BRIDGES ESL
SPRING 2024 ANTHOLOGY

Featuring work from our students:

Yixuan Li
Martha Lucia Mona Molina
Liset Jaen García
Aya Murayama
Weronika Milewska
Isabella Vieira
Hyunjin Lee
Andong Peng
Yoonseung Kim
Shupeng Lyu
Ana Paula Joaquim Manuel
Jana Rennfeld

Gabi Biondo
Júlia Machado de Aguiar
Songhyun Jung
Joedson Lima
Salomé Serrano
Mingi Um
Moochih Hsieh
Sameh Gendy

Rafael F. Rodrigues
Larissa Fonseca
Gizem Özdemir
Angela Alzate
Jheny
Betül Gürpinar
Danhui Liu
Julia Machado
Elisa Stedile
Building Bridges 2023-2024

History

Bridges ESL was founded in 2001 with the goal of providing free English as a Second Language resources to New Haven. We have proudly served our surrounding community for 23 years, seeking to break language barriers and promote social equity. All current tutors are Yale College students who have received training in ESL instruction. Tutors design their own curriculum based on their students’ needs and are provided educational resources, including sample lesson plans and office hours. We provide several levels of instruction based on student proficiency: Survival, Beginner, Intermediate, and Advanced.

Mission Statement

Bridges ESL provides free English language lessons to adult learners in the Greater New Haven area. Tutors develop personalized lessons to help meet students’ language goals related to employment, education, citizenship, and daily life. Bridges ESL helps people acquire the English skills necessary to confidently navigate family, work, and community—building bridges for their own future.

Bridges ESL Board 2023-2024

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Director of Publicity: Yuanyu Chen
Director of Education: Selin Nalbantoglu
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Special Thanks to Our Tutors

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Tiffany Zhou
Toby Platt
Tommy Gannon
Ushuu Namarra
Vishnu Bharathram
Yocilin Solis
Yoyo Ocho
Yuanyu Chen
Editor’s Note

I have been involved with Bridges ESL for three years now, starting my commitment to this organization as a first-year at Yale. I initially began as a regular tutor, dedicating my Saturdays to tutoring students beginner-level English. I was originally apprehensive at the idea of committing myself to something I consider elaborate and beyond reach of my comfort level, but I immediately found a community with my students. I learned from their experiences learning English, barrier they had faced since coming to the States, and impacts of my dedication to their enrichment.

Since then, I have served as Director of Pairing (2022-2023) and now Secretary (2023-2024) on the Bridges ESL board. Compiling and reading all of the entries for this anthology has reminded me of how thankful I am to be part of this community. I have enjoyed reading how tutors have made impacts in the very recent lives of their students, while also seeing the emerging confidence in language abilities from students due to their experience with Bridges ESL. I am reminded of why I have decided to make this space a forever community for me, as I hope to foster the same for others.

Thank you to tutors for your immeasurable work this semester and I hope you all have inspired a new generation of alumni that will forever be indebted to your services. Beyond everything, thank you to the students for trusting us in creating a safe and enjoyable space for you as you start (or continue) your journey learning English. We hope we have made a huge influence in your English-learning practices, so much that we invite you all to stay with us for future terms -- you are all part of this forever family.

Ignacio Ruiz-Sánchez
Bridges ESL Secretary (2023-2024)
Dear Bridges community,

What an honor it has been to serve alongside Melina as one of your co-presidents this year. From the moment I joined Bridges as a freshman, this community has given me endless support and guidance. The work we do is so important. Language barriers are barriers to interpersonal relationships, to healthcare access, to an equal workplace. Language barriers are barriers to our emotional, physical, and societal wellbeing. Together, we have built bridges to overcome these barriers. (haha.) Tutors, I thank you for committing your time to creating engaging lesson plans. I thank you for teaching with empathy and patience. To our students, I thank you for trusting us to be your teachers and friends. Thank you all.

This year, we have faced unprecedented change. Transitioning out of our hybrid model posed challenges ranging from a lack of physical space to organizational inexperience planning in-person events. However, we have faced these challenges head on and thrived. This year, we expanded our in-person operations to La Casa Cultural, which in turn enabled us to organize over 20 additional in-person classes. We welcomed author and Bridges alum Younsoo Shim to speak about her memoir detailing her time as a Bridges student. We partnered with the Community Health Educators and HAVEN Free Clinic to lead health-focused workshops for students. Finally, last week, we were nominated for the AACC Program of the Year.

None of this could have been possible without your energy and passion. Seeing everyone’s faces in the AACC and La Casa every Saturday morning is always the highlight of my week. I would also like to thank my incredible student board—Ignacio, Denise, Rosa, Yuanyu, Brian, and Selin—for their tireless efforts. Thank you guys for putting up with me day in and day out! Finally, I would like to thank my co-president, Melina Joseph, without whom none of this would have been possible.

I look forward to coming back next year—my senior year—as a tutor, hopefully retired from leadership duties but definitely filled with gratitude. Good luck to our graduating seniors, and see you all soon!

Best,
Derek Song
Bridges ESL Co-President (2023-2024)

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Dear Bridges family,

As we come to the end of another academic year, I find myself reflecting on the incredible journey we’ve shared. It has been an immense honor to serve as one of your co-presidents this year. Together, we’ve navigated challenges, celebrated successes, and grown as a family bonded by a passion for language and learning.

I vividly recall my own beginnings as a tutor during my first year at Yale, a time when virtual learning became our new norm due to the pandemic. Despite the distance, our connection remained strong, and our commitment to supporting one another never wavered. Through it all, our students’ resilience and dedication have been a constant source of inspiration, reminding us of the profound impact education can have on transforming lives.

Though it is bittersweet to graduate, I am filled with excitement for the upcoming year and the ways in which Bridges ESL will continue to grow and flourish, living up to its name of building bridges across cultures and communities. I want to take a moment to extend my gratitude to my incredible co-president, Derek, and my board members--Brian, Denise, Ignacio, Rosa, Selin, and Yuanyu—for their leadership and dedication to Bridges.

To our students and tutors: you are the heart of this organization, and your commitment to language learning and cultural understanding is an inspiration. Thank you for the unwavering support, the laughter shared, and the friendships forged. It has been an honor and a privilege to be a part of this community. As we part ways, know that you will always hold a special place in my heart, and that the bonds we’ve formed within the Bridges family will endure.

With warmth,
Melina Joseph
Bridges ESL Co-President (2023-2024)
SPRING 2024

Student: Gabi Biondo
Tutor: Jungbin Cha

I’m from New Haven and started doing Bridges ESL class to improve my English. Since then I’ve been learning and practicing my communication skills so much and it’s been very satisfactory to see my English getting better.

I’m grateful for the time Yuanyu Chen and Jamie Cha took to teach us. They are amazing and very thoughtful with all of us.

I appreciate the opportunity and the effort all the students put to offer us the classes.

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Student: Júlia Machado de Aguiar
Tutor: Jungbin Cha

Hi, everyone! I’m from Brazil and after 6 months living in the US I feel comfortable saying that I could not have asked for a better opportunity to improve my English. I’ll always be grateful for having been part of the program. I’ve been trying to keep conversations and working out some problems in English and Bridges helped me with my development and my confidence. Have you ever wondered about taking classes at Yale, with students who’re currently studying at the University and classmates from all over the world? You are definitely not in regular English classes. You are immersing yourself in a group to learn new words, English grammar and communication but also, I had the opportunity to learn culture, different accents and histories. I’m finishing my exchange very thankful to my tutors who made all of this possible. They’re amazing and helped me a lot throughout my journey. I can see my English skills have gotten better and I couldn’t pull it off without them. Now I am coming back to Brazil proud of myself and with all learning and experiences.

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Student: Songhyun Jung
Tutor: Jungbin Cha

During my first year in the U.S., I didn’t have many opportunities to speak English, since I do not work or study here. Finally, after joining Bridges I found a place where I could speak English regularly. I felt like I was improving my English, and myself! My mentor, Jamie, helped me learn better sentence structures and expressions. With Bridges, the atmosphere was always very welcoming and easygoing. I am so happy to have found such a good opportunity to practice my English, and also to get to meet amazing people through Bridges ESL.

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Student: Joedson (Joey) Lima
Tutor: Jungbin Cha

My name is Joedson (Joey most of the time), I’m from Brazil and I’m currently doing part of my Biochemistry PhD in the US. I’ve heard about Bridges ESL from a friend that I’ve met aboard. She told me about her experience and how this class changed her perspective on a lot of things. That was the push I needed to start. Among other reasons, I was first motivated by the opportunity to improve my English and my scientific writing. Then I figured out that these classes would mean so much more to me. With Jaime Cha and Yuanyu Chen, we shared many stories and learned about so many different cultures. Now I’m not only better at my English, but I also made friends from across the world, people I can hang out to talk about our purposes here. With different experiences, from being here to learn English to singing Danny Boy in an acapella group, everyone I met gave me an extraordinary perspective about their dreams and I feel that we’re a little bit closer just by joining a class that pushes us forward. That said, I am immensely grateful for the experience Bridges ESL has provided me.
I loved being a student of the Bridges ESL. The classes were amazing, I learned a lot, and I met nice people. Linda, your classes were so good. I like so much the exercises. Thank you!

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**Student: Mingi Um**  
**Tutor: Brian Moore**

I’m a foreigner who has lived in New Haven since 2022. I have been taking a Bridges ESL class for about 2 years. I am confident that Bridges ESL program can give you opportunities to not only learn English, but also communicate with people who speak English as a second language. If you are struggling with communicating in English, don’t miss out on this amazing class!

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**Student: Moochih Hsieh**  
**Tutor: Sophia Liu**

Hello! My name is Moochih, and I’m from Taiwan. I came here as a student spouse. This is my last semester in New Haven, and I really appreciate the BRIDGES ESL program.

In class, we often practice speaking, and through our weekly classes, I became more confident speaking English, which helps me feel less confused when auditing classes at Yale. I want to thank my tutor, Sophia, for making it possible for me to learn and communicate with confidence.

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**Student: Sameh Gendy**  
**Tutor: Linda Do**

Spring 2024 was my second season, respectively. I enjoyed this journey, especially with Lenda, who created many learning methods to help us understand, enrich my vocabulary and speaking through games, Google new and extra information about the lesson topic and give us a space to share and speak more. I’m looking forward to joining the next level. Also, I was so happy to see people to whom I recommended the Bridges ESL.

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**Student: Salomé Serrano**  
**Tutor: Jungbin Cha**

I’m very grateful for the Bridges program because through Bridges, I was able to meet many people of different nationalities and they enriched me with their cultures and I was able to make new friends. I also want to highlight the work that our tutors do since they are very responsible and patient people with all the students. The classes were very fun and going back every week for a Bridges class was always very pleasant.
Hello everyone, my name is Shupeng Lyu. I’m very honored to have the opportunity to join this writing project, this is my story about English: I’m from China. When I was a middle school student, English was a required course. However, unfortunately, maybe I don’t have any language talent. And, as most people have the impression of Asian people---I’m good at math, physics, biology, and so on. So, based on these courses are enough for me to get a good grade. English is not important to me.

As time goes by, I like most people in the world, graduate from school, get a job to earn money, marry my wife, and start organizing a family. The study of English has become an old memory, it has no influence on my life.

One day, my wife told me that she wanted to come to the US to continue her studies. It’s a very big decision. Because at that time, I had a certain position in the company, and we had begun to plan to buy a house. If we choose to go abroad, it means everything will be broken. But I couldn’t bear to live apart from her or talk her given up this choice. Because she was so cautious and I didn’t want to hurt her feelings.

Consequently, two years ago in spring, English study return to my life.
Conclusion:
My journey as an Au Pair in America was a rollercoaster of emotions, challenges, and moments of pure joy. This anthology is a testament to the transformative power of this experience and the valuable lessons I will carry with me for the rest of my life.

Student: Jana Rennefeld
Tutor: Toby Platt

Hello, my name is Jana and I am an Au pair from Germany. This was my second semester at Bridges ESL. The English classes have been very helpful, so that I could improve my reading comprehension, grammar, as well as expand my vocabulary! My tutor this semester was Toby, who always structured the classes very well, which made learning English easier and more fun. Bridges ESL was definitely a nice opportunity to improve my English skills, and through the program I was also able to meet new people and get to know other cultures!

Student: Yixuan Li
Tutor: Ari Li

I’m Yixuan Liu and I have been living in New Haven for about five months. I’m here because my husband got a postdoc offer from Yale University and I would like to further study in the United States. This is my first time in the US. Although I have studied English since I was 6 years old, I didn’t have enough opportunity to use it as a spoken language. For a few months, I’ve been very nervous about how to communicate with others, because I’m not sure other people can understand what I mean or whether I can understand what others mean.

However, I got to know the Bridges ESL class by chance. To be honest, it’s a very nice family, everyone I met in class is so kind that they made me brave enough to express myself. I want to thank Bridges everyone, especially my tutors Ari and Yuanyu, who taught me grammar, reading skills, and speaking. I feel confident and motivated to speak, even though sometimes I don’t know how to express myself specifically. But it’s fine because everyone would correct my error and how to say it in English. Meanwhile, I met lots of people who have the same hobbies as me. We always hang out together and have a good memory here. I’m sure it’s a good beginning and plan to join the next semester to practice listening and speaking.

Student: Martha Lucia Mona Molina
Tutor: Damaris Cuapio

My name is Martha, I am from Colombia, I have been here 2 years. I am a babysitter. I found this course trough internet I want to learn English to perform better. Thanks to Miss Damaris for her dedication and patience
Student: Liset Jaen García  
Tutor: Damaris Cuapio

My name is Liset Jaén and I am from Cuba. I have been living in the United States for a year. Currently, I reside in Guilford. I work at Yale University as a Casual Service Worked.
I joined Bridges ESL because my goal is to learn English so I can study, have a better job, and to be able to interact with other people. This program has allowed me to improve my English and I am truly grateful for this experience. Which made it possible to improve my English skills.
My favorite part of our classes was learning about pronunciation.
I would like to express my gratitude to the teacher for her patience and dedication during our classes.

Student: Aya Murayama  
Tutor: Madeline Chun

This is my second semester attending ESL classes at Bridges. The first semester I took classes through Zoom. But when I visited AACC on Celebration Day last semester, I enjoyed the atmosphere so much that I decided to attend class in person this semester.

I really enjoyed Madeline's class. She provided us with texts and resources in a variety of genres. Sometimes the content was challenging, but I really got a lot out of it, learning new vocabularies and expressions, and making me think!
The class size was also wonderful. There were four or five of us, including the tutor, so it was easy to have discussions.

Since my stay in the U.S. this time was to accompany my husband on his sabbatical at Yale, I had more free time than before. I had the opportunity to study English seriously for the first time in a long time and reconfirmed my enjoyment of learning, not only English.

Finally, thank you Madeline, Isabella, Kim, and Weronika. Although it was only two hours a week, I am glad that we could share the time to learn together. I hope to see you again if the opportunity arises.

Student: Weronika Milewska  
Tutor: Madeline Chun

My name is Weronika and I’m 27 years old. I’m here in US almost two years. Being in foreign country it’s not that easy you have to use to many new things especially language. I’m glad I could improve my language skills here in Bridges ESL. I’m so grateful for that opportunity to learn from great tutors from Yale University. In Bridges program I could read great stories, improve my grammar and spoke about interesting topics with tutors and my colleagues.
On the program you can meet people with similar goal as yours so that gave me feeling that I’m not alone here. I met here people from different countries and also learn about their culture.

Bridges program is free for everybody as an Au Pair I can say that is really important and great chance for us.
The Bridges ESL program helped me a lot especially with conversation. I’m more confident about that. Thank you for that opportunity.
Student: Isabella Vieira  
Tutor: Madeline Chun

Finding out about Bridges was a pleasant surprise. As an exchange program student one of my main goals was improving my English level and getting to know more about the North American culture. My first language is Portuguese and it could be a bit challenging finding yourself learning a new language by being 100% immersed in it but I feel like it is a big opportunity to push yourself.

The program offered by Yale students has a lot of potential when it comes to putting a group of people with different ages, cultures and that speak different languages together to share life experiences and learn or improve your English skills. In my classes with tutor Madeline Chun we got in touch with a lot of different literary genres by reading news, books, essays and listening to podcasts. One of my favorite parts was an exercise where our tutor brought up a few idioms and if we had any idea of what it meant we would have to explain it in our own words. Like “Break a leg” for example, if you just translate it to your mother language it wouldn’t make much sense but in the English language it has a meaning behind that transcends the usual meaning of those words, like good luck.

The course in general was really eye opening, being able to have a study routine was really important for me personally and made me want to keep on studying and learning more and more English and the North American Culture.

Student: Hyunjin Lee  
Tutor: Vishnu Bharathram

This Spring 2024 semester of bridge esl was my 3rd semester.  
My tutor’s name was Vishnu and my classmates were Alex, Nadia, and Elisa.  
They are all from Brazil. My name is Julie, from South Korea. My Korean name is Hyunjin Lee.  
First of all, I really appreciate my tutor, Vishnu. He is my best tutor ever.  
And he sincerely tried for our classmate to improve our English. Thanks for his effort. Vishnu always gave us homework every week. It was reading summaries, writing for some subjects, and listening summaries.  
He always checked our homework during the classes. If I couldn’t understand some words, he explained them in detail.  
Secondly, I appreciated my classmates.  
We had good memories and laughed a lot together. Our class memories are happiest to me.  
In the classes, we learned Reading, speaking, listening and grammar as well. For reading, we read aloud one by one and summarized some paragraphs. Vishnu corrected English pronunciation. During listening time, we listened some of podcasts.  
Sometimes, we watched the American Sitcom ‘Friends’ with English subtitles. We laughed a lot when we watched, especially Alex. Alex has watched this sitcom a lot before. Also we talked each other’s about life in the US.  
Lastly, I’ll enroll next Fall semester also. I’d like to get tutoring with Vishnu. Thank you for all, my tutor and class mates.  
Let’s keep in touch. And I wish you are doing well everything and you are all the best. Be always happy and healthy. See you again next semester.
Student: Andong Peng  
Tutor: Tiffany Zhou  
I'm very glad to have the chance to join the class, and meet good and excellent teacher and classmate. I want to say thank you to my teacher for your help. I know my English is very bad, you will use Chinese mandarin when I can't understand what you say. Since I join the class. I gained courage to speak English with others. I think my English improved a lot. I can understand simple sentences, and I can write some sentences. Thank you very much. I will attend next class if I have chance.  
Hope you're happy everyday!

Student: Danhui Liu  
Tutor: Tiffany Zhou  
I'am so exciting to attend this English class. The teacher Tiffany is so kind and patient to teacher us. It's my first time to learn at Yale. The teacher teach me many new methods to learn English. She gave us a series of classes. For example grammars, new words, reading and writing. Especially we see many videos programs. Everytime I feel the time flies and hope to see the teacher sooner next time. And I let new friends here. That make me very happy too. The English lesson is free, I am so touched I will learn from you. In the future, I will help people as I can. I hope I can attend next time. Thanks so much.

Student: Julia Machado  
Tutor: Yuanyu Chen and Jamie Cha  
Hi, everyone! I'm from Brazil. After 6 months of living in the US I feel comfortable saying that I could not have asked for a better opportunity to improve my English. I'll always be grateful for having been part of the program. I've been trying to keep conversations and working out some problems in English and Bridges helped me with developing my English and also my confidence. Have you ever wondered what taking classes at Yale, with students who're currently studying at the University and classmates from all over the world, will be like? They are definitely different from taking normal English classes. You are immersing yourself in a group to learn new words, English grammar and communication but more importantly, I had the opportunity to learn culture, different accents and histories. As I near the end of my exchange experience, I'm very thankful to my tutors who made all of this possible. They're amazing and helped me a lot throughout my journey. My English skills have gotten better and I couldn't have pulled it off without them. As I return to Brazil, I will reminise these lessons, experiences, and challenges with pride.

Student: Elisa Stedile  
Tutor: Vishnu Bharathram  
The Bridges ESL classes helped expand my vocabulary in a fun and relaxed way. Exploring different words from different eras was intriguing, even if I might not use them on a daily basis I can see how this knowledge will come in handy when reading classic literature. Despite the fact that it was a short experience for me, and I didn't got to know a lot of my classmates I really enjoyed it and would definitely recommend it to others.
Hello! I'm Yoonseung. It surprises me that it's already been two years from the time I first started my life in the US and New Haven. At that time, moving to the US and working at Yale was a great opportunity to me so declining it was not an option. However, I remember that I had such a big fear in communicating in English so that I wished the departure date would not come.

Bridges ESL was a big help for me to overcome the fear. I took this program in multiple semesters, and the tutors were always willing to help, and I had many opportunities to have interesting discussions with other tutees. I liked the small-group-style class, because I was able to ask questions as many as I want, and the group members could share their personal interests and use it for topics to discuss. Especially, I thank Sammie, my tutor of this semester, for encouraging me to speak English without fear in the classes.

It's likely that my life in New Haven will end soon. I'm not sure about what to come in the next step of my life, but I will probably be more confident this time. Thanks, Bridges ESL!

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Hello, my name is Rafael Rodrigues, I'm from Brazil, and, when I choose my professional career, I knew the need to speak English. I study English in Brazil almost three years, but, I never had the possibility to contact with foreigner teachers.

I can't write enough how grateful I am for the opportunity to improve my skills in English with Bridges ESL and my tutors. The classes were very good and I could see the love the teachers had for teaching us English. All our recommendations were well accepted and included in the lessons. Our lessons went very quickly because I was very entertained by the topics of the day. The teachers always made it comfortable for me to speak what I knew at the time and I can't tell you how much I've improved since the first lesson.

When I started this course, I wanted to improve my English, but when we finished, not only did I improve my English, but I met two wonderful people from another culture who helped me a lot without asking for anything in return. I'm excited to next course. I hope with the same tutors.

I just say: THANK YOU TEACHERS

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Hi, my name is Larissa I'm from Brazil, and I'm living in West Hartford now and working as an au pair, because I'm really want to improve my English skills, so I decided to do this exchange program. I loved participating in bridges esl I feel like I'm more confident with my English and it was great meeting with people from different cultures. I would like to thank Ivana for taking the time to help us improve our skills.
Student: Gizem Özdemir  
Tutor: Ivana Nique

Hello everyone. I am Gizem from Germany. I wanted to improve my english skills and from a friend, I heard the possibility, that I can visit a program in the Bridges ESL. It is for free, and you can do it online with Zoom. So I thought it would be a good opportunity. My tutor Ivana is such a lovely and helpful person, I would recommend her to everyone. With all the years of trying to improve my English, finally I had the chance to talk with people, who also wants to learn English. That’s why I am thankful and happy for the experience. Wish everyone, who also wants to visit the program a lot of fun.

Student: Angela Alzate  
Tutor: Sophia Liu

Having the opportunity to study with Bridge ESL has been very rewarding. I accomplished my goal, which was to improve my English grammar and expand my vocabulary. My tutor was always very responsive and took the time to explain what I didn’t understand. The topics covered I feel are relevant and very useful, and my tutor is very resourceful in her teaching. I am ready to come back next season and continue improving my English.

Student: Jheny  
Tutor: Jennifer Rosas and Yocilin Solis

Hey, I’m Jheny! Start the classes for improve my english was the best decision that I’ve made this year! I don’t speak enough but every step is valid. You just need to be patience with you, purpose takes time! I’m go grateful for the opportunity to study, thank so much to my amazing teachers 🌸 I’m goin keep working next semester for sure!

Student: Betül Gürpinar  
Tutor: Toby Platt

Hi! My name is Betül and I am from Germany. I moved to the US last year and now live in New Haven. Finding Bridges ESL was a big relief for me because I felt very insecure with the English language. I’ve been attending the classes since September 2023. This is my second semester here, and just like the first one, it’s been really great. I’ve learned a lot and feel much better speaking English now. The classes were always well-organized and covered lots of different topics, which made learning fun. It was also really nice to get to know my classmates. I made new friends and met people from all over the world. Also, I want to give a big thank you to our tutor, Toby. He’s been amazing, always helpful and supportive. The classes were always good prepared, fun and interesting. Thank you for everything! Overall, I’m grateful for the experience and the chance to be part of Bridges ESL and for all the new friends I’ve made. I’m excited to keep improving my English in the future.
Celebrating a successful year of Bridges