

Bedford library hosts YMCA's adult conversation groups

Halifax, Nova Scotia

By Sarah Gignac

On Wednesday nights the Bedford Library hosts one of the YMCA's Adult Conversation Groups. For two hours, five to ten people meet to help each other improve their English.

It is a relaxed, casual setting designed for anyone who wants to practice English. While the groups are open to everyone, the majority are newly landed immigrants. "We have people from all over," says Rohini Sunderlan, a volunteer. "People from Russia, the Middle East, Korea, Japan, everywhere."

Sunderlan runs the Bedford meetings. She came to Halifax from India six years ago, and has worked with the YMCA since. Sunderlan felt she could help because, "I could relate to people who had most recently arrived," she said. Sunderlan guides the discussions to topics everyone is interested in and ensures everyone understands what is being said.

In each group the English level ranges from a very limited vocabulary to a solid understanding of the language. It is up to Sunderlan to give the beginners special attention, while keeping the group challenging for the more advanced speakers. "It is not for



Left to right: Jamil Koreal (Iraq), Rohini Sunderlan (India), Ingrid (Venezuela) Zary (Iran) and Segolene Levivier (France)

everyone," she says, "Some people find it difficult because everyone's English is at a different level."

For Zary, a newcomer from Iran, the first meeting was definitely a challenge. She arrived in Halifax seven months ago and her English is limited, so Sunderlan started the meeting by playing simple word games. By using pictures and hand gestures she was able to explain to Zary what she was saying.

Other members, who have attended the

conversation groups longer say they find it easier. Jamil Koreal moved to Canada with his wife two years ago. He has been a member of the group for a year and a half. He has a firm grasp of English and says he attends the meetings "to practice and improve my English and to see my friends." Since its beginning 10 years ago, the program has grown to include thirteen groups throughout the Halifax municipality.