

Opportunity

March • May 2022



friends
INTERNATIONAL

Looking Back as We Move Forward

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Editorial

I'm sure you've heard the saying, 'An Englishman's home is his castle', but do we regard our homes as our 'castles', places to be defended or to keep people out? It seems that a large proportion of international students in this country never get to see the inside of a British home. We even hear of visitors from other countries arriving with a wrapped present from home for their hosts... which returns home unopened because they didn't receive the welcome they had anticipated.



This strikes me as profoundly sad. While there are some who welcome visitors into their homes, others may fail to offer the welcome and hospitality that they could, and they can lose out by not getting

to know those who have so much to offer in cultural insights and friendship.

As God's people, we are called to follow his lead as: 'He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing' (Deuteronomy 10:18) and 'The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt' (Leviticus 19:34).

This is why our **Local Link scheme** is so integral to who we are and what we do (page 10). Homes are opened (when allowed!), meals are shared and friendships established, as Christians meet and support international

students in their homes. We show something of the gospel by our welcoming, creating opportunities for talking through what's important in life, and we gain an insight into other parts of the world and a whole new set of potential friendships. Whether it is a one-off Sunday lunch or a regular café meet-up, we can trust that God will be at work through our availability. More often than not, it starts with a cup of tea, and most of us can manage that!

Thank you for partnering with us in this gospel and Kingdom ministry, and we pray that we can be of service as you seek to live out God's calling on your life. Please get in touch if we can help!

Alan

Alan Tower
National Director

Opportunity is published by **Friends International Ministries**. Editor: Manuela Vitelaru. ©2022.

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Friends International Ministries is a charity registered in England and Wales (1094095) and in Scotland (SC 048838).

'He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing.' Deuteronomy 10:18

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Updates from Friends International Student Cafés Across Britain

Update

Below we have gathered news from some of our International Cafés. Follow our social media pages on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter (@FriendsIntl) for weekly updates from our centres across the country!

Dundee ▶

We had a wonderful time celebrating Chinese New Year, sharing food and friendship with many new international students coming along for the first time! Please pray that more international students will join the Bible study group as well as for the accommodation challenges that the new international students face currently.

Wenjin Chi (Charis), Staff Worker



◀ Reading

The Friends International centre here in Reading is very new, but we are slowly starting to build relationships with local Christians and church leaders serving international students as well as with the Reading University Christian Union (RUCU). At the end of January, we ran an International Student Track during their Events Week, where some staff and volunteers from the centres nearby came to help. We praise God for that time and pray that the international students that we met will continue to come to the Small World Cafe events.

David Hubbard, Centre Team Leader



Cambridge ▶

Praise God for good numbers of students coming along to both the cafés and the Bible studies! www.ficams.uk/icafe

Katie Pipe, Staff Worker



◀ Exeter

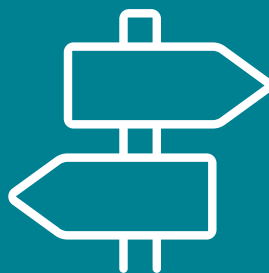
In Exeter we have been enjoying meeting with students at our Monday night Globe Café. We also went on a tour of historic Exeter which attracted students that we hadn't previously met. We would love to run more regular daytime outings but are praying that more volunteers will come forward to help us run these.

Helen Morrissey, Centre Team Leader



Looking
Back

Looking Back as We Move Forward



As believers we do not live under the shadow of a pandemic, but rather under the shadow of the Almighty! That was part of a prayer I heard recently. What a fresh way to see life and particularly the last two years. For international student ministries and indeed the students themselves, it has certainly not been an easy time. These times have affected us all to a greater or lesser degree. For some of us there has been great personal loss. Through it all, we have seen God working in us and teaching us to trust in Him. Often our plans have had to change, and we have learnt to adapt at short notice.

To find out
more about
conferences
scan this code:



'On many occasions, we have seen the activities we relied on for our initial engagement with international students coming to a complete halt.'

However, when we look back, we see with gratitude a faithful God. Our teams across Britain and Ireland have welcomed 30 new staff in the last two years. Together with 90 affiliates and our committed volunteers and partner churches, they have shown resilience, adapting to meet the opportunities presented to us. We are still hearing some of the stories coming out of this time – a number of students coming to faith and others asking to be baptised.

On some campuses, doors seemed closed to us for a while, but as the lockdown and restrictions dragged on, we were being contacted by those who initially didn't want us to engage with 'their' students. They approached us and invited us to provide support to international students. Restrictions are now being lifted and we can build on those relationships. Challenges still exist, but we have seen again and again that God's Word was never locked down (2 Timothy 2:8-10). Our prayer is that the lessons – of total dependence on our Lord, of being flexible, adaptable and teachable – will be central as we move forward in ministry.

Serving with Humility in Multicultural Ministry

Friends International's annual conference in January was a real highlight for us. Gathering in person was something that we looked forward to, hearing from one another, exchanging ideas, resources and praying together, while sharing what God is doing through Friends International across the UK and Ireland.

Several of us could not attend in person, but we are now experts in virtual meetings, and we had the facility to broadcast the Bible readings and morning sessions as

well as the evening celebrations. Dr Mary Evans led our Bible readings on 'Tales of the Unexpected: God Speaking Through Stories', rediscovering together how God's Word does not glaze over the ugly behaviour of man; it is only when we recognise our condition that we are able to appreciate His grace. Peter Oyugi helped us look into the theme of 'Serving with Humility' in multicultural contexts. In understanding our own prejudice, we can, in humility, adapt our ministry approach to reach those students who find it hard to connect with the average British way of doing things. Several partners in different parts of the UK, Ireland and around the world joined us for our Saturday livestream celebration entitled 'Behold, I Am Making All Things New!'.

This is our conviction. Our God is on the move. Nothing – no virus or earthly power – will stop Him. His commission for us, his followers is still to take the Gospel to the nations. The nations are coming to our university campuses; therefore, our vision remains unchanged:

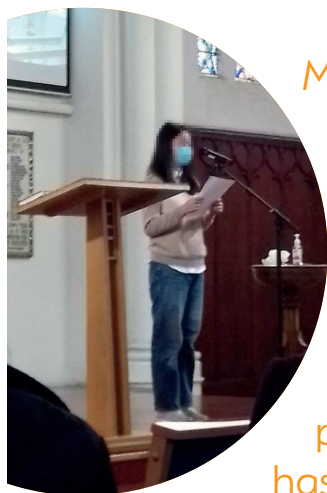
'To see international students transformed by the good news of Jesus, so that they fully engage with the mission of the church in the world.'

Thank you for your partnership in the gospel. For more information in how you can be involved, contact us via our website www.friendsinternational.uk.

Iván C. Neira, Regional Development
Director North England & Wales



Puzzle Pieces Com A Chinese Student



Ministry is often like looking at a puzzle – sometimes you only have half of the pieces. You don't see the full picture of God's work in someone's life. Especially in international student ministry, when students are here for a little time and perhaps you only get to see how one or two pieces get added. 'I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow.' (1. Corinthians 3:6)

Here is the story of Shelly*, where God was gracious enough to let us see the full picture.

Shelly came to our city in the summer of 2020 to study a masters. The first time I heard about her was when my Reach trainee told me about a new friend she had made – a girl from China, not interested in the Bible, but thankful for opportunities to connect with local people at a time when everyone stayed home. She soon joined one of our international cafés, which is run by a local church supported by one of our staff workers and happened online at the time.

Quickly she became a regular attendee, enjoying the community online, making friends with the local team and even contributing to the programme. Later she said that the reason why she

started looking into the Christian faith was because of the café team members.

She also became a close friend to my Reach trainee – despite the few opportunities to share food and see each other in person. They had many good conversations online, and soon my Reach trainee invited Shelly to come to church with her... and she did. Soon she also joined their weekly Bible studies.

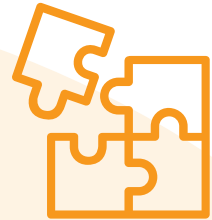
Another thing Shelly joined was our Buddy Scheme– designed to connect international students one on one with local Christians, so they can practice their English and get to know Glasgow and local people. Shelly was linked up with a lovely lady in her fifties. This lady was from one of the churches we are working with, but she had never been involved

'She couldn't understand how the team was so joyful and friendly towards her. Something was different, and she became keen to find out about their faith.'

”

ning Together: t Getting Baptised

Puzzle
Pieces



before and she saw the pandemic as a good opportunity to give international ministry a go. With all the screen exposure and Zoom fatigue at that time, they chose to speak on the phone each week and continued to do so for the next year, without having ever met in person!

In autumn 2021, we suddenly heard that Shelly was planning to be baptised! Her buddy's husband had gotten baptised a few weeks before, and she had joined in for the celebration, even buying him a book about baptism as a present. Interestingly, she read it before giving it to him and realised that she was willing to make that step herself.

It was a joyful celebration for all of us to see Shelly get baptised recently and to hear her full story as she shared how we all played a part in her journey. Hallelujah!

Rebecca Davies,
Centre Team Leader
in Glasgow

'All in all, Shelly was almost better connected than even us, the staff – being part of an international café at one church, having a buddy from a second local church and joining Bible studies at a third! But none of us could see the full picture!'

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**To find out
more about
the Reach
programme
scan this code:**



*name has been changed



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Romanian
Students

Romanians:

The Second Largest Migrating Group Pre-Brexit



A Friends International Overview

'For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in.' (Matthew 25:35)

Jesus' words here are powerful and to be taken seriously. It challenges us, who know what follows in verse 40: 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.' It also brings us back to what Alan wrote in the editorial: where is our heart to welcome the strangers and foreigners in our midst?

Did you know that Romanians are now the second largest group of EU immigrants in Britain after the Poles? The most recent official data shows that there were 1.067 million Romanians applying for the 'right to remain' before Brexit (Romania-Insider.com). In the pre-Brexit picture, EU students didn't have access to the same maintenance grants as the British students, so many were forced to take on extra employment to support themselves throughout their studies.

I once was a Romanian student in the UK myself. My Eastern Orthodox family cut me off completely back in early 2016 because I had left the Orthodox church and told them that I was a born-again Christian. It was hard and unexpected. I had to work outside my lectures to cover all my unplanned living expenses. I was the stranger that Jesus spoke about in Matthew 25. Yet, I was being taken care of in every possible way by my local church, Bournemouth Christian Church and by Friends International alike. Anita Dalkin was at the time the staff worker in Bournemouth. I'll always be grateful for her love, spiritual support and friendship. Today I am the Communications Coordinator of Friends International, in charge of the news that you read in Opportunity.

Our Friends International team in Bournemouth, Antoine, Antje and Sue Burt,

kindly introduced me to Edi and Ema, two Romanian students from their international café. Below is their contribution to this article.

Ema, would you tell us a bit about yourself and how you came across Friends International?

I'm a second-year Animation student from Iasi, Romania. I came to study here (at Bournemouth University) because my degree doesn't exist back home. I moved to the UK during the pandemic. I struggled to make friends. I didn't know anyone here – all my lectures were online for the first year. I joined the International Café events on Zoom, where I found it easy to make friends with other international students like me. Once the lockdown started to ease, I also enjoyed their events in person. As a student, you appreciate the free cookies and food, but also the friendly community! All of the friends that I have are from the international café!

Ema, as you previously told me, your family is Christian, but you have not met Jesus for yourself yet. How have you been finding the element of faith within Friends International?

I appreciate Antoine and Antje's approach to sharing faith with others. I know that if I ever want or need to discuss any faith-related topics with them, or to explore the Bible, they will always be there for me.

Did you know that there are over 1 million Romanians in the UK? What are your thoughts on this?

Ema: No, I didn't. It is not shocking though. I believe that there are two groups of Romanians that come here: the students and the working class. The first come for better job prospects after their studies, the second

come for a better salary for their family or themselves. Personally, I enjoy meeting Romanians here, especially in university, as it makes me feel more like home.

Edi, what was your experience of moving to the UK as a Romanian like? What are some of the challenges that you faced, if any?

(Edi told me that he is a second-year Geography student, who unlike Ema, enrolled at Bournemouth University as a EU working resident in Britain)

'I appreciate Antoine and Antje's approach to sharing faith with others. I know that if I ever want (...) to explore the Bible, they will always be there for me.'

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Initially, you get a sense of alienation because the mentality, culture, etc. are different. Romanians generally have a bad reputation here, so at the beginning I felt marginalised and thought that people around me had preconceptions when they met me (only because I

am Romanian). Maybe this was all in my head, from the media and the political atmosphere here during Brexit, but these things have affected me when I first moved to the UK.

Finally, would you recommend the Bournemouth Global Café community to other international students? Why?

Edi: It is fun! We play games, learn about other cultures and have really interesting discussions with other students! This year we can meet face to face, and sometimes we have about 40 students that join! It is a really nice atmosphere. I loved that I could meet other Romanian students, like Ema and many others. I stayed here for most of the summer. I appreciated that Antoine and Antje organised fun trips to Old Harry Rocks, Salisbury, etc. even during the summer break.

Manuela Vițelaru

Communications Coordinator



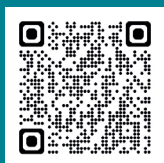
Latest News

Local Link

In his editorial, our National Director has emphasised the biblical importance of hospitality and challenged us to open our home to international students by participating in the Local Link scheme.

Further details of how to become a host, including a Host's Code of Conduct and a sign-up form, may be found on **www.friendsinternational.uk/become-a-host**. Once you complete and submit the form, which gathers some key information (about your location, about you, and about your availability for hosting students), your request will go through to your local centre, who will contact you to follow up on your kind offer. Further information about Local Link, for any students you may know who are interested in connecting, may be found on **www.friendsinternational.uk/local-link**

For more about Local Link scan this code:



Word Alive International Track: 9 - 14 April 2022

The International Student Track at Word Alive is a fantastic opportunity for international students to discuss the Bible more deeply, as well as think about topics relevant to discipleship and preparation to return home.

This year, the International Student Track will take place from Saturday April 9th to Thursday April 14th, and will be held at Pontins, Prestatyn (North Wales).

Please pray for our speaker, Peter Teagle, who will be teaching from 1 Peter, as well as for all the international students attending. There's an exciting programme of talks, discussion groups, seminars, welcome meal & more. More details, including recordings from previous years can be found on our website: **www.friendsinternational.uk/wa**

Reach Programme

Reach is a cross-cultural discipleship and ministry training programme for recent graduates. Through befriending and sharing the love of Jesus with international students, you will join in with God's global mission – and have opportunity to grow in your relationship with Him and develop your God-given gifts at the same time.

Start date: 1st September 2022

Cost: £750, or the Euro equivalent in Ireland, (as a contribution towards training, set books & resources), plus living expenses.

Deadlines: We encourage application as soon as possible to avoid disappointment regarding preferred location and visas, but we will welcome applications up to 30th April 2022.

Contact: Any further enquiries can be made to reach@friendsinternational.uk

Appointments and Farewells

In 'Looking Back as We Move Forward', we mentioned that we have welcomed 30 new staff over 2 years. In 2021 this included: 4 new Centre Team Leaders for whom we had advertised multiple times (sometimes, we need to be very patient and wait for God's perfect timing), one leader of a new Centre (Dublin) and no fewer than 7 additional staff in existing Centres. Matt Pate joined us as an Apprentice Staff Worker in Oxford, having first been introduced to Friends International as a CU International Rep and having spent a year as a Reach trainee. We will welcome Judith McKeown to the Newcastle team as an additional Staff Worker in March. There are changes afoot in Coventry, where Jeremy Wardell will be leaving us as Apprentice Staff Worker to pastures new. However, there are plans for the continuation of the

ministry in Coventry, by the appointment of a new Staff Worker and by continuing to seek a Centre Team Leader to head up the ministry.

It is a time of transition in the Friends International central office as well! Having already welcomed a new Communications Co-ordinator (Manuela Vitelaru, Opportunity Editor), who replaced Jack Bentley in November, we now say a sad goodbye to our Finance Manager, who retires in March. Robert Felix has been with Friends International since December 2009, having joined us after many years in senior finance roles in several companies – some of them household names. Robert's achievements include oversight of the move of FI offices from Putney to All Nations and establishment of the ISM Housing Trust. We will miss him, but we are delighted to have replaced him by two people in part-time but complementary roles – Lydia Evans (Finance Manager) and Paul Couper (Finance Co-ordinator).

Recruitment Programme

At the time of writing, we have vacancies for Centre Team Leaders in:

Colchester, Coventry, Durham, London Central, London South-West, Paisley and Sheffield. We are also looking for a Reach Co-ordinator to replace Jenny Brown, who has been overseeing the Reach Trainee programme for 3 years and has now been appointed to the new role of Apprentice Co-ordinator.

Can you help us to fill these posts? Further information may be found on our website: **www.friendsinternational.uk/current-vacancies**. We will be arranging a virtual Recruitment Open Day on 23rd March at 10am– please join us if you are interested in finding out more about working with us!

Email **info@friendsinternational.uk** to register and receive the Zoom details.



@friendsint



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@friendsintl

Please Support our Vision to help international students.



Thanks to your generous and faithful support, our teams across Britain and Ireland have welcomed 30 new staff in the last two years.

Our vision remains unchanged:

'To see international students transformed by the good news of Jesus, so that they fully engage with the mission of the Church in the world.'

To continue to fulfil this vision, we need your support. We trust that we can soon be able to open new centres around the UK and Ireland where there is work for us in reaching international students with the gospel.

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

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from our local
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