



Tutoring in the OLive program with Refugee Education UK in Bristol, Summer of 2023

In the summer of 2023, I had the opportunity to be part of the tutoring team of Open Learning Initiative (OLive), a program run by Refugee Education UK in partnership with the University of Bristol.

As part of summer programs, OLive has set up free short 'Life Stories' courses for young refugees and asylum seekers in the Bristol area. This course covered a number of aspects involving the experience of the lives of refugees and asylum seekers, English writing exercises, reading books and creative writings, and photography. The sessions also included discussions and advice about the future prospects of joining the higher education system in the UK, a pathway to university as well as support through applications and funding options. OLive offered two parallel summer program teachings running in the summer of 2023. The first one was held at the hotels where some of the young asylum seekers lived for easy access to the students, while the other one was hosted by the Bristol Hospitality Network (BHN) in Easton Family Centre.

As an undergraduate social policy student at Bristol University and an immigrant myself, I had the privilege to be part of the tutoring team in the BHN to offer my experience in the higher education system and, at the same time, support young refugees to progress into higher education and career prospects.

I was a bit nervous when I first started as I was not sure what to expect, but thanks to Dr Corine Squire of the School of Policy Studies, Bristol University and the OLive coordinator for her extended support and encouragement, I easily fitted in. However, my nervousness quickly faded away and turned into excitement when I saw the enthusiasm of the students. Everyone had a vision of their own, and each contribution during the class was very interesting and had its own merit. The majority of the students came from different parts of the world with interesting life experiences. They had different levels of education. Some of the students

had university degrees from their home country, which the UK system does not recognise. My experience turned into an exciting learning opportunity for me.

The weekly programs were soon filled with joy and laughter during the discussions as everyone contributed their live stories. The reading section included reading famous writers; students suggested what writer to discuss. In writing, students also chose a variety of topics, from the history of Malcolm X to the geographical and cultural aspects of home countries to social justice in their communities. Other students displayed their creative talents by writing poems based on their life experiences. There were other students whose passions were photography and making films. One particular student enjoyed capturing the unique landmarks of the city, and it was very pleasing. I looked forward to every session to see all the different printed photos of different objects and landmarks. At the end of the program, students were awarded a certificate with a mini photo opportunity.



Hafti, reading with his friend. He calls him Nathan

To celebrate the success of the project, OLIve organised a short video to promote and explain the aims and objectives of the OLIve teaching programs. Again, I was very fortunate to be part of the video shoot and play my part.

To reflect on the overall experience, it was such an amazing experience, and I was so fortunate to be part of the OLIve team. I recommend it to anyone, whether it is volunteering, work placement or even as a part-time career.