

with written texts. There are potentially serious problems for people unable to read English when they are faced with the bureaucratic demands made of migrants in English-dominant countries. This is particularly true for asylum seekers and refugees such as Kamal. Many people in his position have access to community networks and resources to help them process important bureaucracy such as letters from the immigration authorities; they also have recourse to official interpreters and translators provided by government offices and local councils. However, one of the reasons people attend ESOL classes in the first place is to break their sense of dependency on either official translators or friends and relatives. This dependency can occasionally provoke insulting treatment from street-level bureaucrats and functionaries, as Yasmin's story suggests:

I have no confidence in anything, no control. I went to the bank to open an account. I took my sister with me to interpret. The cashier said, 'You don't know English?' 'No, I don't.' 'You can't open the account.' I froze in my place. I said, 'What, don't I have any value or anything?' He says to me 'You don't know English. Go and get an interpreter.' My sister said she was interpreting. 'You must pay money for an interpreter.' So I said, 'Let's go.' The man shook me up. In my country my brother opened an account for me. Nobody said anything. You get a strange feeling when you come to a strange country. You've left everything, and then people talk to you like this.

Yasmin, Yemeni woman, Leeds

Apart from the serious immediate and day-to-day reasons for needing literacy in English, many students are motivated to become literate to fulfil their longer term aspirations for employment and further study. Although many migrants face barriers which are arguably greater than those created by their low levels of English language and literacy, such as poverty, racism, and other discrimination, they often see literacy as their main passport to greater personal and economic fulfilment. Some people, often women, regard their efforts to acquire literacy in English as attempts to redress many years of inequality and frustration. Gulnaz's story is an illustration of this.

CASE STUDY 1 Gulnaz's Story

My father sent all of my brothers to school but he did not send me. I studied in primary school until the fifth year. They did not send me after that because we were living in a village. Actually there was not even a school building in my village. There was a very old building where they used to teach children. There was not even any tables or chairs. We used to sit on the floor. Some people went to secondary school in towns because they had some relatives living there. People who did not have any relatives in towns, like me, had to work in the fields. The other reason was that I was a girl. They believed that girls should not need to study.