



International evening,
December 2022

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I work for Wilmslow Guild for Lifelong Learning, an educational charity in Cheshire, that supports in the main learners of the third age. Apart from providing a broad range of courses and thereby promoting lifelong learning, the charity also places substantial focus on social integration.

We offer a wide range of language courses for Italian, Spanish, French and German, with a good number of learners studying more than one language.

Although some learners are engaged in more than one language course, there is usually no cross-over between them; however, this year, in mid-December members from all the language classes with their teaching staff came together for an international evening - an evening of enjoying foreign languages, food and drink.

The motivations for getting learners and teachers of all four languages together lay in the desire

- to offer learners the opportunity to meet others studying the same language and to socially interact using their joint foreign language free from the constraints and expectations of the classroom,
- to engage with learners and teachers of the other foreign languages on offer, and hold conversations in languages they may have previously learnt.

The evening was meant to be a platform to practise speaking and listening in a non-threatening, social setting and to foster social integration.

Kindly funded by the charity, the teachers had prepared a buffet of traditional food, the charity's café offered warm and non-alcoholic cold drinks, and learners were invited to bring any alcoholic beverage they wanted to consume. Everyone enjoyed the culinary variety. A true journey around Europe on a plate (and in a glass!)

Within a very short period of opening the doors, the Guild social area was bustling with people. Some naysayers had previously commented that our intention of everyone communicating in the foreign language(s) they were studying and/or had learnt would not work, but Italian, Spanish, French and German conversations filled the room, swamping the international Christmas music playing in the background. Of course, at times English was spoken, but generally people made an effort to use their language skills as well as they could. (Learners at all levels were present.) It felt like a true celebration of language learning.



Wherever you looked you saw happy faces with attendees clearly enjoying the cross-course social interaction. As the evening progressed we even saw a "pop-up" choir of German speakers from a range of courses performing two traditional German Christmas carols; this provoked the Italians, and is likely to result in an Italian speaking "pop-up" choir at a future event).

Feedback was very positive, with many requests for more future events of this nature.

Personally, I would love to see more international evenings. It was such a pleasure to witness such a celebration of the main intent of our language learning. i.e. social interaction. Besides that, I cannot deny that I really enjoyed being able to speak German, French and Spanish all in the same evening, whilst re-awakening my very dormant Italian by listening to others speaking that language.

Not something that happens every day, that is for sure!

