

Caledon ESL participants receive awards

Two individuals, an instructor and a learner, from the Language Instruction to Newcomers to Canada (LINC) program at Caledon Community Services (CCS) are the recipients of notable awards this year in the world of English language training in Ontario. Suma Balagopal, ESL (English as a Second Language) instructor has won the Teachers of English as a Second Language Association of Ontario (TESL) Ontario's Sparks of Excellence Recognition Award for "providing outstanding educational experiences to her students in a manner that goes above and beyond the day to day duties of her job," according to the Award's description. One of her students, Afia Akhlaq, is one of this year's TESL Ontario grand prize winners of the province-wide annual ESL Creativity Contest.

What makes both these awards particularly rewarding is the fact that Balagopal, who has been teaching adults new to Canada for only the past seven years at CCS, is so passionate and enthusiastic about her new career (she was a former marketing executive abroad) that her success in helping students has translated into consistently producing winners in TESL Ontario's ESL Creativity Contest every year since the competition started and sometimes more than one in the same year.

Akhlaq's submission in the Learner category, one of more than 40 contest entries, was in the form of a short story about the life story of Hansa. She wrote it after reading an article about happiness that was presented in class by her instructor, Balagopal. Her story is about how a young girl in another country and culture had made her own life a very happy one, although to many readers, might have seemed very difficult and unhappy.

The contest, organized by TESL Ontario, is a feature of ESL Week, an annual celebration of ESL education and learning throughout Ontario, held this year from Oct. 12 to 18. A total of 50 communities to date have officially proclaimed ESL Week in their respective region.

Both Balagopal and Akhlaq will be honoured at TESL Ontario's 42nd annual conference in Toronto, which runs today (Thursday) and tomorrow.