

Opportunity

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friends
INTERNATIONAL

Good News for Hard-to-Reach International Students

Growing Friendship and Faith with International Students

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Editorial

All too often my prayers are for outcomes, development and progress but the Apostle Paul asks for God to work His power in our inner lives, with the effect of Him dwelling in our hearts through faith, so we would get a better understanding of the love of Christ (Ephesians 3:16-18).



In this edition of Opportunity as we focus on 'hard-to-reach' international student ministries we should keep this principle in mind. Although we yearn for breakthroughs and the going appears tough, it is not a wasted time as God is richly at work in us and in the lives the international students we are praying for.

At this time of year we will be welcoming thousands of language students, who may be in the UK and Ireland for only a few weeks, but at the same time we are saying goodbye to other international students as they leave the UK and Ireland to return home. For every international student we have known, we hope they will leave with an understanding that God loves them, and a realisation that the best is yet to come. They can approach the future with hope even though they may feel a sense of loss as this chapter of their lives comes to an end. Our prayers are particularly for those students going back to hard-to-reach places where it is dangerous to be a Christian or the truth about God is prohibited.

In this issue you can read more about our work sharing friendship and faith with international students from hard-to-reach places. Also included is an interview with staff member and evangelist, Peter Teagle, revealing what he shared with international students at the Word Alive conference on living under pressure, and the challenges they face. I hope that like me, you will be encouraged as you read various accounts of how Friends International teams and volunteers have been there for international students offering food, friendship, fun and a listening ear.

Thank you for walking with us and please continue to pray and support us financially as we seek to meet these challenges.

Alan

Alan Tower
National Director

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'I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being.' Ephesians 3v16

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Local Centre Growth

News

By David Hubbard, Friends International
Reading, Centre Team Leader

Six months ago, I moved to Reading with my wife Rachel, to begin work as the Centre Team Leader. Reading has not had a Friends International worker until now but there have been faithful, committed volunteers reaching out to international students for many years. I work three days a week and my focus so far has been getting to know key volunteers and visiting churches.

A full English

The principal way we meet international students is by supporting the 'Small World Café' that is run by the university CU. Until recently the café was not allowed to serve food due to Covid restrictions, but Haruki*, a Japanese student, invited himself to our flat to experience a cooked English breakfast. In several weeks, he'd polished off plenty of bacon and mushrooms, with a bit of 'Uncover Mark' on the side. Haruki was also attending an Alpha course run by the CU and I was thrilled to hear that he had come to faith. Before he came to the UK, Haruki had not read the Bible and knew next to nothing about the Gospel.

The true meaning of Easter

We support the Chinese chaplain by attending the Chinese fellowship that meets on campus. On one occasion, we brought several colourful plastic eggs. Each was filled with a different item to represent the key events of Easter week...nails, a stone, silver coins, a 'spear', but the final egg was empty. For many this was the first time they had heard the true meaning of Easter. I gave a talk titled, 'Are we more than our academic achievements?', to help students understand that we are accepted by God whether we pass or fail our exams!

Challenges for 2022

We are currently working on establishing the Reading development group that will help support our work financially and develop working partnerships in Reading over the coming years.

We hope to make new contacts during Freshers' Week in September and grow the Local Link scheme so that we can connect more international students with local Christians.



*name changed to protect confidentiality



'Will you pray for our staff and volunteers as they reach out to international students like Ariana from these hard-to-reach places'

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Sharing Jesus with the Hard-to-Reach

In many countries international students are not free to hear the Gospel, and Bibles are not easily available.

The world is in turmoil again following the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Troops are on the ground, buildings have been destroyed, millions have been made homeless and are fleeing the country in a desperate attempt to escape the onslaught. Christians everywhere are on their knees in prayer, calling on God to intervene and put an end to the violence.

This is a critical time, when lives are being shaped before the international students

return home to take up positions of power and influence. **However, in many countries, international students do not experience the freedoms we enjoy in the UK and Ireland to hear the Gospel, and this may be their only opportunity to hear the truth about Jesus and His love for them.**

Drawn to God's love

Ariana*, a young woman from a strict Muslim country in the Middle East, came to the UK, initially to study for a Master's, then later for

a Doctorate. Although she was desperately lonely, Ariana persevered through the course to complete her degree. On her return to the UK to continue her studies, Ariana was contacted by Friends International and began attending some social activities.

Although Ariana had never heard the Gospel, she was drawn to God's love and to understanding Jesus as God, a religious doctrine that she had always been told to despise and reject. Her faith grew and four years later, Ariana surrendered her life to Christ, willingly and emphatically calling on God for His forgiveness. At her baptism, Ariana testified that although the road ahead would be tough, nothing could be more important than knowing Christ. **Ariana realises that she can never return home and although she has been given leave to remain in the UK, she will be separated from her family and friends unless the regime changes.**

A simple truth

Every year an estimated one million international students come to the UK and Ireland to study. They represent countries from across the world, from France to China,

Muslim to atheist, and everything in between. As a loyal supporter of Friends International, you will understand that our role is to support international students during their time in the UK and Ireland, alongside giving them the opportunity to hear and experience the living Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Will you pray for our staff and volunteers as they reach out to international students like Ariana from these 'hard to reach' places, **that they hear the truth about Jesus who loves them and wants to be their Saviour and friend. This simple truth can change their life and profoundly influence the lives, communities and nations of those around them.**

Can I also ask if you will prayerfully consider making a donation to support our work, sharing Jesus with international students from hard-to-reach places. Your gifts will help us to open new centres and run events like our recent 'Crossing Cultures' conference in Winchester, preparing and equipping our teams to reach out to international students from different cultures.

To make your response as easy as possible you only need to complete the response slip included with Opportunity, or alternatively you can make a gift by visiting our website at **www.friendsinternational.uk/hardtoreach**.

Finally, I want to thank you for your commitment and generous support to Friends International. It will make a difference to many international students, not just at this critical time but throughout their lives.

Yours in Christ,

Alan Tower,
National Director

To make a donation scan this code:



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

Under Pressure



Fresh from a week at Word Alive 22 in North Wales, where he led the international student track, Allen Moxham spoke to Friends International's Head of Events Speaking, Peter Teagle, about international students living under pressure.

AM – What was your inspiration for this series?

PT – From the first time I read 'God's Smuggler' by Brother Andrew (John & Elizabeth Sherrill, Open Doors / Hodder & Stoughton) in the late '80s, I have been impacted by stories of the 'suffering church'. Although I may never have to pay the price for my faith that countless others have, stories of ordinary believers showing great courage and faith in the face of serious opposition, and their testimonies of God's goodness and supernatural joy, have been instrumental in reminding me that, for much of the Church's history, suffering is *the normal Christian experience*.

AM – What challenges are international students facing and what questions are they asking?

PT – We often have only a basic idea of what students might face, or if we do have a good idea of what those challenges might be, we have usually not walked the road they

will have to. We are necessarily distanced by geography and culture, and patriotic or cultural loyalty often makes it difficult for some to hear implicit criticisms of their country or culture's record on freedom of religion.

'Though you have not seen him, you love him...and are filled with an inexpressible joy'

1 Peter 1v8

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Each time I address the cost and realities of following Jesus at Word Alive, there always seems to be an unspoken question lingering in the room: "Yes, Peter, but you don't understand... in my situation *I have no choice*"

For Word Alive this year we collected together some stories of what it means to live as a faithful believer in a hostile world. One account told of a promising PhD student who was denied the 'ideal' job in his field precisely because, in the interview, he admitted to being a Christian. Others told of being rejected by family or criticised by angry parents. Another international student described how his community constantly faced threat of attack from Muslim militants.

These true stories seem to strike a chord with many.

AM – You chose to use 1 Peter as the basis for your teaching programme. How is this relevant?

PT – The apostle Peter could assume his readers would have some background knowledge in the Old Testament (the Temple, priesthood, sacrifices etc.), but this Peter (me) could make no such assumptions and had to teach everything from scratch. But the apostle's audience and mine were not so dissimilar: a wide range of people from many backgrounds who were likely to encounter a range of persecution and opposition, from minor discrimination to direct threat to life.

What seemed harder to communicate, however, was the counterbalance of Peter's letter: that unimaginable and overwhelming joy is *also the normal Christian experience* (see 1 Peter 1:8). Those just starting out on their journey of faith

were just beginning to grasp the full measure of what Jesus has achieved for us.

AM – What benefit did the international students take away from the week?

PT – What I hope the students would have gained from the teaching this year is something of the fact that, as believers in Jesus, we no longer belong to the world quite as we once did. As we said several times through the week – a Godly exchange has taken place – whereas once we belonged to this world but were strangers to God, we now belong to God's family but have become strangers to the world. We pray that everyone who attended the track will have tasted something of the overwhelming joy that the apostle Peter describes, and that to know Jesus is more precious than anything this world can ever offer.



Softening of Hearts in Cornwall

By Josh Bell – Centre Team Leader –
Friends International Cambridge



“A week of love and grace.” This was how one of our team members described their experience with a group of international students in Cornwall. For many years now, the team from Friends International Cambridge have taken a group of international students for a week away together, to Menadue Farmhouse in Tintagel, a Grade II listed 18th century farmhouse now converted into a residential centre. As well as having a great time of fun and enjoying each other’s company our hope for the week is to sow the seed of God’s word. We hope to see relationships of trust formed that will break hard ground in the hearts of those who don’t yet belong to Christ, so that they might be open to His leading and guidance.

Softening of hearts

It’s a set pattern that seems to work well. After breakfast together, our first day out always involves a visit to a local church in Camelford. The congregation have become used to our visits and always give us a warm welcome. Meeting someone from Uzbekistan was a first for the church and our presence caused some good-natured interest. I’m convinced that much of the softening of hearts to receive God’s word during the week happens at this visit.

Over the coming days we visit places such as Tintagel Castle, Lanhydrock and Bodmin Moor, share meals and spend the evenings delving into God’s word. Whether it be listening to a Christian testimony while walking from Boscastle to Tintagel, eating fish and chips on the beach at Polzeath or seeing how many Cornish ice-creams we can consume in a week, the whole experience provides an opportunity for us to get to know students better, share our lives with them and serve them.

“God accepts us no matter who we are”

Although it’s an essential part, our hope and prayer is that the week goes beyond just the fun and friendship. There’s something unique about being together in a household for a week which enables Bible discussions to reach depths of openness and honesty we don’t always get week by week

in our café Bible studies. It’s great to be able to interact with people’s real questions and to see people really begin to understand the Bible. This past year, M* from Japan said that she’s finally realised why Christians want to have a relationship with God. M said, “He is a God who accepts them no matter who they are or what they do because he loves them so much.”

It’s a terrific week and is usually a highlight of my year. The final day is always bitter-sweet as we say good-bye and, in the words of one international student, “get back to reality”. It’s true that these times do feel like a break from the ‘reality’ – praise God for such times – and that we are presenting our ‘best-selves’. If students were to scratch too deep below the surface of our lives, they would find a reality of sin and brokenness. But we hope and pray that the students will see something different in us – sin and brokenness being redeemed and the presence of a Saviour who makes all things new. We hope that this trip to Cornwall is another step along their own spiritual journey to know this God for themselves.

Note* – We have withheld M’s full name to protect their identity.

‘Others...hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop—some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times what was sown.’

Mark 4:20

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Latest News

Support Centre Changes

We are glad to welcome Lydia Evans as our new Finance Manager and Paul Couper as our new Finance Coordinator, both part-time. Bernie Bitter has joined as our Support Centre Administrator with some Supporter Relations responsibilities. Please pray for them as they settle in.

Virtual Open Day

Come and find out what it could be like to work for Friends International at a Centre somewhere in the UK or Ireland. We are holding an online recruitment day on Thursday 23rd June from 11.30am – 12.30pm. There will be a presentation on what it is like to work for Friends International, information on current opportunities and a time for you to ask questions. Further details, including a registration form, can be found at: www.friendsinternational.uk/openday



Coventry team growing

We are glad to welcome Catherine Ayre to the staff team in Coventry. Catherine has served for several years as an affiliate and she joins Abigail Pearce, who recently moved from Birmingham to take over the growing work in Coventry that we started in 2020. Please pray for them both as they settle in.

Resource Mobilising Volunteers – could you help?

We are seeking volunteers to help raise awareness and explore opportunities with individuals and churches in areas where Friends International do not yet have a presence. As a Resource Mobilising Volunteer you will work with us to develop relationships locally and encourage others to get involved sharing friendship and faith with international students. For more information please go to:

www.oscar.org.uk/christian-jobs/church-relationship-volunteer

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Reach

After graduation, Effy, an international student from China, signed up to join the Reach programme, Friends International's cross-cultural discipleship training programme for recent graduates.



Effy, how did you know about the Reach programme and what motivated you to join?

A good friend was a Reach trainee. She suggested it to me. I wanted to grow closer to God, to learn more about the Bible together with others. I saw it as an opportunity to share the Bible message with students, and I liked the thought of having a mentor to teach me.

She came to the café and on day trips. I invited her and two other Japanese friends to eat hot pot together and to share about Japanese and Chinese cultures. Later, I shared my faith story with her and how I know that God loves me so much. She shared a bit of her experience, too. I said that while we will never have a perfect boyfriend, we do have a perfect God.

What have you done through the Reach programme?

Every Monday evening we have a student café. I meet with the team to pray and plan, prepare food, run games. I love the discussion groups and getting to know students. During the week we have conversation groups. I do the publicity and social media for our centre. I sometimes lead the Mandarin group Bible study. I love meeting up with students just to do fun things and get to know each other. It's amazing the conversations that come as you cook together!

How do you think you've grown through Reach?

I feel more confident answering questions about faith, and leading Bible studies. I've learned, from someone else's story in a book we read, how people from another religious background can find Jesus. It inspired me and I feel more equipped.

I've experienced more of God's love for me. I've seen so many answers to my prayers and known His grace in my life! No one is pushing me, but I find I want to read the Bible more and to know God better. I've learned to reflect on my experiences, I'm more thankful and my heart is softer.

Tell us about one of the students you've got to know?

T is an exchange student from Japan.

For more information on Reach or to apply for the programme, please go to www.friendsinternational.uk/reach-programme or email jenny.brown@friendsinternational.uk. Applications for 2022 close on 30th June 2022.



We need your help to share Jesus with international students from 'Hard-to-Reach' places



In many countries, international students are not free to hear the Gospel and Bibles are prohibited. Their time studying in this country may be their only chance to experience the love of Christians and hear the truth about Jesus. Will you support us to share the truth about Jesus with international students from hard-to-reach places?



Will you pray for our staff and volunteers as they support international students and look

for relevant and sensitive ways to tell them about Jesus?



Will you make a donation to support our work, sharing Jesus with international students from hard-to-

reach places by opening more local centres and recruiting additional staff to reach out to different cultures?

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



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