

Opportunity

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friends
INTERNATIONAL

Local Centre Vision Takes Shape

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Growing Friendship and Faith with International Students



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Leading Thoughts

Have we moved on from the unprecedented use of the word unprecedented? Perhaps not yet.



Amid the challenges we are all currently facing, I am thankful for colleagues and volunteers attempting and achieving great things in international student ministry. Yet, the pressures

are so much more acute for the international students themselves. They are arriving on our shores with so much to adapt to, with different cultural norms, study methods and the removal of usual social frameworks due to Covid-19.

During 2020, Friends International has seen growth and an exciting continuation of the vision. Incredibly, we have recruited 14 new staff members in the last 12 months – none of whom joined us because of the impact of Covid-19. On top of this we were able to launch a new local centre in Sunderland.

We are also celebrating the testimonies of international students who are having their lives transformed by God, and are delighted to share some of these with you in this edition of *Opportunity*.

However, there is still such a long way to go and so many more students who need to be within reach of a Friends International local centre. Therefore, we have been inviting supporters and volunteers to prayerfully and financially support our local centre vision. May I encourage you to use the response slip and freepost envelope to enable more students' lives to be transformed?

Finally, we are grateful to all the churches who got on board with our Just Say Hello campaign and were able to step out and welcome international students. It is not too late if your church or small group would still like to use the free Resource Pack to start thinking of and praying for overseas students. Find it here:

www.friendsinternational.uk/hello

We are energised for the task in front of us, but there is always more to do! Thank you for your partnership in the gospel.

Alan

Alan Tower
National Director

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"And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up."

Galatians 6:9

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My name is Ines and I'm from Portugal

Testimony



Over the last year I have been studying here in UK, and it is when I became a Christian. When I think about it, it is still hard to believe how everything turned out!



I had a flatmate, she wanted to continue to go to church after moving to the UK. She knew that Friends International were visiting different churches and she went with them and then invited me to go too. I went and then kept going, everyone was super friendly. Then someone at the church, a student worker, contacted me and we went for a coffee every week or every two weeks. Talking with her helped me, as when I was going to church, I could understand it better and that only made me more curious about it all.

I wanted to learn more about the Bible, about God and about Jesus, but then the lockdown came. Yet, for me this was a time when I really grew in my faith. I started a course with Friends International to learn more about the Bible and that was so helpful.

Everything was online so I sent a link of my church service to my mom back in Portugal and, amazingly, she watched it. Then she watched it again the next Sunday, and again, and again! She seemed excited and decided to visit a church in our country, near our home. It was really good, the pastor's wife also contacted her, and she went again the next Sunday. She is excited about it. It is so great, and this would not be possible had I not come to the UK, and if I had not met the people that I've met here.

My church and Friends International all made me grow in my faith and allowed me to share it with my mom. I just hope that I will have more opportunities to do that with more people.

Watch Ines' full testimony on our website.

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Our New Vision Will Increase Support for International Students



International students have arrived in the UK and Ireland despite the Coronavirus pandemic. With increasing numbers, coupled with increasing isolation of students, Friends International is responding with an ambitious vision to increase our local centre network and transform more international student lives.

Over the last year Friends International was able to support more than 10,000 international students. 1,300 students attended a Bible study organised by us, hundreds more attended our English language courses and 700 enjoyed hospitality as part of our hosting schemes.

Jeet, a post graduate research international student at the University of Surrey in Guildford, said; *"Friends International has really helped me enjoy my stay here, making new friends and developing more knowledge about British culture, food and the Christian faith"*.

However, we cannot stand still, and our heart goes out to the 98% of international students we don't yet have the capacity to support, students who had no one to turn to in these turbulent times of uncertainty.



We want every international student to be within reach of a local centre where they can find Christian love and friendship.

As we look to the future, we are driven by a belief that by supporting international students, nations, governments and communities can be influenced for good. This

belief is incarnated through our network of local centres, where international students are able to experience local culture at its best, coupled with the opportunity to hear about the Christian faith. Ultimately, we want every international student to be within reach of one of our local centres where they can find Christian love and friendship.

Our vision is to open 12 new local centres by 2025: hubs that will serve local communities of international students in the towns and cities where they study. As well as these new locations our vision is also to supplement our existing work by recruiting new staff in another eight centres, where the sheer number of international students compels us to increase our presence. Please join us on this journey to reach more international students, offering them friendship and faith, and transforming not just their lives but potentially whole communities for Christ.



Will you support our vision so that more students can experience God's love and hope?

We recognise that students everywhere are facing levels of unparalleled uncertainty. Covid-19 has meant that many international students have had to interrupt their studies while the impact on their emotional and mental wellbeing cannot be overstated. We think that the support that Friends International can provide to international students – through your generous donations – is needed now, more than ever.

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Our vision is to open 12 new local centres by 2025

Can you make a gift of £20, £50 or commit to making a regular monthly donation? To make your response as simple as possible, enclosed for you is a reply form and post-paid envelope. You can also make your gift by visiting our website at www.friendsinternational.uk/give

I want to finish by thanking you for your continuing support. It is so much appreciated, not just by myself and our team at Friends International, but by the students themselves who are finding friendship and faith because of your prayers and generous donations. May God bless you.

Yours in Christ,

Alan

Alan Tower
National Director

Growth in 2020

Over the last 12 months we have been incredibly excited to see the local centre vision taking shape, with new staff being recruited and centres being established in new locations. In total we have had 14 staff join Friends International in 12 different cities. Here we highlight some of the most exciting developments.



Sheffield

We have recruited two extra members of staff in Sheffield. Caleb Chen joined us in March and Carol Forbes in September.

Both bring much experience and cross-cultural knowledge to their roles as they reach out to the 12,000 international students in the city.



Dundee

In August Charis Chi, a former Reach Trainee, joined our Dundee team as a staff worker. She says "Working for Friends International is a way of giving back because I have seen how much international students, including myself, have been blessed by this ministry.

I'm looking forward to seeing the ministry blossom on campus."



Sunderland

Launched in September, Sunderland was our first new centre in 2 years. James Adair, the new Centre Team Leader, says: "I am really excited and thankful to be involved with the launch of Friends International in Sunderland. I am really looking forward to be partnering with local churches as we seek to share the gospel with these students."



Coventry

In September, Jeremy Wardle joined us in the Coventry and Warwick area. We are now looking to take on a team leader which will enable Coventry to become a fully-fledged local centre in 2021.



Norwich

We have strengthened our Norwich team, bringing in Julia Trarbach as an extra staff worker. She will work with Raquel Medina in

reaching students at the University of East Anglia.

Next Steps

We are now actively looking to grow the work in Liverpool, Dublin, London, Reading and Cardiff – with the aim of bringing in new recruits in 2021. Join us in praying for God to bring us the right people.



Adapting to the New Normal

As thousands of international students arrived in the UK and Ireland, churches and CUs had to adapt to local restrictions and be creative so that they could continue befriending, and witnessing to, international students.

Beeston Free Church (Nottingham)

Like many, we have moved our small groups online. Alongside this we are trying to invest in face-to-face relationships too as regulations permit. With it being harder to meet new students, we are hoping to focus more on equipping international Christians to reach out to their friends and course mates.

We are finding it far harder to connect with new students and I fear students may more easily become isolated.

Our discipleship group has organised into offline 'pods' of 4. The pods are a mix of team and students. They started by meeting in homes, but now have moved to doing walks or coffee outside. One group is planning to clear leaves off the church site together next week.

– **John Goodwin**, Assistant Minister

St Bart's Church (Bath)

We are thankful that here in Bath we can currently run an international café at our church according to the government guidelines (this complements two other cafés that we are running online). Although numbers are smaller, students appreciate being able to meet and chat in-person. We are unable to do things like bring-and-share meals, which is sad, but we are trying to be creative.

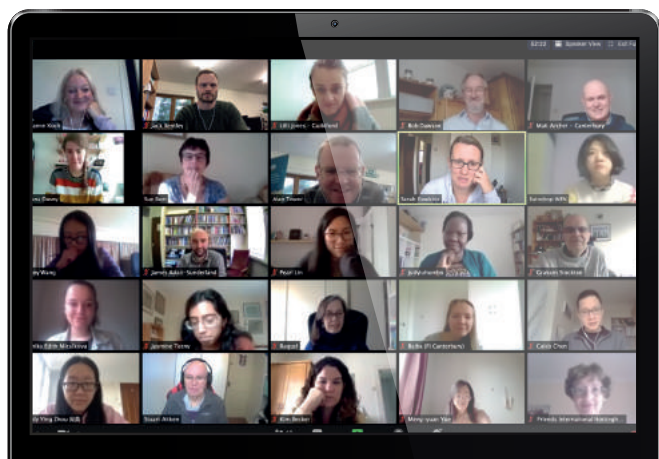
As a church we are trying to think ahead to Christmas and supporting students who may not be able to return home.

Some students are trying to limit the amount of unnecessary social contact and sadly that includes some of our activities. One Chinese student said: "Apart from the risk of infection, another thing that worries me is whether I will be judged or mocked because

I wear a mask on the street (and perhaps because I look Asian). That is also part of the reason why I want to minimise going out."

– **Francis Lewis**, Pastoral Assistant (Internationals)

The CU seems very blessed despite the circumstances



Heath Evangelical Church (Cardiff)

For international students, we have been running an online weekly Bible study as well as Open House, an online version of our usual Friday night international café. We changed our Bible study times to better accommodate those who have returned as some have been joining us from abroad. A few volunteers even arranged Sunday Lunch on Zoom – sending food to students first and then eating "together" online.

Before the latest Welsh lockdown came into place, we were able to meet with students in the park and play socially distanced games. We found that the students were 'Zoomed out' and were longing to meet others in-person.

A personal invite has always been the best way to grow the group, but it is hard to make that initial contact due to Covid restrictions.

– **Levon Chorbajian**, International Student Worker

Christian Union (University of Edinburgh)

We alternate activities every week – online international café one week and international family hangouts on the others. Our international family hangouts initiative is a buddy system whereby international students

in Edinburgh get paired up with a Christian, and they meet fortnightly and discuss themes and questions. It helps us engage with them and build intentional friendships.

Numbers of international students haven't changed that much, however they are eager to reach out for friendship with locals, perhaps because of the lack of interaction with people on their course during class time. They are also more inquisitive about faith and beliefs – in casual conversations even, they are keen to ask about faith.

– **Charlie Yep**, International Secretary

Christian Union (University of South Wales)

The CU seems very blessed despite the circumstances. We have a weekly meeting on Zoom and people seem to enjoy it a lot. We have got to know many new students recently who are joining us for the first time. Overall, I think it is working, with the obvious downsides, such as no real contact with each other and no conventional outreach opportunities.

I would say almost 70% of our CU are now international students, the CU Committee is entirely international!

– **Albert Kovács**, Impact Group Coordinator



Did you say "hello"?

In October we encouraged churches across the country to step forward and welcome international students, with our Just Say Hello campaign.

Thank you to every church who responded and made efforts to warmly welcome students. The impact of your welcome and friendship should not be underestimated.

The Just Say Hello Resource Pack for churches and small groups can still be accessed and used to get you thinking of and praying for international students.

The free downloadable Church Resource Pack includes a:

- Bible Study
- Student Testimony
- Fun Quiz
- Prayer Maps
- Ways to Get Involved

Saying "hello" can be the beginning of an incredible adventure of meeting new people and seeing lives changed.



Find out more: [friendsinternational.uk/hello](https://www.friendsinternational.uk/hello)



Latest News

Philip Project

This year the Philip Project has gone online, meaning Christian international students anywhere in the UK can now access quality teaching on Bible handling skills. Find out more or sign up: www.philipproject.org.uk

Vacancies

As our vision gathers pace and new centres are being established, we are looking to recruit more staff. Currently we are looking for Team Leaders in Coventry, London, Glasgow, Paisley, Colchester, Liverpool and Leicester.

Find out more:
www.friendsinternational.uk/jobs



Local Link

Last year, Friends International linked 700 international students with local hosts through our hosting schemes. Due to Covid-19 we have had to adapt and change the way hosting happens. We now call it Local Link, which better reflects the broader approach we are now taking, where linking students with locals is not restricted to meeting in homes. A walk in a park, meeting in a coffee shop, or for outdoor exercise we want hosts to be creative while obeying local restrictions. If you are interested in meeting students through Local Link please visit www.friendsinternational.uk/host



Please Support Our Vision to help international students.



International students have arrived into the UK and Ireland despite the Coronavirus pandemic, and their numbers continue to increase.

To respond to the growing need, we have a vision to establish local centres in new locations across the UK and Ireland, including Liverpool, Coventry and Dublin.

Will you support our vision so that more students can experience God's love and hope? Please pray and, if you can afford to in these uncertain times, please make a gift.

Please use the response slip enclosed, or give online at www.friendsinternational.uk/give

**Find out more
about our local
centre vision
inside.**



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