

ESL Women's and Men's Retreats

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The retreats created by Minnetonka's Adult Options in Education give ESL learners an opportunity to use the English language for an extended time outside of the classroom while getting to know each other and their instructors better. The women's retreats have varied from an overnight to a full weekend and the men's from a Saturday evening at a St. Paul Saints game to a *Hooky Day* experience.

Women's Retreats

The women's retreats have been held at a staff member's lake cabin. Instructors and tutors join ESL learners of all levels of English ability for one to three days of cultural sharing. For most learners, it is the only time they are exposed to English around the clock. The women share life stories and talk about their decisions to come to the United States. They also talk about future goals, families, food, movies, etc. There is a lot of laughter and some tears. These women's retreats create lasting bonds between learners, instructors and tutors, and are a celebration of the world community of women.

Planned and spontaneous retreat activities vary. Often participants go to a local restaurant for supper the first night. For some newly arrived learners, it is their first restaurant experience. Other activities include walks, food preparation for a potluck meal, games (Scattergories and Party Pictionary are the favorites), singing around the campfire and roasting marshmallows canoeing/kayaking and small-town shopping. Each year, a time capsule is created with questionnaires completed by the women, and the previous year's capsule is opened and the items read.

Costs for women's retreats are shared. Once a retreat location is found, learners pay for restaurant dinners and bring food and beverages for a potluck lunch on Saturday. Supper consists of lunch leftovers. Instructors provide Saturday and Sunday breakfast rolls, toast and cereal.

Men's Retreats

There are two types of men's retreats: Saturday trips to a St. Paul Saints game or *Hooky Day* experiences.

On a baseball retreat, learners attend with their children; instructors and their husbands also attend. Prior to the live event, learners study the vocabulary and rules of American baseball. One the first class day following the St. Paul Saints game, learners put their new knowledge into action by playing a game of softball.

Benefits of the ESL baseball retreats are similar to the women's. Men practice speaking English outside the classroom while getting to know each other better. They become familiar with an important part of American culture: baseball. Learners pay for group-rate game tickets and carpooling is worked out by the group.

In years when male learners' work schedules do not make it possible for many of them to participate in a Saturday game, a *Hooky Day* experience is planned. The experience is usually a trip to a nearby lake where there is access to boating and fishing. Prior to *Hooky Day*, boating and fishing vocabulary and equipment are discussed. The day of the outing, learners come dressed for a morning on the water with their own fishing gear. *Hooky Day* is a very popular alternative to the Saints game.