Aurora student, team helping students ease into learning English

An Aurora student is working hard to ensure her peers learn English with ease after moving to Canada.

Mary Liu, a Grade 12 student at Newmarket's Pickering College, founded LinguaPeer Education Group Inc., in 2023 as an online platform pairing students from Asia with Canadian peers ? or tutors ? to help students struggling to learn English overcome these hurdles in a conversational setting.

Liu has been building the company and its platform diligently since its founding and last year it was a finalist in the Diamond Challenge, a prestigious international high school entrepreneurship competition among 940 international competitors.

?I started this in the summer of Grade 9 because my brother and many of my friends?when they first came [to Canada] they all had trouble speaking English ? they didn't feel really confident speaking in English,? Liu tells The Auroran. ?Culture-wise, it's hard to imagine how their life would be abroad, especially coming from Asia, so I started LinguaPeer.

?We connect local North American high schoolers with students from Asia and they have conversations online, sharing about their life in North America and stuff like that to prepare these students with a cultural understanding and also English conversational abilities.?

As a student, Liu developed LinguaPeer as part of Pickering College's Global Leadership Program, which encourages students to identify real-world problems locally and globally and develop real-world solutions to address them.

?This helped me dive deeper into the general problem,? she explains.

Since its inception, LinguaPeer has reached more than 50 students with 35 tutors across Canada and has delivered 800 classes.

?From helping each student, I get feedback from the parent that their child has improved their English grade in school or they just feel more confident speaking in English,? she says. ?Comments like that are really motivational because I feel like it's having a real impact on these students and it's really useful for them.?

The program ? and Liu's efforts ? have also extended beyond the platform.

This past August, while visiting her hometown in China, she used profits from LinguaPeer to donate more than 2,500 sets of stationery to underprivileged children in the area, supported by the Microlight Charity Foundation, which encourages students to

pursue their education in the face of financial challenges.

"We take great pride in cultivating students who embody compassion, leadership, and a sense of responsibility to make the world greater, better, and more beautiful," says Joshua Armstrong, Director of Teaching and Learning at Pickering College. ?Mary's act of generosity so clearly reflects these values and reminds us of the positive impact young people can have when given the opportunity to lead with empathy and purpose.?

As she navigates her final year of her secondary education, Liu hopes to pursue a business degree at either the University of Western Ontario, the University of British Columbia, or the University of Waterloo. Looking forward to her post-secondary education, she says she's keen to take LinguaPeer to the next level at the same time.

?I'm going to continue to get more students in as well as more tutors so we can reach out to more students in need,? she says. ?And hopefully in the future I could [have] a more meaningful impact for more underprivileged students ? not only in China, but maybe even in Canada and in Aurora.?

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter