



Lottie Osborn has been working as a primary French teacher in London for two years, and previously for three years as a secondary French and Spanish teacher. She is now in Barcelona studying for a Master's degree in Applied Linguistics and Language Acquisition.

Teachers as learners

Earlier this year, I was lucky enough to be awarded a Margaret Truss Study Abroad Bursary by ALL. I used the money to help fund a two-week stay in Paris, where I volunteered with Utopia 56, a French-based humanitarian association that provides urgent care and advice to displaced and homeless people in France, regardless of their legal or administrative status. Started in 2015 in the Calais Jungle, Utopia 56 aims to mobilise civilians, while advocating to enforce basic human rights. The association now has eight branches in France, including Paris, Calais and Toulouse.



Utopia 56 identifies the gaps in the support provided by the state and other organisations, and adapts its approach to current needs. I carried out a wide variety of volunteering tasks, such as distributing food and clothing, accompanying women and families to emergency accommodation for the night, and helping at the association's temporary accommodation location.

Utopia 56 aids unaccompanied minors who have arrived in France but have had their request for minor status rejected. The association supports them with administrative advice throughout the long process of appealing this decision, which can often take a year and leave them living in the street and unable to access education or healthcare.



They also organise bi-weekly French lessons for the young people and it was rewarding to use my language teaching skills in this context. The students were very motivated and ranged from new speakers of French, to fluent speakers from Francophone countries who were perfecting their writing skills.



The volunteering requirements are very flexible, with no minimum commitment, which allowed me to plan my time in a way that also enabled me to rest, which was important for a teacher during the school holidays! The ethos of Utopia 56 is very supportive and encourages volunteers to look after themselves, as the work can be physically and emotionally draining.

I volunteered most days, but some shifts were only a few hours, so I also had time to explore Paris. My highlights were: the sunset from Parc de Belleville, the incredible cherry blossom in Sceaux and visiting exhibitions in La Villette. Paris is amazing for free cultural events!



Through spending time volunteering with Utopia 56, I interacted every day with other French speaking volunteers, as well as many migrants from French speaking countries. This really improved my spoken fluency and confidence. The experience widened my vocabulary and knowledge relating to migration, asylum seeking and the refugee crisis, as well as enabling me to use my language skills to help those in need. All in all, it was wonderful to be part of such a project, and the impact did not stop there.

Back in London I shared my experience with my pupils. I showed them an interview with Josué ([link below](#)) an 8-year-old boy who explains how Utopia 56 has been so important for his family. In class, we discussed migration, homelessness and the refugee crisis. These are challenging topics to approach with children, but they showed sensitivity, awareness and empathy, which was another great outcome from my Margaret Truss experience.



All images from utopia56.org

If you are interested in volunteering with Utopia 56, please feel free to contact me, as I am happy to answer any questions:
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Their website has information on how to get involved here
<https://utopia56.org/devenir-benevole-2/>.

You can follow them on Instagram for regular updates on the migrant and humanitarian crisis in France. <https://www.instagram.com/utopia.56/>
<https://utopia56.org/notre-histoire>

Josué interview: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ILc1MeZiwM&t=4s>

Details of how to apply, and criteria for the ALL Margaret Truss Study Abroad Bursary fund:

<https://www.all-languages.org.uk/about/awards/margaret-truss-study-abroad-bursary-fund/>