

Opportunity

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friends
INTERNATIONAL

New Challenges for Arriving Students

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Leading Thoughts

Soon after moving to Bolivia as a family, we attended our first church service. After about 3 hours and 40 minutes, with a toddler in tow, we realised church would be wildly different from our British upbringing.



Church was just one of many things we had to adapt to. We were warmly welcomed but didn't always understand the social and cultural signals being offered.

A combination of experienced international colleagues and generous local friends helped us to adjust gradually.

International students coming to the UK and Ireland have so many things to adapt to. Their student experience has been taken to a whole new level with pandemic adjustments and constant uncertainty. These additional pressures mean that many are facing greater challenges to their mental wellbeing. In response to this, Friends International are launching an exciting new video series for international students. Find out more on page 5.

We like to celebrate partnership and working alongside Christian Unions Ireland (CUI) is a real privilege. We are thrilled to be launching a new Centre in Dublin alongside CUI, which you can read more about in this edition.

None of these exciting developments would be possible without those who generously give towards the financial needs of the organisation and pray for the work. In this edition we present our Financial Review as well as our Impact Report – highlighting the impact of the ministry over the last 12 months. Thank you for being part of what we have achieved in the past year!

Looking forward, we have plans to see staff placed alongside churches and Christian student groups in new places, most recently Sunderland, and now Dublin, with more in the pipeline. We had hoped to provide seed funding for new appointments of this type but have come to a pause, having allocated the currently available funds. So, please join us in praying and asking our Father in heaven for his provision once more.

Alan

Alan Tower
National Director

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“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.” Philippians 4:6

”

“Studying Changes Destiny”

Testimony

The Chinese often say that “studying changes destiny”. So, under the influence of utilitarianism and pragmatism, I came to Sheffield in the UK for a Master’s degree. Yet, under the guidance of God’s goodness, I met Friends International workers Carol and Caleb.

I had the privilege of attending the Word Alive conference. To be honest, I didn’t fully understand what the talks were about. But the message I heard every day was “He loves you forever” and “you are my precious”, words that awakened my long-dormant heart.

For me, growing up in a single-parent household, I always thought love was conditional. A deep sense of abandonment gripped me, especially when I couldn’t get my father’s affirmation even though I tried my best. As a result, I was reluctant to believe that a perfect God would love an imperfect me.

I used to think that if God loved me, he should have made my father repent and apologise to me. But I realise now that God had watched over me since I was a child and that He has given me the most radiant and dazzling love in this world. As I found my value and security in Christ, I began to accept myself and believe that I was complete. No longer did I need to prove who I was by my grades, social status, wealth, etc. God’s unconditional love also gave me the power to forgive, so that I was released from hatred and bitterness and was truly set free.

It was as if I heard a voice inside me saying: “Why am I not one of the many servants of God?” It was then that I realised what it meant to be a Christian, and that I wanted to take up my cross, to follow Jesus Christ closely, and to be a blessing to others.

Thank you to everyone at Word Alive. Although I cannot thank you in person, I am confident that God remembers your labour.

Leah, International Student from China



“Why am I not one of the many servants of God?”

”

Arriving Students are Now Facing Greater Wellbeing Challenges

The new academic year is here, but international students are facing multiple challenges to their wellbeing.

This month, hundreds of thousands of international students are arriving into the UK and Ireland. It is an exciting time, both for these students and for the local churches who hope to meet many of them during their stay.

Unfortunately, Covid-19 continues to cause great uncertainty. Add this to the stresses of student life and the challenges of being abroad in unfamiliar surroundings and studying in a second or third language, then you can start to see how tough it can be for international students.

A 2020 study by the Office of National Statistics found that more than half of all students in England said their mental health had worsened since starting university.

Despite the struggle many international students have with mental health, they are less likely than British students to report it or to seek help. This is often due to cultural stigma around mental health or a distrust of medical professionals.

Bekah Callow, a former Friends International staff worker, has recently completed a Master's degree involving interviewing international students about their wellbeing. She collected the words of international students into poems. The poem below features the 'I' and 'My' statements from an interview with just one student, and demonstrates challenges faced:

Language

When I came first to here
I'm worried about some people talk to me
When I go to supermarket and I want receipt
I am scared because, because...
My English is not good
When you are studying about English
Sometimes, some people ignore me
I don't know that English
I don't know that in English
I don't know in English
I just know in Korean

(C1, from Callow, Rebekah (2019) 'Is it helping?',
Doctoral thesis, Anglia Ruskin University, p.101)



Responding to the Wellbeing Crisis

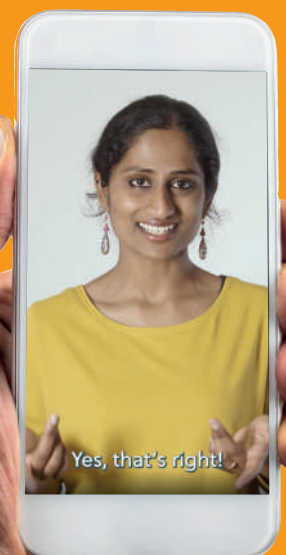
A survey last month found that 97% of Friends International staff have contact with international students who are struggling with anxiety and depression.

Therefore, there is a deep need to respond sufficiently and quickly to support these students and to show Christ's love to them. One way we are doing that is to launch a new video series aimed at helping international students with their wellbeing.

The videos follow the '5 Ways to Wellbeing' framework, which is a widely accepted approach and promoted by the NHS. The videos are no more than 3 minutes and are fun and engaging.

The videos are now available on the Friends International app. May we encourage your church or CU to use them, as they are perfect for showing at an international student café or other social setting where discussion can take place.

To find direct links to the videos and great ideas on how you can use them in ministry, download the 'Just Say Hello' Church Resource Pack (see page 7).





Join the Just Say Hello Day

It's easy to just say "hello", but it can make a huge difference to someone.

That's why Friends International are inviting you and your church to 'Just Say Hello' – a time for stepping forward to welcome international students to the UK and Ireland.

We have created a Resource Pack for church small groups to work through. It will get you praying for international students, while also getting you thinking about what you can do in your local area.

This year we are offering churches more free resources than ever!

The Just Say Hello Resource Pack includes:

- Free books worth £12!
- Student testimonies
 - A Bible study on 'Why reach international students?'
 - Helpful Prayer Guide
 - A Quiz (How well do you know international students?)
 - Wellbeing videos series and guide
 - Fun explainer videos on cultural differences

Get all this and more at:
www.friendsinternational.uk/hello

“Your church will learn so much about cross-cultural evangelism by simply using the Just Say Hello resources. Then, when you welcome students from all sorts of places you will be confident and even excited about chatting to them. Do it, and see what God does!”



A New Centre: Welcome to Dublin!

The ISM Ireland Project is a partnership between Friends International and Christian Unions Ireland (CUI). Mark Ellis, the Director of CUI, says: "We're thrilled that Heledd has joined our team, and delighted that through our 50/50 partnership with Friends International we can work together for Christ's kingdom in Dublin and beyond."

"Heledd comes with a wealth of pioneering experience in cross-cultural and international student ministry, most recently in Italy. But more than that, she is gospel-hearted and consistently kind; able to come alongside others and point them to Christ."

"So, we are deeply thankful to God for his provision to us of his best, and grateful to Heledd for being willing to join our team."

A new Friends International Centre is being launched in Dublin, as the work continues to grow.

We are thrilled to be expanding the work with our very first established Centre in the Republic of Ireland. Heledd Job is becoming the Dublin Senior Staff Worker and will work alongside Hollie Tagle, who is the Project Leader for the ISM Ireland Project.

Who is Heledd Job?

"Hi, I'm Heledd. I'm Welsh and since graduating have been involved in student ministry with IFES in Wales, Portugal, Slovakia and most recently in Italy.

As someone who's spent the last 10 years as a foreigner, I've seen and felt the difference a warm community that displays the welcome of the Gospel can make. So, I'm excited about joining an organisation that puts that at the centre of what they do.

I want to see students from all over the world fall more in love with Jesus as they are welcomed, loved, known, discipled and then sent out as witnesses to Him both in Dublin and wherever God takes them in the future."



Find out more about the international student ministry in Ireland: www.friendsinternational.uk/ireland

Impact Report



Ministry and Covid-19

Everything in some way has been impacted by the pandemic. With our events going online for large parts of the year, it has meant we have had contact with fewer students compared to the previous academic year.

Despite this, we have still had contact with some 4,000 international students. We have had 500 join our Bible studies, and we praise God that we have seen 34 students come to faith!

Exciting Growth

In line with our exciting vision and to match the growth of international student numbers, we have also grown as an organisation. We now have more staff in more locations and our Affiliates Network has gone from 63 last year, to 80 Affiliates today – which is the most we have ever had.

Finally, we celebrate that over 400 international students have been hosted through local hosting programmes. This is a great achievement, as the Coronavirus had at one point stopped hosting entirely and has meant hosting in recent months has taken place outside or in a socially distanced setting.

On the next two pages you will see a summary of our ministry statistics which outline the impact we have had during the last 12 months.

Thank you for your support and prayers, which makes all this possible.

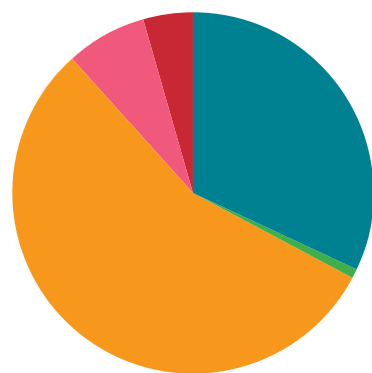
Jack Bentley, Communications Manager

We give thanks and praise to God for the provision of funds to support our work amongst international students. The outcome for 2020 was a deficit of £167,346. By excluding legacies, the deficit would have been £178,899 (£66,714 in 2019).

Despite the financial uncertainties created by the spread of Covid-19, donations and gifts from churches, trusts, individual supporters, and related Gift Aid were 9.6% higher than the previous year. Our expenses have risen by 13.0%. Both increases are a direct result of employing more staff, which enables our ministry to grow. A significant proportion of the deficit relates to the use of reserves previously set aside to support new staff as they build up their own financial support base.

As always, we are extremely thankful to all our supporters. Without your generous donations and prayers this would not be possible.

INCOME: £1,779,444



32.2% From churches, trusts and local organisations.

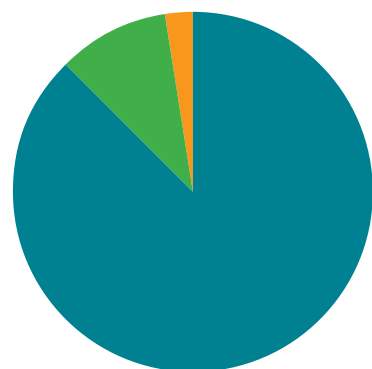
0.6% From legacies.

55.7% From personal donations.

7.3% From Gift Aid reclaim.

4.2% Other.

EXPENDITURE: £1,946,790



87.7% To direct ministry costs.

10.0% To management, communications, and admin.

2.3% To generating funds.

Ministry Stats

Academic Year 2020-21

83

Friends International Staff and Admin workers

12

Reach Trainees

80

Affiliates on our Affiliate Scheme

41

UK and Irish cities and towns with ministry to international students

1,000

Number of volunteers active in the ministry

250

Number of churches we work with in ministry

Ministry Impact

Academic Year 2020-21

4,000

International students we've had contact with

500

International students who attended a Bible study

34

International students who have made a faith commitment

424

International students who have been hosted

626

International students who attended our English language classes/groups

39

International students who attended the Philip Project Course



October 17th is Just Say Hello Day

Your church can reach international students! The **Just Say Hello** resource pack will help your church or small group get excited and equipped for reaching international students. In the pack you will find:

- Testimonies
- Prayer Guide
- Quiz
- Bible Study
- Wellbeing Videos
- Ideas for welcoming internationals

**PLUS GET TWO FREE BOOKS
WORTH £12!**



Join in and find
out more at:

**friendsinternational
.uk/hello**