

# Opportunity

August • November 2023

**friends**  
INTERNATIONAL

**Sharing friendship  
and faith for all**

Growing Friendship and Faith with International Students

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# Leading Thoughts

Sabbatical reflections from around the world

It's good to rest. God gave us an example in creation by resting on the seventh day. A regular sabbath was established for the people of Israel for rest, and for worship.



Further aspects of refreshment and renewal were established like the Year of Jubilee. How are you doing? Busy? How do we combine church life and ministry with all the other aspects

of our lives to achieve a richly balanced, nourishing and fulfilling existence? It's not easy and even thinking it through can leave us frustrated or exhausted.

Alongside a number of churches and Christian agencies, Friends International offers staff the possibility of a three month sabbatical after seven years' employment. Earlier in the year I took up this offer and used it as a time to attend an international mission conference in Thailand, as well as a visit to parallel ministries alongside colleagues in South Korea, and undertake a guided study programme in Oxford. As much a change as a rest, the sabbatical was an opportunity to think through some issues, work related and wider, and adapt to a changed routine. To conclude, I am glad to get back to the day job, but equipped with some new ideas and

thinking, and safe in the conviction that I'm not heading for a career change.

We don't all have the opportunity to enjoy such a substantial break from work but we should be mindful of building periods of rest into our busy schedules. We will be better able to offer ourselves fully to what we are called to in our daily lives if we also refuel through times of rest and refreshment. We offer a sign of hope to international students when we take rest seriously...but not too seriously. As Mark Ellis (Christchurch Newcastle) said at our recent staff training event when speaking from Exodus 16: 'To choose to rest is an act of faith'. Let's be people that can offer hope and show faith to our international student friends, and all those around us, through choosing to rest at appropriate points.

*Alan*

**Alan Tower**  
National Director

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**"Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done."** Genesis 2v3

# Creating Community in Sheffield

Testimony



Originally from Iowa, USA, Stephanie Schmalz has recently taken on the role of Centre Team Leader in Sheffield, the 'City of Steel'. With much experience in student ministry, she has a passion for sharing Jesus with international students. As she comes into the role Stephanie shares her vision.

I am deeply encouraged and looking forward to seeing how God opens doors for the ministry to grow in the coming years. Thanks to the faithful work of our staff team, Caleb, Carol and our network of volunteers, there is an incredible foundation for ministry to international students in Sheffield.

Our vision for Friends International in Sheffield is to create a community that feels like a home away from home for students. As we share our lives, we pray that Christ's love becomes evident and opportunities arise to share the life changing message of the Gospel.

God is at work among international students in Sheffield and is showing us how important belonging is when it comes to belief. The power of a caring community allows people to feel safe and known. From there genuine questions about our faith come. Sometimes we can over-complicate things and we are learning how being present to students has a massive impact.

Our biggest challenge is numbers. There are over 16,000 international students here in Sheffield. We would love to connect with all of them but we need more people to join us before that can happen.

Please support us by praying for our staff team, that we would work well together and continue to find ways to reach more students in Sheffield. We need help to build trust and bridges with the University of Sheffield and Sheffield Hallam University. Also, pray that God would lead us to international students 'of peace', those that most need His love and are open to the Gospel.

**Our vision for Friends International in Sheffield is to create a community that feels like a home away from home for students.**

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# The Clock is Ticking

Sometimes we only appreciate the things we have, when we no longer have them.

**Our desire is that every person coming to the United Kingdom and Ireland to study will be in reach of a Friends International local centre where they can find friendship and faith.**



It's a well known truth that sometimes we only appreciate the things we have when we no longer have them. A job, heavy rainfall, parents, hearing...the list goes on. Time is one of those precious commodities; when we are young time is limitless but as we get older and time becomes more precious, our perspective changes.

As a British based intercultural mission agency, we find ourselves in a privileged position. We have the world on our doorstep and we have the opportunity to interact with

international students who come to the UK and Ireland to enhance their education and career prospects, and experience western culture. Our desire is that they will find wisdom in addition to just gaining knowledge. The Bible tells us that the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom and at this time in a world full of fear and uncertainty, the wisdom that God provides is needed more than ever.

In the late 18th century the pioneers like William Carey travelled to India taking the Gospel to new continents. At that time

Nations	Numbers	Open Doors World Watch List
Nigeria	990	6
India	930	11
China	595	16
Pakistan	380	7
Bangladesh	115	30
Vietnam	105	25

missionaries were free to travel and reach out to those they met with the good news of Jesus. World population was just under one billion people but today it exceeds eight billion although, according to the latest estimates, 3.4 billion people have still not been reached with the Gospel. Despite the advances in technology, science and education, the need of mission is as acute today as it was at the time of the pioneers Carey, Livingstone and Hudson-Taylor.

Now however, the world is coming to us. International students from all over the world come to campuses across the UK and Ireland, more than half of whom come from countries identified in Open Doors World Watch List as the hardest places in the world to be a Christian. Staff and volunteers from Friends International regularly meet with international students to study the Bible and share faith with students from India, China, Nigeria and the Middle East.

A good example of both the challenge and the opportunity facing Friends International is in Huddersfield, where we hope to open a local centre in the near future. The table above, detailing international student numbers in Huddersfield, is dominated by students from countries where persecution is rife. The time studying in the UK and Ireland is probably the only time when Christians will have the

opportunity to freely share their faith. What an opportunity.

Many of the young people who come to study in the UK - undergraduates, postgraduates and visiting academics - are willing to explore new ideas. Our desire is that every person coming to the United Kingdom and Ireland to study will be in reach of a Friends International local centre where they can find friendship and faith.

But time is against us. The opportunity is ours now, but living in post-Christendom society, with the tightening of restrictions for students and the growing cancel culture, it is uncertain how long the opportunity will exist. We are already seeing the growth of philosophies and organisations directly opposed to Christianity and opportunities to speak freely about matters of faith are diminishing.

Thank you for your prayers, support as volunteers and for your financial gifts that enable us to reach these students with the Gospel. Our desire is to be able to place staff workers in as many campuses as possible around the UK and Ireland, partnering with the local church to make the Gospel widely accessible.

May the Lord grant us the opportunity to meet as many students as possible, to introduce them to Jesus. For some of them this may be the only opportunity that they will have to hear about the Gospel and learn in freedom the opportunities available to them to enter God's family through the work of Jesus.

The clock is ticking... the time is now.

**Iván C Neira**

Friends International, Regional Development Director North, England and Wales

# Sharing Friendship and Faith in York



Every year the medieval City of York welcomes over 20,000 university students, more than a third of whom are international students.

Over the years the team in York has supported countless international students and led many to faith. One such international student is Suki\*, who grew up in a country in East Asia, where people are not free to talk about God or ask questions about faith. One day Suki 'accidentally' met a volunteer from the Friends International team on a bus, who invited her to the local international café. Suki became a regular at the international Bible study. She is a gifted singer and entered a singing competition, reaching the finals, only to get a sore throat on the day of the final. She asked an FI volunteer to pray with her, and by the time she had to stand on the stage, the sore throat was gone! She experienced God's love and returned home as a Christian determined to join a local church albeit within the underground church movement.

Ian Patrick, Friends International's chair of the local branch, says: "Friends International Ministries, York, is now well into its second decade. We can trace our roots back to the time when a group of local Christians and former missionaries, from a small group of

churches, noticed that increasing numbers of international students were coming to study at the universities. So they offered cultural support, the opportunity to visit a real English home and put on fun evenings with other Internationals, in an intercultural interdenominational environment." Since then the number of Indian and other nationalities has increased, so has the number of churches partnering with Friends International, creating new opportunities to engage with international students in the city.

Charis has recently been appointed as Centre Team Leader in York. She brings with her; passion, enthusiasm, and experience, essential as the team seeks to reach out to international students in the city in partnership with local churches. Charis says: "My vision is to share the love of God to international students as we introduce them to Jesus and to enrich our understanding of the global Church". Please pray for Charis and the team in York as they seek to be bold witnesses to the international student community.

\* Name changed for security purposes

# Prayer Diary

August • November 2023

friends  
INTERNATIONAL



Seventeen weeks of prayer points



Thank you for your continued prayers  
and support for international students.

# New Academic Year



**Week 1**  
7th Aug

**Susan Caddy, Southampton and Winchester**  
Give thanks for the 10,000 plus international students studying in Southampton and Winchester. We were excited to see answered prayer last year and we will continue to pray for opportunities to meet students from countries that wouldn't usually engage with Christians. Give thanks for our two new apprentice staff workers and help us to make the most of the opportunities we have.

**Week 2**  
14th Aug

**Kirsten Wynn, London**  
This coming term we'll be encouraging students to join the local link hospitality programme. Please pray that local churches would get behind this and for recruitment of new hosts in preparation for the new season.

**Week 3**  
21st Aug

**Skyler Ehly, Lancaster**  
Please pray for the international students arriving at Lancaster University early for a four-week English for Academic Purposes course to improve their English and study skills for university. Pray that these students will come to our events during the month of September and will discover the resources we can offer them in friendship and faith.

**Week 4**  
28th Aug

**Ivana Bajic, Stirling**  
Please pray for Freshers' week at Stirling University. Pray that we can make a lot of new connections with new international students, especially those that are open to finding out more about Christianity. Please pray for possible cooperation with Mission Aviation Fellowship during Freshers' week - that resources which we will have can bring a lot of spiritual fruits.

**Week 5**  
4th Sep

**Rebecca Davies, Glasgow**  
It's International Welcome Month! With 27,500 international students arriving in Glasgow each year, we asked; "What would it take for students to meet Christians at the beginning of their time in Glasgow?" and so the International Welcome was born. Churches will be asked to host welcome events, which in turn we advertise through the universities and student accommodations. Please pray for our 15+ events this month, that many students would come and make a local friend.



**Week 6**  
11th Sep

**Helen Morrissey, Exeter**  
On Monday 11th, Lynette Teagle will be doing some online training for our volunteers. This is a great opportunity at the start of the academic year to be envisioning our team with how God could work through our ministry to bring students to Himself. Pray that through this training, our volunteers will feel encouraged to think of new ways they can be deepening their friendships with international students at our events.

**Week 7**  
18th Sep

**David Hubbard, Reading**  
Freshers' week. Pray for the contacts made at the Welcome Fair and the events planned. These will include local walks and other social events. Please pray for the Christian Union International Coordinators, William and Stephy, as they organise the events and try to get CU members to support it.

**Week 8**  
25th Sep

**Madeleine Bonicel, Nottingham**  
Thousands of international students will be arriving in Nottingham. Pray that we would meet and connect with them at the events planned with the University of Nottingham and Nottingham Trent University including the International Welcome Café on Wednesday 27th. Pray we will have enough volunteers and that we would be a blessing to the students over these first few weeks of settling in. Also that they would connect into our weekly cafes and activities.

**Week 9**  
2nd Oct

**Baiba Strause-Kalmere, Canterbury**  
Pray for our Freshers' week as we will be engaging with new students on university campuses. Pray that our new Bible study group with a meal that will start on 3rd October will be well attended and that students would be hungry to study God's word.

**Week 10**  
9th Oct

**Ruth Duffin, Leicester**  
We are working with the CU at De Montfort University and a local church to organise a welcome meal in International Freshers' Week. In the past we have found it very difficult to connect with students at this university, so please pray that this new initiative will enable us to get to know many new students here.



**Week 11**  
16th Oct

**Joshua Bell, Cambridge**

Cambridge students have arrived - give thanks for the International Students Welcome which was run with post-grad and undergrad students at the university. We'd love the students we meet to be drawn into a relatively new café on Friday evenings which the undergrads have got going in recent years.



**Week 12**  
23rd Oct

**Kirsten Wynn, London**

Give thanks for the welcome meal at All Souls Church for international students studying and living in central London. Please pray that invites will get to the international students and that a good number would come along and go on to form deep personal relationships.

**Week 13**  
30th Oct

**Mike and Rachel Hill, Birmingham**

Please pray for the volunteer teams who will be continuing ministry while the Hills are on sabbatical. Pray for many good contacts with new students early in the term and for the leaders of each ministry.

**Week 14**  
6th Nov

**Joshua Bell, Cambridge**

Please pray for international students arriving at Anglia Ruskin University. We will be running a range of welcome events - garden tea, tours etc. Please pray for Max as he gets to know this new cohort of students, and we seek to welcome them into the café.

**Week 15**  
13th Nov

**Rebecca Davies, Glasgow**

Please pray for the start of our Philip Project this month. It's our monthly Bible training course, now running for the 6th year in a row! Please pray that many Christian students would hear about it and join to be equipped in cross-cultural Bible handling skills. Please also pray for our Philip Project leaders and all the speakers throughout the year.

## Local Centre Growth

**Week 16**  
20th Nov

**Susan Caddy, Portsmouth**

We give thanks for the ministry in Portsmouth over many years, for ongoing links with the University, the international students we have met over the last year and those who have been supported by the University Christian Union and local churches. Pray for the formation of a Portsmouth Branch and recruitment of a staff worker to lead the work.

**Week 17**  
27th Nov

**Alan Tower, National Director**

Please pray for the fulfilment of vision for an expanded local centre network across the UK and Ireland so that all international students are in reach of a Friends International centre where they can be loved and supported.



# God is Building Foundations in North Wales

Local Centre News

Over the last year, there has been an increase in international students across the UK and Ireland and no more so than in Wales. The country has several well-known university campuses including Cardiff, Aberystwyth, Swansea and in North Wales, Bangor. This historic city traces its founding to the 6th-century AD. It is the oldest cathedral city and the third smallest city in Wales.

Around 19,000 people live in Bangor but every year the population swells as the university welcomes up to 10,000 students from across the UK and the world who come to study. Of those over 2,000 are international students, and half of these students come from areas of the world with little or no access to the Gospel.

Over the last three years, Friends International has partnered with local evangelical churches to hold a prayer meeting focused on international student outreach. We also support Bangor CU by providing speakers for their events and facilitating training.

Nia\*, Bangor's CU International Secretary says: "Bangor University is home to thousands of international students and that number is constantly growing. Over the year that I've lived in Bangor and studied at the University, I've come to realise just how much more outreach is needed. Our small Christian Union Global Café event has attracted a few new international students, but the need is great to share the good news of Jesus and to provide friendship and support."

Currently, we are praying and looking to form a development group to oversee the appointment of a staff worker who will

help expand the work among international students in the city. Friends International's only other Welsh local centre is located in Cardiff and as part of our vision, that every international student should be in reach of a local centre where they can experience the friendship and faith of local Christians, we are looking to expand into other areas of Wales.

Friends International's desire is to have staff workers on all the major campuses where international students live. To do this we depend on the support of evangelical churches and volunteers so we can be effective in the work we believe God has called us to do. Please pray with us for the resources needed, for open doors and key partnerships to make Jesus known to international students in our midst.

**Iván Neira**  
Regional Development Director North, England and Wales

**We are looking to expand into other areas of Wales**

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# How to Change Your Life in a Week

What happens when hundreds of international students come together for a week of teaching and fellowship, aimed specifically at helping them grow as disciples of Christ?



For more than a decade, Friends International has worked in close partnership with other mission groups to run the international student track at Word Alive, an annual Easter conference for believers of all ages for teaching, worship and fellowship in Prestatyn, North Wales. Contextualised talks, small group discussions and seminars help teach students to follow Jesus faithfully in diverse cultural contexts, no matter where they might go after graduation. As part of the wider conference, international students benefit from hearing other teaching tracks and a range of great resources. Worshipping God alongside thousands of Christians each evening never fails to have an impact, especially for those who are the only Christian in their family or community and do not have the chance to enjoy fellowship with other believers.

Ade is a single mum from Nigeria. She has two young daughters and struggled to bring them up on her own, but after hearing teaching on suffering at Word Alive Ade discovered new joy

in the Lord and returned this year to encourage others. Another international student, Charles, is from East Asia. He was so impacted by the teaching at last year's Word Alive that he committed his life to Christ and then returned this year to show how God had changed his life. These are not isolated incidents but living testaments that God is alive and working.

First impressions aren't always encouraging: the chalet bathroom door may not close properly, wind whistles around the marquee and Wi-Fi is at best variable. The annual sandcastle competition takes place whatever the weather, we've even known torrential rain! But none of those things can overshadow the reality that God is powerfully at work during the week. The basic accommodation soon becomes incidental, compared with the joy of sharing life with other international students from all over the world, along with team members and group organisers. In fact, for both staff and students, the international track is a highlight of the year.



You may think, 'Why go to the bother of arranging an international track? Wouldn't it be better and easier to integrate all the students together?' The international track provides a unique opportunity to contextualise Bible teaching and address relevant cultural issues for the students through the week. The biblical exposition is mindful of diverse worldviews and backgrounds. This year, Peter Teagle taught from 1 Thessalonians, marking his tenth year as the main speaker on the track, with a focus on living faithfully in the



Word Alive

light of Christ's return. Seminar topics such as 'Life after graduation' and 'Relationships' are specifically tailored to internationals and address issues such as cultural and family pressures and arranged marriages. The seminar on 'Ghosts, gods, spirits and ancestors' covers topics not found elsewhere in Word Alive, yet tackles real experiences faced by many of our students. Wherever possible small groups are organised in ethnic groupings and give students the opportunity to discuss how to apply the teaching in their home context. Three students from China, Singapore and Nigeria shared their personal stories with clarity and conviction while others spoke movingly of experiencing God with them through tough times.

Sue Burt, Head of Returnee Ministry for Friends International, said; "In the months since Word Alive, the impact of what these young students heard continues to bear fruit. We've heard of numerous international students who gave their lives to Christ and others who have been stirred up and want to know more".

Lynette Teagle, Head of Learning and Development for Friends International, added; "On the last day a number of students told us that the marquee had become a 'home away from home', and they desired to follow Jesus wholeheartedly. Team members were able to share God's love and prayerfully care for individuals who came with concerns and burdens".

Please continue to pray with us that the seed sown will become deeply rooted, bearing fruit in students' lives for years to come.

**Sue Burt and Lynette Teagle**  
on behalf of the Word Alive planning team



## Latest News

### Building the Team

Friends International is always on the look-out for those who are gifted and called to international student ministry and 2023 is no different. A significant proportion of those who later join Friends International as staff are already known to us, having been CU reps, Reach trainees, affiliates, volunteers in local centres, or members of other student-facing organisations. Personal recommendations are often key and we are willing to consider speculative applications from people with suitable experience, even if we are not directly advertising.

After the fluctuations of the last few years this year has seen an upturn in interest in both staff posts and the Reach programme. We have appointed an Apprentice Co-ordinator which has enabled us to have a more consistent approach to recruitment, resulting in the appointment of four new apprentice staff workers and others who will join the team this year.

For more information about jobs and working for Friends International go to [www.friendsinternational.uk/jobs](http://www.friendsinternational.uk/jobs) or scan this code.



### 'Do you PrayerMate?'

A great way to access the latest prayer material from Friends International is through the PrayerMate app. Available from both the Apple Store or Google Play, you can set up PrayerMate to display the latest Prayer Diary notes prompting you to pray for international students regularly throughout the month. PrayerMate also allows you to incorporate other material from other churches and agencies so you can build your own personalised programme of prayer.



PRAYERMATE™

# Global University

It's good to have focus and know what to set about achieving – we have a vision "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" and a mission "To work with the church to communicate the good news of Jesus to international students in both word and deed and in whole life cross-cultural discipleship", focused essentially on the UK and Ireland. But international students move around, go home, end up moving on elsewhere, and it's good to know that we are among friends who not only tell us when people they know are coming our way, but also help us by making contact with those who have studied here in the UK and Ireland, before moving on.

At Friends International we link with other international student ministries in countries where we can connect returning students. In sensitive parts of the world this needs careful work with trusted colleagues. In Europe that's the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students [IFES], and more widely, we link with the Lausanne Movement's Worldwide International Student Ministry Network. We often hear of students who have come to Christian events while in the UK and Ireland, but only make a decision to follow Jesus after returning home.

### Friendships are for Life

We aim to link students who have come to faith in their place of study with churches and supportive colleagues where they go next. Nono\* from Japan came to Reading University to study for a master's degree. He engaged with the Small World Café on campus on Friday nights, and then he joined an Alpha course hosted by the Christian Union. It was at this time he made a commitment to follow Christ. On his return to Tokyo Nono was linked to Friends International Affiliates, Liz and Mike Jeggo, who invited him to their international church, which allowed him to meet local as well as international Believers who live and work in Japan. Nono continues to do online studies with his former Centre Team Leader back in Reading, and we hope that he will join a relevant small group locally in time.

Mai Honda served as a Reach Trainee in Canterbury. She says ; 'Becoming friends with Friends International people led me to church and interested me in the Bible, who Jesus is, and why people were so passionate about Him. Even after I went back to my home country, they connected me with local Christian student workers and it was such a blessing to do some more Bible study with them too. Praise God for giving me these opportunities and calling me into His family!'

\* Name changed for security purposes





## We need your help to find more 'Workers for the Harvest'

Numbers of international students coming through Friends International's network of local centres and Global Cafés are on the increase. God, the Lord of the Harvest, is clearly at work, with new centres being readied for launch, and international students stirred to engage with Christian truth. In the Gospel of Matthew Jesus says: *"The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."*

**Please pray** that more workers come forward filled with passion to share friendship and faith with international students.

Can you make a donation that will help pay for the new staff we need to help us reach more international students with Jesus' love, hope and joy?

Please use the response slip enclosed, or give online at:  
[www.friendsinternational.uk/workersfortheharvest](http://www.friendsinternational.uk/workersfortheharvest)



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