**HELPSmates Buddy Program Guidelines for Volunteers**

**Who will I meet?**

We will help students choose their volunteers based on the information you gave us in your application. Usually the most important factor is whether you are both available on the same day. Other factors include gender, area of interest and how many students you would like to meet at the same time.

When you register, indicate how many students you would like to meet. Most people meet only 1 student but some people like to meet in a small group of 3, including the volunteer. Volunteers are only expected to spend 1 hour a week, no matter how many students they meet. Don’t feel obliged to meet your students on separate days! Students can only choose one volunteer buddy.

**What is my role as a Volunteer Buddy?**

* Provide an opportunity for casual conversation with a sympathetic local person
* Model grammar and pronunciation skills through speaking
* Ask questions to clarify understanding and vocabulary
* Answer questions about your language and culture
* Answer questions about your experience in the Australian workplace
* Give feedback and make corrections if you are comfortable with that, based on your own experience. You don’t have to be an English teacher!
* Consult with HELPS if you would like access to any other resources
* You don’t have to prepare lessons; help with student assignments or be an expert in English grammar – just turn up and encourage conversation!

*Talk to your student about what they need and try to be guided by them.*

**What is the Student’s role?**

The student should be encouraged to discuss what kind of approach they think may help them. They should also be challenged to initiate conversation and decide on what they want to talk about each week, though this may be difficult for some of them at first.

Ask them what they think they most need to improve and what they think has helped them in the past. For most students simply meeting and participating in casual conversation provides them the opportunity to help them improve a range of skills (general fluency; informal Australian vocabulary; pronunciation and grammar skills).

**When, where and how often should we meet?**

When you register for this program you will agree to meet your student on UTS premises for a minimum of 6 meetings. Ideally they will take place once a week, but we understand you may need to be flexible with that depending on your availability and that of the student.

You can decide where to meet. You are very welcome to meet in the HELPS Volunteer Lounge or a UTS café or quiet area on campus. If the Lounge isn’t open when you arrive, drop into HELPS and ask for access. If you want to meet after 5pm, please contact the HELPS Volunteer Coordinator to arrange access for you. Remember, the HELPS Buddy Program insurance only covers you while you are here on UTS premises. If meetings continue or are conducted outside of UTS they are no longer considered to be part of the HELPS Buddy Program.

You can also meet through other forums such as Skype, as long as you are both comfortable with that but remember the HELPS Buddy Program is about casual conversation so face to face meetings are ideal.

**When will I get a buddy?**

You may be contacted soon or it could take a while, depending on demand and time of year. At certain times within the semester, it may take longer to find a buddy. Matching of volunteers and students depends on whether they have the same availability and areas of interest. If you don’t find a buddy within a few weeks of semester start, please email us and we may be able to offer some advice.

**How long should buddies wait for each other?**

It is very important that volunteers and students reply to their emails or their buddies will think they are no longer interested in the program. It is also important to check junk mail as there have been some problems with emails going to junk mail, though we think that has now been solved.

Asking someone to wait for longer than 15 minutes in case of delay is considered unreasonable. At the first meeting consider exchanging phone numbers, though only if agreed by both partners.

**Should I prepare for the meetings?**

It’s good for the students to think about their aims for this program. Challenge them to bring topics or questions each week. As the volunteer, you don’t need to prepare anything unless you think additional materials might help eg. newspaper articles; photos.

**What will we talk about?**

The first couple of meetings are about getting to know each other. Some topics that might help if the student is finding it hard to know what to talk about:

* Their cultural background and experience in Australia – what is different from their country?
* Their schooling, current studies and future life/career plans
* Their travel experiences and yours
* Their reason for wanting to improve English – work; residence; social; IELTS exam
* How you would both like to manage the meetings – casual conversation is fine!

As you get to know each other, it’s a good idea to ask students what they would like to talk about each week.

Though it is a good opportunity for students to talk about their studies and clarify ideas, it is not a volunteer’s responsibility to edit written assignments. This may be in breach of the university’s Plagiarism policies. For help with writing, students can come into the HELPS centre and talk to our Academic Advisors.

**Should I correct the student? How much correction do they need?**

You don’t have to be a grammar expert to be a volunteer buddy! Just turning up and modeling clear conversation and pronunciation skills is already enough.

This is for you to agree with your buddy but here are some ideas you can discuss with them:

* Don’t correct every mistake unless your student is very confident – you don’t want the meetings to be all about errors.
* Talk to your student about when and how they would like to be corrected
* Talk to them about the balance that is needed between being fluent and being accurate
* Help your student if they are searching for a particular word or phrase. It’s helpful sometimes to write them down so that they can slowly build themselves a list of new vocab.
* You can both try to identify patterns over time eg. particular sounds, particular words or sentence structures.
  + Identify something that is difficult for you to understand
  + Repeat in the correct form
  + Write down what it sounds like to you
  + Ask the student to repeat after you

**What if I want to stop?**

Either partner can stop the meetings if necessary but please contact HELPS to confirm this is the case. It is important to also confirm with your buddy that you can no longer continue. If needed, HELPS can contact your buddy for you and help you find a new buddy.

**Should we record how often we meet?**

You will be sent a simple online form where you can record your 6 meetings. It helps us monitor the success of the program and ensure we can continue.

**Do I get a certificate?**

Certificates will be issued to volunteer buddies after completing the program. Certificates are not issued to students taking part to improve their English speaking skills.

**Good luck with the UTS HELPS Buddy Program!**

**How the Buddy Program can help with conversation skills**

**Fluency**

International students need opportunities **to talk at length** without too many pauses or hesitations. Talking with a buddy can help them develop **the right speed** and give them practice **linking their ideas together well**. Ask questions to keep your student talking. You will naturally model how to start sentences and link them together without thinking about it eg. ‘apparently’; ‘because of that’; ‘what I mean is ..’

**Vocabulary**

International students are trying to increase the **range** and **accuracy** of their vocabulary.

• For study (academic vocabulary)

• Within their particular field (nursing, business, law etc)

• Within the Australian context (slang, informal language, casual conversation)

Let them know if you notice them using incorrect word forms eg. ‘economy’/’economic’. Help them find the words they are looking for and different ways of saying the same thing.

**Grammar**

International students are trying to reduce the number of **errors** and increase their **range** of grammatical structures. Help them identify regular errors without over-correcting them eg.

Verb tense I go (went) to the beach

Subject/verb agreement I go/she goes

Articles the/a/an

You will model different grammatical structures without even trying.

**Pronunciation**

International students are looking for pronunciation **errors that cause confusion.**

It’s not about having an accent – everyone has an accent! – it’s about being understood.

Tell your buddy when you don’t understand a word or phrase.

Write down what you hear and show them so they can see what you hear.

You can model the word or phrase and ask them to repeat it and compare.