



Melissa Hymas - Café Médiathèque, Loudéac

Melissa: Well I started in March 2018, it was an idea following a French formation because I was searching for work and I wanted to do some work that gave something back to the community. er I'm a big fan of baking, so I thought why not do a 'Cafe Conversation en Anglais' where I can have a conversation group, bring some cookies, make it more convivial, urm and so people don't feel so intimidated about trying to speak French. So it was originally a small group of people. The idea into conversation and then have a pause with coffee and cookies and then it was really popular straight from the start. I started as a benevole so it was 3 months er giving the information, trying to see if the course was going to work or not and from the start it was really successful. I think we had probably 17 people on the first day. No inscriptions, one publicity, so it was, we could see it was going to be successful and the following week I think we had an equal number of people. New people came every time. It was an idea to find something, an activity, for people that were retired er job seekers, wanting to improve their English and er it was for people to find new friends as well.

Elaine: Was is difficult finding the right premises.'cause this room is ideal,I mean to me it's lovely, it's warm, it's friendly, it's not like a big hall?

Melissa: No, that's right. Well, I approached the Médiathèque and asked if they were interested in pursuing something like this and in fact Carole le Pecher who is responsible here said she was astonished because she was just looking for an activity like that when my letter fell on her desk and so she immediately took me up on the offer to do 3 months for free to see how it would work, so that's how it started.

Elaine: So excellent, so it's almost like a coincidence, or serendipity, a moment of serendipity - your letter landed, just as - you were meant to be here?

Melissa: Yeah - it was fate, so this is my second year and still there's more new people coming every week.....

Elaine: So you just have the one session a week?

Melissa: One session a week yeah for one hour, two thirty to three thirty (14.30 to 15.30). I've had a lot of people asking for another session for five o'clock (17.00) in the evening for people who are working those hours, but there isn't the funding, I believe, so it would be the Mairie in Loudéac that would decide whether that was possible or not, so

Elaine. So you do get some funding towards?

Melissa: I am no longer... I have created my own 'enterprise' now.

Elaine: But you are a one very busy person?

Melissa: I am



Elaine: I guess you can't keep still?

Melissa: No, but I love doing it. I love to teach people and to make it more informal you know and to see their confidence build each week I love that.

Elaine: You can see that. I liked the way you had them sitting in just a semi circle. Are they all French all the people who come or do you have other nationalities who want to.....

Melissa: No, we have had some Spanish people, erm, it just changes, but generally they are French people from around this area, Mur de Bretagne, Ploemeur, Loudeac, just from around this sector. Yeah. So most of them are, some of them are younger students but the majority are retired people - one of our oldest students that come is 90 and he used to live in New York, but his English is really good and he wants to learn, well just to keep practising really so he can watch the police dramas on TV and understand it all.

Elaine: Are people reluctant to speak at first?

Melissa: I think when they know the group is already established, because there are people who come each week, although it is no inscription and so you can turn up, you can miss weeks, there's no...you're not obliged to come every week I think that when it's their first time they've arrived, like Luke today, I think there is a little bit of apprehension but that soon passes and I think having the coffee and tea and biscuits, and having that pause halfway through helps people feel a little more like they're at home. You know it's an exchange really more, more than a traditional lesson. It only a free style lesson it....we don't really know.....we'll start on maybe a subject but we can go off at a 'tandem' (tangent?) and talk about something completely different, so it flows naturally, I think.

Elaine: How can interested newcomers join in? Do they come to the library?

Melissa: Yeah, they can - there's a web site, obviously on Facebook. The Mediatheque's on the internet, they can phone up the Médiathèque and ask when the 'Cafe Conversation' are being held. Generally its on a Tuesday two thirty to three thirty (14.30 to 15.30) every Tuesday except during the school holidays. So they can just turn up, you don't have to reserve a place or anything like that.....

Elaine: And that's a nice - I think a good length of time isn't it? An hour.....

Melissa: Yeah, it goes very quickly and I always give time after for questions because you'll always get one or two people that didn't want to ask something during the lesson, they want to ask something afterwards so we kind of allow for that too.

Elaine: Do you have any plans to sort of develop further or to create another.....

Melissa: Yeah - I was actually doing a monthly group at Pontivy but there seems to be a lack of funding, at all, so I would really like to, be able to branch out, yeah I would like to branch out and do some more in different areas because I think there really is a demand for it there's people retired that have family living or working abroad in an English spoken country and they want to participate, they want to go shopping and not feel isolated



Elaine: Well, I admire your enthusiasm and energy

Melissa: Well, thank you very much

Elaine: And all your baking skills I'm sure are second to none.

Melissa: Different recipe every week, try to

Elaine: So thank you very much for taking time. And hopefully if we get any mayors out there listening they will sort of then leap into action.

Melissa: Thank you, I'd love to.

Elaine. Thank you and very well done.