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Mobile ESL classroom overcomes transportation barrier for refugee groups

By Quint Qualls
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After realizing that transportation represented the greatest hindrance to refugees attending English as a Second Language classes, one group of Tennesseans resolved to eliminate that barrier.

The Tennessee Foreign Language Institute is now bringing fully functional English as a Second Language classes to refugee communities in Nashville, using a new and very large truck.

“It’s really complex,” said Leah Hashinger, ESL to Go program manager. “We call it our transformer because it does so many different things. Attached to the chassis is the classroom on wheels. It’s designed to run and look like a normal ESL classroom.”

Hashinger joined with Angie Harris, director of the ESL program at TFLI, to raise more than \$150,000 to buy the truck, outfitted with tables, chairs, a mounted projector, and a heating and cooling system. It can seat up to 12 people comfortably. The Frist Foundation, Martin Foundation and Memorial Foundation each contributed \$50,000 to the project.

“The reason why a lot of us are in the field serving refugees is because these people were forced out of their homes,” Hashinger said. “They’ve been through so many struggles in life. We believe learning English is the first step to becoming self-sufficient.”

See the truck from 6-10 p.m. Saturday at East-Centric Pavilion at 1006 Fatherland St. in East Nashville. There will be live salsa music, international foods and cultural performances.
