

Volunteer English Tutoring Provides a Window to Real Life in San Miguel

At Jóvenes Adelante, we know that for our graduates entering the job market, landing the best jobs is a highly competitive business. We also know that being fluent in English often gives applicants the edge they need. With that in mind, our students are strongly encouraged from Day 1 to acquire English alongside their university coursework, and to select a language program that suits their learning style and their schedule. For some, meeting regularly with a tutor is the answer, and JA is fortunate to have a small team of volunteer English tutors.

I recently found Brian Clark with student Ana Sofía Muñoz Plaça, both hard at work on the Biblioteca patio. They meet every Saturday, and they happily took a short break to talk to me.



Brian is clear about why he does it:

“Volunteering with these kids allows me to become part of their lives, part of the San Miguel community, in a way that would never have been open to me otherwise. With these connections, I feel like I’m part of the community -- I’m not longer just passing through.”

A retired clinical social worker from Colorado, Brian began teaching English 7 years ago, for 6 months a year, every year.

He has seen the consistency pay off -- several of his students, who started with no English at all, are now nearly fluent. They have graduated from University and are working. Brian points out, “The students take our tutoring time seriously, even though their lives are very busy and they are under a lot of pressure at school. They are bright and highly motivated -- the future leaders of Mexico. For me, it’s a privilege to contribute to that process.”

Sofía is equally enthusiastic in explaining why she’s learning English. She is a first-year Tourism student and knows that she’s chosen an industry that requires English. And she wants to travel. She dreams of taking her mother on a trip to Canada!

Brian is one of four tutors providing regular support to Jóvenes Adelante students over the winter months. And more are needed, as he explains, “We especially need tutors who are here longer than I am. When I leave at the end of March, I know that my students will lose ground, in spite of their good intentions to maintain what we’ve achieved.”

He reflects further, “It’s not necessary to be formally trained in teaching or ESL, but it would be very hard to teach the beginners without an intermediate grasp of Spanish.” He continues, “Some degree of structure is required for sure, a consistent approach that the students can count on and allows them to gauge their progress.”

Brian's method (which he is happy to share!) gets students talking quickly by teaching sentence construction, starting with the selection of a common verb. As students gain confidence, their short stories describe their histories, their experiences at home and school, and their hopes and dreams. For Brian, this is a rare window to life in San Miguel, a privileged communication.

If you are interested in joining the volunteer tutoring team, please contact Dulce Cerritos at d.cerritos@jovenesadelante.org.