Saturday, November 13, 2010
 St. Catherine Laboure, 9740 Sappington Road

Hoolie, Sunday, March 6, 2011
 Maggie O'Brien's Restaurant, 2000 Market Street

Students from around the globe have benefited this year by working one-on-one with their volunteer.

Afghanistan	Honduras	Somalia
Albania	Iraq	Syria
Bethlehem	Jordan	Tanzania
Bosnia	Kurdistan	Thailand
Burma	Liberia	Togo
Burundi	Mexico	Turkey
Congo	Nepal	Ukraine
Croatia	Russia	Uzbekistan
Eritrea	Senegal	Vietnam
Ethiopia	Sierra Leone	

You can be a volunteer and enjoy an enriching experience for one hour, twice a week. Lesson plans, training and materials are waiting for you!

Visit our website at www.irwp.net to learn more.