

What Do You Dream About?

by Nouf Alkhidhr

Fisher Ng is a volunteer English teacher who has kindly dedicated his time and effort to help refugees learn English and adapt to a new culture. I knew Fisher as a student in the Arabic class that I was teaching. I constantly reflected on my teaching experience, and always wondered about what makes a good teacher. Eventually I discovered that pursuing teaching as an act of service is a great approach. I found that approach ingrained in Fisher, and that is why I wanted to share his story as a volunteer teacher.

A full-time mechanical engineering student at Gonzaga, Fisher is a native English speaker who is fluent in Mandarin Chinese. He learned Spanish in school and Arabic later at university. Currently, Fisher is picking up Sgaw Karen (a language spoken by an ethnic group from Myanmar and Thailand) as he is helping the refugees adapt to the culture here. The concept of service is an essential part of the Bahá'í Faith, and that is the belief which fuels Fisher's passion for helping others while practicing his faith. Growing up, he was surrounded by supportive youth groups that helped him have important conversations. These experiences transformed Fisher in a way that made him know that one day he wanted to be in a position to provide the same support for somebody else. It was a natural progression that Fisher took the role of volunteering to lead the Junior Youth Spiritual Empowerment Group in Spokane.

From the simplest gatherings around bonfires, this group was formed in September 2019. At the time, it was to help the refugees develop the capacity to express themselves by reading with them. When the pandemic hit, the world changed, but Fisher continued to serve. It was during that time that parents became involved with the group meetings, whether it was through music and songs, or just being present with their children. A young student brought up a conversation about life goals and asked Fisher, "What do you dream about?" That inspired Fisher to pass on the same question to a parent of a student. That parent's response was, "to learn English so I can make friends from

different cultures and talk to my boss." Fisher quickly took the initiative saying, "Next week we will start learning English!" And that is how this class started. Word of mouth grew and other parents joined, and it started meeting for about 2 hours 3–4 times a week.

"It is a way to connect with other people," is how Fisher would describe his class. But like any teacher, Fisher faces challenges that come along with the job. The wide age range of the students made it somewhat difficult to be able to cater to all the needs. There was also a difference in the educational background. Some parents had schooling in their country, while others did not. However, something wonderful happened. Those who were of a more advanced level would turn to others around them and help them. This happened naturally.

In class, Fisher would usually have one of the youth help with translating words. When Fisher prepares for the class, he thinks mostly about what is going to help. That guides him in picking the best lessons and material. He thinks about what words are most relevant. Fisher hopes that the parents will feel encouraged enough to continue



Fisher Ng is a mechanical engineering student at Gonzaga University. He is a native English speaker and is now a volunteer teacher in Spokane, Washington.

making the effort to learn independently, too.

Fisher feels that the most rewarding thing from this process is interacting with people from different cultures. “Developing these friendships is always joyful,” he says. There were times that the parents would cook food for Fisher, and he was touched by that act of kindness and generosity. It was their way of showing appreciation, and he thinks this is a meaningful act and a great example of human connection.

For this informal group that was formed by eagerness to learn English, what might be missing is a way to maintain consistency, since learning is not measured by any tests. However, these parents are some of the most diligent students that Fisher has known. They arrive on time, always pay attention, and are there to learn and take advantage of this opportunity. If there is one piece of advice to share with the youth, Fisher says he would tell them to never look at their shortcomings and instead

to look at the relationships. “If you love spending time with people and knowing them, that is your guide to conversations about deeper things.” Language learning will follow naturally.

Fisher hopes to continue helping this group for the next few years. He would like to be around to see growth over time. In the Bahá’í Faith there is a belief that one should lead a balanced life, and Fisher hopes to use his education to conduct service projects aiming to help the community. “I want my future to be of service and to connect with people,” he said.

Being of service marks the difference of people who know life is all about being part of something bigger than yourself! When I told Fisher that I want to interview him and praise him for the amazing volunteer job he is doing, he said that he does not think he needs the praise as it is always in his heart and actions to be of service to others. That sums up the kind person Fisher is.



“I have a huge passion for Arabic and teaching it makes me happy.” A native Arabic speaker, **Nouf Alkhdhr** (<https://www.the arabickitab.com>) is passionate about storytelling, music, charity projects, Arabic, and the kind way of teaching. She enjoys talking to people and getting to know them and their stories. Nouf thinks language teaching should be interesting, fun, and most importantly coming from a place of love. You can contact her at nouf@the arabickitab.com.